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Customer Success Leadership Study



Introduction

Welcome to the 2024 Customer Success Leadership Study, brought to you by ChurnZero, 6sense, Customer Success Meetup, Gong, SaaStr, and Success Venture Partners.

The mission of this report is to bring greater awareness, understanding, and support to the customer success (CS) community through research. By establishing benchmarks and trends around tenure, budget, team size, workload, goals, strategies, measurement, and technology, we hope to give CS leaders the information they need to drive revenue and deliver the best possible customer experiences.

The CS Leadership Study is in its fifth year and is the largest CS study in the industry.

What's changed.

This year we added two questions to establish benchmarks:

- 1) What is your average annual GRR?
- 2) On average, how many customers does each CSM manage?

The research team at 6sense provided rigorous analysis so we could get deeper into the data and determine what trends were **statistically reliable**.

They compared data to many factors including team size and maturity, budgets, company size, and against previous years' data. Special thanks to Kerry Cunningham, head of research & thought leadership, and Sara Boostani, marketing research analyst at 6sense.

6sense provides a full **statistics glossary** that we reference throughout the report.

Data gathering process.

ChurnZero and its partners conducted the survey between May 31, 2024, and July 8, 2024. The survey was emailed to our respective databases of customer success professionals. It was promoted across social media and industry newsletters. More than 1,000 CS leaders participated in the survey.

All responses are voluntary. All data is self-reported by participants.

Foreword

If you're a customer success leader and 2024 is making you nervous, we get it.

There have been many questions about the future of CS this year, about where it should live and how it should look. On the one hand, we heard, "Is CS the new sales?" On the other hand, we saw CS teams creating round-robin workflows and pooling resources in ways that reflect how support teams operate.

With all this swirl, it is natural to be nervous, but you shouldn't be in the long run.

There is no world in which customer success doesn't exist at B2B subscription companies.

CS grew up in good times and benefited from a lot of experimentation and investment. What you're experiencing is your first strong headwind (or minor hurricane) as a function. Over the past two years, every less-than-best practice has been scrutinized, and the question of who owns what is critical.

It's a bumpy road to the top. I am convinced that customer success is still on its way to being the most important, sophisticated department of the enterprise. We hope you're still enjoying the journey somewhat, and that the insights within this year's Customer Success Leadership Study will help you navigate it.



You Mon Tsang

CEO and Co-founder, ChurnZero

Key findings

The last two years have been messy for SaaS businesses and CS teams.

The good news.

- The worst of the budget and team cuts appear to be behind us.
- Reporting structures for CS teams are shifting, but CS leaders continue to report to the highest levels of the organization.
- The CS tech stack is robust.
- In-person meetings with customers are still happening and have a positive impact on the bottom line.
- Internal collaboration is starting to trend back up.
- CS metrics are all revenue-driven.

The bad news.

- Overall, NRR has declined.
- Delays in purchasing and decision-making continue.
- CS teams still “own” the renewal process and a good portion of the expansion process, but incentive compensation for expansions took a hit.
- CS strategies are being left undone, a trend that has spanned all five years of the Study.

The interesting.

- Customer success charters have not substantially changed over the years and do not reflect revenue priorities.
- Companies with higher NRR are more likely to invest in CS.

“Customer success is at an inflection point in 2024, and its leaders have a unique opportunity to shape the future of the discipline. On one hand, teams face pressure to prove their worth and build revenue with confidence. On the other, CS has much to teach other SaaS teams about managing every company’s greatest asset: its customer base. All eyes are on CS leaders this year.”

—**You Mon Tsang**
CEO and Co-founder, ChurnZero

NRR and SaaS business health in 2024.

The SaaS industry was hit hard in late 2022 through 2024. Shifts in market dynamics led investors to favor financial stability and profitability over “growth at all costs,” putting retention at the center of most businesses.

