

Relevance is the only way in

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AI made it free to contact anyone. Buyers responded by closing the door to almost everyone. The vendors still getting through have one thing in common.

For most of the last decade, B2B engagement followed a simple rule. More outreach produced more meetings. Volume was expensive to create, so volume was an advantage.

Generative AI broke that rule. Writing a personalised-looking email now costs almost nothing. One seller can send in a day what a whole team used to send in a month. Every vendor gained the same ability at the same time, so the outcome was predictable. Inboxes filled up, and buyers stopped reading.

What changed on the buyer's side

73%

Of B2B buyers avoid irrelevant outreach

61%

Prefer buying without sales reps

80%

Buyers initiate vendor contact

69%

Spot inconsistencies in vendor messaging

Buyers did not simply put up with the flood. They adapted.

Gartner's 2025 research found that 73% of B2B buyers actively avoid vendors who send irrelevant outreach, and 61% would prefer to buy without a sales rep at all. Buyers now do most of their research privately and contact vendors on their own terms. In 6sense's data, the buyer makes first contact more than 80% of the time.

There is a trust problem too. Gartner also found that 69% of buyers see inconsistencies between what a vendor's website says and what its sellers tell them. Every mismatch makes the next message easier to ignore.

The cost lands hardest on good vendors. When every inbox is defended, a useful message gets filtered out along with the rest.

The result is a paradox. Reaching people has never been cheaper. Engaging them has never been harder.

Why personalisation stopped working

Many teams answered the noise with personalisation: the prospect's name, their company, a line about a recent post. AI made this easy too, which is exactly why it lost its effect. Buyers can spot a template wearing a first name.

Relevance goes further. It answers a question the buyer is already asking. It connects to something happening in their business right now: a new leader, a new market, a new regulation, a programme running behind schedule. It offers something useful whether or not they ever buy.

Compare two openings. 'Hi Sarah, I saw your post on supply chain resilience and thought you might like our platform.' Or: 'Your new Rotterdam site opens in March, and the customs rules on that route change in April. Here is how two operators handled the same overlap.' The first is about the sender. The second is about Sarah's next six months.

The test is simple. If the message would make equal sense sent to 500 other companies, it is volume with better formatting.

What engagement looks like now

The vendors who still get through work in a different order. They understand first and speak second.

- Fewer, better conversations. One well-timed, well-informed message to the right person outperforms hundreds of generic ones, and it does no damage to your name.
- Context before contact. Know what the account is working on, who has changed role and which problem is moving up their agenda.
- Consistency everywhere. Your website, your sellers and your customers should all tell the same story. Buyers check.
- Introductions over interruptions. A warm introduction through a trusted network carries more weight than any cold sequence. Trust transfers well. It rarely gets built from zero in an inbox.
- Value in the first touch. Share an insight, a benchmark or a relevant example. Ask for the meeting once you have earned it.

The human part

AI belongs in this picture. It is excellent at reading signals, researching accounts and drafting first versions at speed. Used well, it gives a seller the context to be relevant.

What it cannot do alone is judge whether a message deserves to be sent. That still needs a person who understands the buyer's world and is willing to say 'not yet' to an email that is ready to go.

There is a commercial case for that restraint. Every irrelevant message spends a little of a vendor's reputation, and buyers remember the names that wasted their time long after they forget what was said.

B2B engagement in the AI era rewards restraint. The vendors who win will be the ones buyers are glad to hear from, which usually means the ones who spoke only when they had something worth saying.

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