HG Insights

INSIGHT REPORT

The Signal Quality Gap

What's Actually Costing Growth GTM Teams Pipeline

For GTM leaders who are generating leads, engagement, and pipeline reports, and still fielding pushback on quality.

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The Core Finding

Most companies missed their revenue targets in 2025, despite record levels of AI investment across go-to-market teams. This is not a story about companies that under-invested. It is a story about companies that bought more tools, more dashboards, and more AI-assisted workflows, and still could not tell their sales teams which accounts to call today.

The common failure point is not data volume. It is signal quality and timing: reps and marketers are acting on the wrong accounts at the wrong moment, because the systems producing "engaged" or "qualified" labels cannot actually see when an account has entered a buying window. For Marketing and Demand Gen leaders, that gap shows up as a specific, familiar pain: the leads look fine on paper, and sales still says they are not converting.

Context: What the Market Shows

Across Growth-segment go-to-market organizations, one pattern shows up regardless of industry or company size: this problem does not appear to be industry-specific or size-specific. It appears wherever a company has more than one signal source and asks a human to reconcile them manually. Marketo tells one story. Salesforce tells another. An intent platform tells a third. Someone, usually in Marketing Ops or on the sales floor, is expected to weigh all three and decide what to do next.

That reconciliation work is where the breakdown happens. The underlying evidence base for this report draws on six deep-dived Growth-segment accounts, nine distinct sales and customer calls read in full with verified, speaker-attributed transcripts, and eight named personas spanning Sales Ops, RevOps, Demand Gen, and Solution and Sales Engineering roles, gathered over a 120-day research window. Across that base, spanning company sizes from small-mid sized companies to large enterprise, the same structural problem recurs: engagement data and buying-window timing are being treated as the same signal, and they are not.

> **KEY TAKEAWAY**
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> This is a category-wide problem, not a company-specific one. It surfaces anywhere a GTM team has multiple signal sources and no shared, prioritized answer for which accounts matter right now.

The pain is not evenly distributed across a revenue team. It lands differently depending on which seat you sit in, and Marketing and Demand Gen leaders tend to be the most under-represented in how this problem gets discussed. Most of the available proof points on this issue are framed around RevOps dashboards or sales rep call lists. Marketing's version of the problem is just as real, but it shows up as a lead-quality and conversion argument, not a cost-justification one. That distinction matters, because it means Marketing needs a different case made on its behalf, grounded in pipeline and conversion outcomes rather than hard savings figures.

> *"We're creating a lot of engagement and we're just not seeing it translate into sales pipeline."*
>
> **VP of Marketing, mid-market B2B SaaS**

The Evidence: How the Same Root Problem Shows Up Three Ways

Interviews across Marketing, RevOps, and Sales functions at Growth-segment companies converge on the same root cause. What differs is how each function experiences the symptom. Presented here anonymized, since these findings are drawn from internal research conversations rather than published, attributable case studies.

Marketing and Demand Gen

These teams are running programs that generate real lead volume, and the leads they hand to sales are not converting at the rate anyone expects. Marketing can see engagement data: opens, clicks, form fills, page visits. What it cannot see is which of those engaged accounts are actually inside a buying window right now versus which are browsing with no near-term intent. The result is a steady stream of leads that look qualified by engagement standards and get labeled low-quality by sales, with no shared way to resolve the disagreement.

A Solution Architect on the research base described deals that were lost after technical approval because budget got reallocated elsewhere, a timing failure no engagement score would have caught.

RevOps and Sales Ops

These teams have done the integration work. Marketo, Salesforce, and one or more intent platforms are connected, dashboards exist, and reporting is technically complete. But the data across those systems does not add up to a single prioritized answer. Each tool tells a different story about the same account, and none of them are fully trusted by the sales team that is supposed to act on them.

A RevOps leader at a mid-market prospect described what the fix would actually require: "a strong priority list of accounts, delivered with reasoning and context behind it, not left as an exercise for the account executives to figure out on their own."

Sales and Sales Leadership

Reps are working leads in the order they arrive, with no stack ranking to tell them which account deserves the next call. Pipeline forecasts built on top of that process are unreliable, because nobody upstream can say with confidence whether a shortfall is a lead volume problem, a lead quality problem, or a rep capacity problem. Without a signal that tells the team which accounts to focus on, every explanation is a guess.

KEY TAKEAWAY

None of these three functions is wrong about what they are seeing. Marketing sees engagement. RevOps sees disconnected systems. Sales sees an unranked queue and an unreliable forecast. They are three views of the same missing layer: a way to tell buying-window timing apart from generic engagement.

Why Engagement Data Alone Cannot Identify a Buying Window

Engagement data answers a narrow question: did this account interact with something we published? Opens, clicks, downloads, and webinar attendance all measure attention. None of them measure readiness. An account can engage heavily for months while evaluating options with no budget approved, or engage lightly and enter an active buying cycle within weeks because a budget just freed up internally.

This is the core reason lead-quality complaints persist even when engagement volume looks healthy. Marketing is optimizing for a signal, engagement, that correlates weakly with the thing sales actually needs to know, which is timing. Treating the two as interchangeable is not a measurement error at the margins; it is a category error at the center of how most lead scoring and lead handoff processes are built.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Engagement tells you an account is paying attention. It does not tell you an account is ready to buy. Conflating the two is the single largest source of the lead-quality pushback Marketing and Demand Gen teams field from sales.