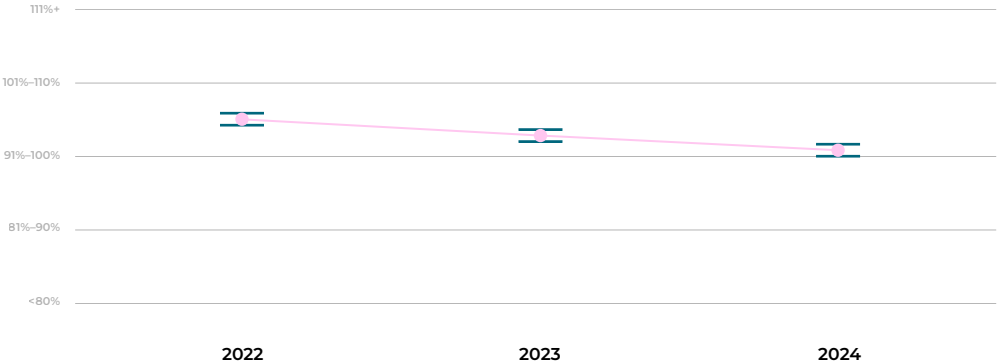
The metrics of retention (gross revenue retention or net revenue retention) are now cemented as qualifying metrics when investors and boards ask about the health of a company. There is no debate about whether companies need to drive recurring revenue, and, as a result, CS teams have become critical to the health of SaaS organizations.

However, the debate around what teams are responsible for recurring revenue and where they report to has intensified, especially given that our research shows a downward trend in NRR from 2022 to 2024.

The decline in NRR.

While the decline in NRR is small over the last two years, a downward trend in net revenue retention is visible and statistically reliable. On the bright side, NRR still remains above 90%.

NRR and SaaS business health (2022-2024)



How customer success teams are faring in 2024.

The SaaS economy since 2022 has created a messy situation for CS teams. As the newest department in B2B companies, when the downturn arrived, many CS teams took an oversized hit. This was especially true in those organizations that had panic cuts.

However, CS has proven itself essential. Budgets and teams are smaller but have stabilized. CS teams still report to the highest levels, although intense revenue pressure has caused some shifting of CS teams under the CRO. CS teams are heavily involved in revenue generation, specifically renewals and expansions. And we have seen that companies with higher NRR are more likely to invest in their CS teams.

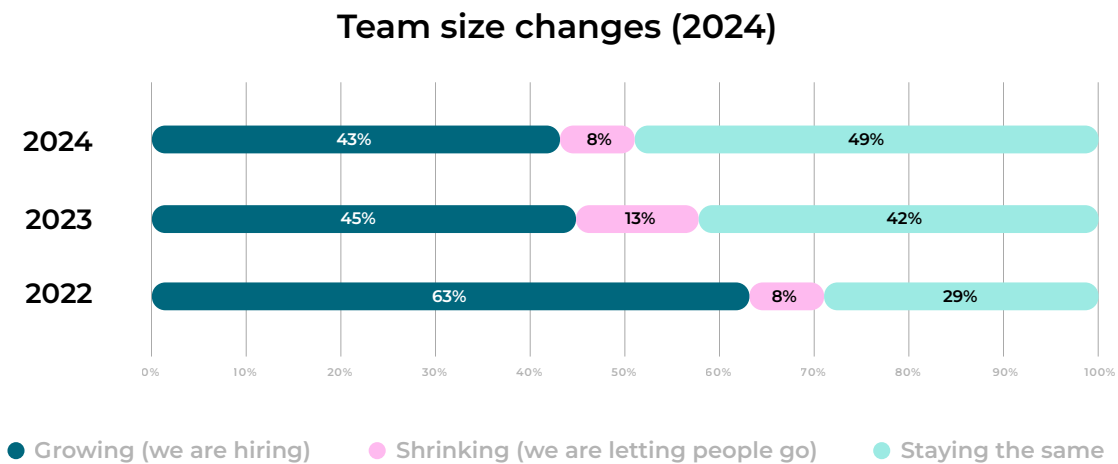
On a more concerning note, most CS priorities remain only partially implemented, a trend we have seen for five years.

Trends in CS team makeup and budgets.

Trend 1: CS headcounts level out, but CS ops roles decrease.

Some good news for CS leaders: 2023 seems to mark the high point of reductions in CS teams.

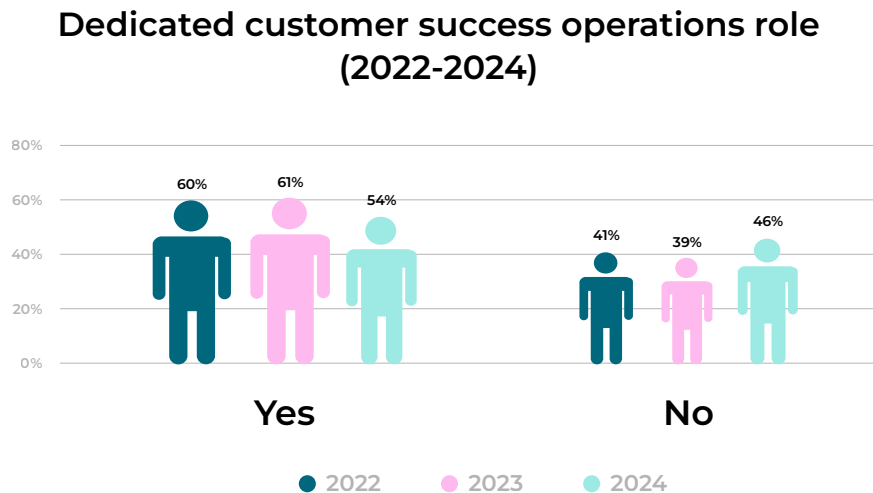
While 8% of teams shrank in 2022, this number spiked to 13% in 2023. This year, we're back to 2022 levels, with 8% of CS teams still experiencing force reductions. In contrast to 2022, however, team growth remains low, with 49% of teams holding steady.



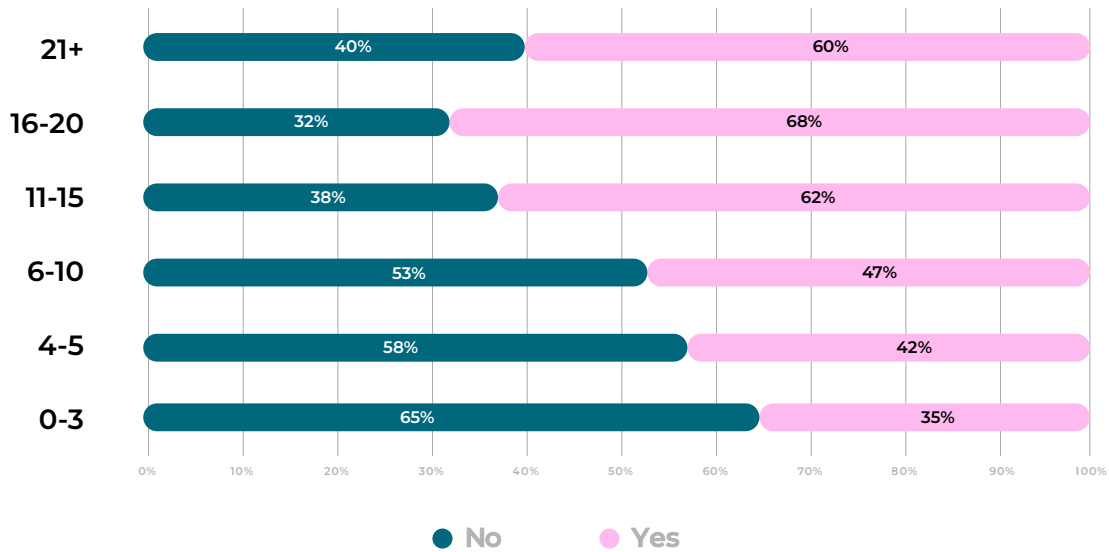
Smaller CS teams are going without a CS ops role.