The accounts most likely to convert are often not the ones generating the most engagement activity. They are the ones where fit, technology footprint, spend signals, and timing align, something that clickstream data alone was never built to detect. Without a way to separate the two, Marketing is left defending lead quality with the only data it has, engagement, while sales continues to judge quality by an outcome, conversion, that engagement data cannot reliably predict.

What This Means for Marketing and Demand Gen

If your team is fielding pushback on lead quality, the instinct is often to generate more leads, tighten the lead-scoring threshold, or add another intent data source. Based on this evidence base, none of those moves address the actual gap. More leads without better timing signal produces more of the same complaint at higher volume. A tighter threshold just moves the argument to a different score cutoff. Another intent source adds a fourth dashboard nobody fully trusts, on top of the three that already do not agree.

The more useful question is not "how do we generate better leads." It is "how do we know which of our engaged accounts are in a buying window right now, and can we make that answer legible to sales without asking anyone to reconcile three tools by hand."

> *"In HubSpot, a lead score is a static number. You have to hit 75 to be considered an MQL. Well, what about all the people that are like 70 to 74? That's what we're missing."*
>
> **VP of Marketing, mid-market B2B SaaS**

That reframe changes what Marketing should be measuring and reporting internally. MQL volume and engagement scores are operational metrics; they show the machine is running. They are not proof that Marketing is handing sales anything sales can act on with confidence. The evidence base suggests that the teams under the most quality pressure are not the ones with the least data. They are the ones with the most unreconciled data and no single, trusted answer for which accounts matter right now.

What To Do About It

1. **Separate engagement metrics from readiness metrics in how you report to sales.**

   Stop presenting engagement score as a proxy for buying intent. Report the two separately, even informally, so sales can see which accounts are active and engaged versus which are showing independent signals of a live buying window.

2. **Audit where your lead-quality complaints actually originate.**

   Before adding a new data source, pull the last quarter of disqualified or "bad lead" feedback from sales and categorize it. If the majority of complaints are about timing ("not ready," "no budget," "not now") rather than fit, more engagement data will not fix the problem; a timing signal will.

3. **Push for one prioritized, reasoned account list instead of three dashboards.**

   RevOps and Sales Ops research in this same evidence base points to the same fix from the other direction: a ranked list of accounts with the reasoning attached, not a set of scores from separate tools that sales has to reconcile on its own.

4. **Treat technology and spend signals as a check on engagement data, not a replacement for it.**

   Engagement shows interest. Installed technology, IT spend patterns, and third-party intent (such as active research behavior on review platforms) show capacity and active evaluation. Used together, they narrow down which engaged accounts are actually in-market now.

5. **Bring RevOps and Sales into the conversation before the next lead-scoring change.**

   Since this is a shared problem experienced three different ways, a fix designed by Marketing alone will solve Marketing's view of it and leave the other two unresolved. The strongest version of this fix is a shared, cross-functional signal that all three teams can see and trust.

The Fix: A Unified, Deterministic Signal Layer

The teams that have closed this gap did not do it by adding another point solution. They did it by connecting the signals that already existed, CRM activity, marketing engagement, and intent data, with a layer of deterministic information that engagement data cannot provide on its own: installed technology footprint, IT spend, and first-party intent signals such as active research behavior on review platforms like TrustRadius.

That combination is what separates a generically engaged account from one that is actually in a buying window. Chartio offers a proof point for what changes when this kind of layer replaces an engagement-only model. Chartio had been scoring leads in Pardot using engagement signals alone, page views, email opens, form fills, and sales could not explain why a given lead scored the way it did, which eroded trust in the queue. After replacing that model with a multi-signal predictive approach that combined customer fit, likelihood to buy, and engagement, Chartio saw a 40% increase in trial-to-paid conversion, and Marketing Qualified Trials became 5 times more likely to convert to a paying customer.

40%

INCREASE IN TRIAL-TO-PAID CONVERSION AT CHARTIO

5x

MORE LIKELY FOR MARKETING QUALIFIED TRIALS TO CONVERT TO PAYING CUSTOMERS

The secondary outcome at Chartio mattered as much as the primary lift. Sales trust increased because reps could see why a lead scored the way it did. Explainability drove adoption, and adoption is what drove the conversion improvement. A more accurate score that nobody trusts changes nothing; a score sales can see the reasoning behind changes behavior.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A unified signal layer does not mean more data. It means one deterministic answer, built from technology footprint, spend, and intent alongside engagement, that tells Marketing, RevOps, and Sales which accounts are in a buying window right now, with the reasoning attached.

For Marketing and Demand Gen leaders, this is the difference between defending lead quality with engagement data that was never built to prove readiness, and handing sales a prioritized account list that Marketing, RevOps, and Sales all trust for the same reason.

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ABOUT HG INSIGHTS

HG Insights delivers AI-powered Revenue Growth Intelligence (RGI) solutions that modernize GTM strategy and activation, enabling B2B companies to prioritize, target, engage, and convert the best opportunities faster. HG Insights platform's analytics and agents turn deep market, account, technology, spend, intent, and customer data into actionable insights and automated workflows that accelerate pipeline and enhance predictability. That's why 95% of Fortune 1000 B2B tech companies and all major hyperscalers rely on HG Insights to grow revenue, boost efficiency, and improve retention. For more information, visit www.hginsights.com.