Overall, we saw an 11% decline in companies with a dedicated CS operations role from 2023 (61%) to 2024 (54%).

However, more mature/older companies are countering this trend. 68% of companies operating for 16-20 years have a dedicated CS ops role.



Dedicated CS operations role by age of company (2024)



Trend 2: Budget cuts show signs of bottoming out.

This year, 27% of respondents reported a budget decrease. Compared to 2023's 31%, this feels like a modicum of good news.

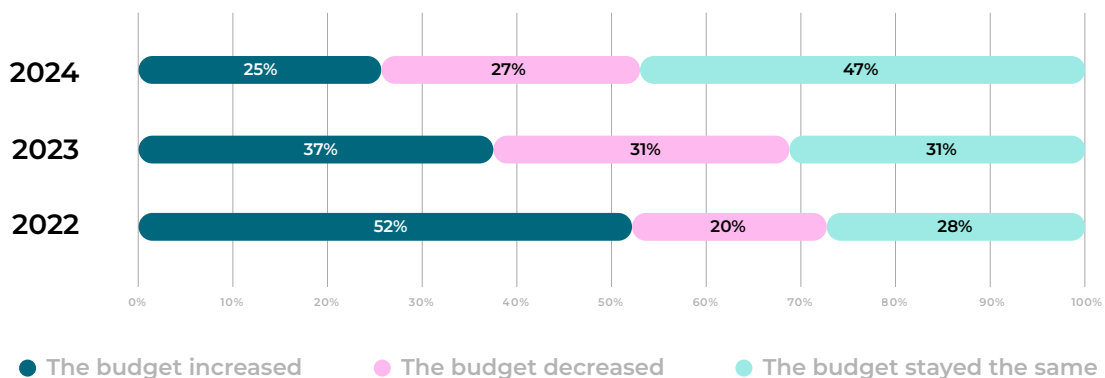
A further 47% report that their budget hasn't changed in the past year, compared to 31% in 2023. For the first time in our study's history, the "stayed the same" group is now the largest group.

Just 25% of respondents reported a budget increase—down from 37% in 2023, and 52% in 2022.

The data presents a mixed picture that feels open to interpretation. In an optimistic view, however, it suggests that the worst budget cuts could be behind us.

While 2024's "decreased" and "stayed the same" groups represent 74% of CS teams combined—again, the largest this group has ever been—the consolidation of the "stayed the same" group and the reduction of the "decreased" group may be grounds for optimism. Ultimately, 2025 will show us whether 2024 was the low-water mark for customer success budgets.

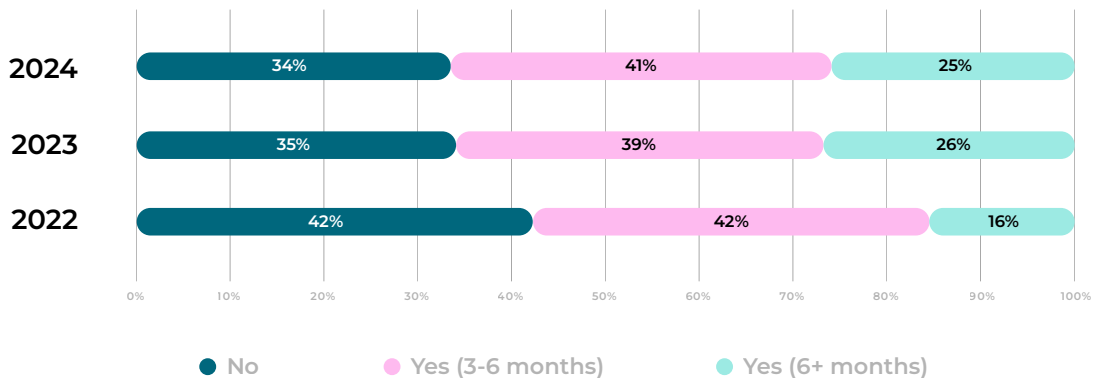
Budget changes (2022-2024)



Trend 3: Caution is the new steady state.

We asked respondents if economic volatility was impacting purchasing or business decisions. This year's results are similar to 2023, and sharply different from 2022. 66% report delays of more than three months in purchasing and decision-making. Moderate delays (3-6 months) have remained steady for three years with a slight increase from 2023 to 2024.

Has economic volatility delayed decision making/purchasing? (2022-2024)

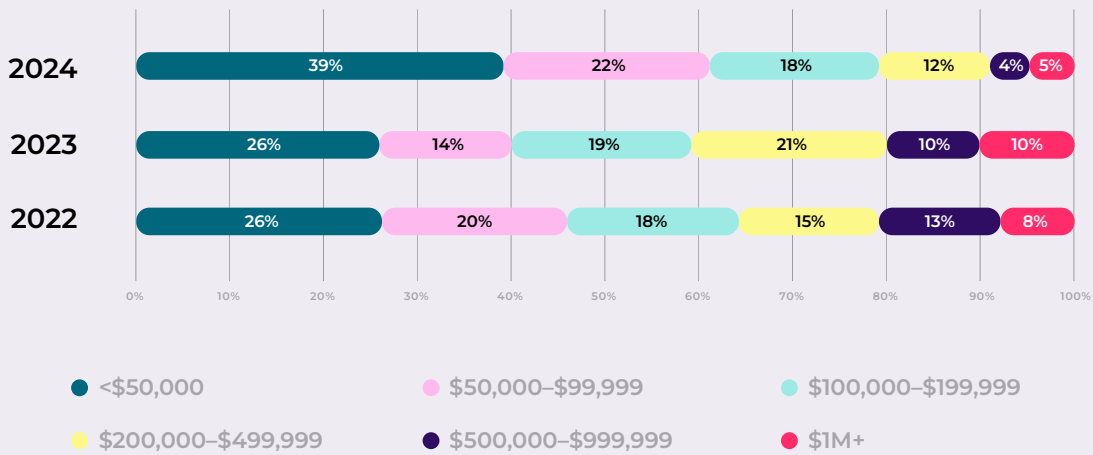


Deep dive: A look at non-headcount budgets by revenue.

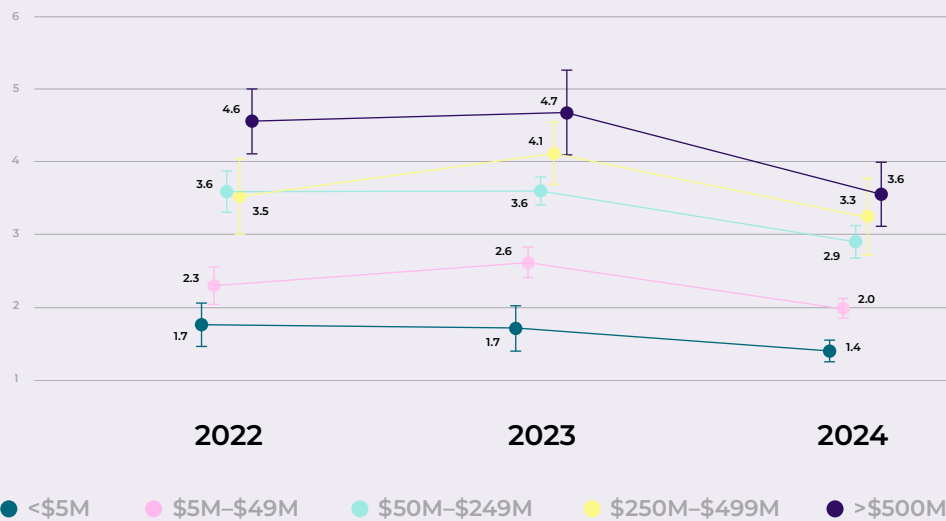
In 2024, more teams reported that their non-headcount budgets were in the 'Less than \$50,000' range this year compared to previous years.

The research team checked to determine whether this was because of budget cuts or overall company size and established that both were factors. Budgets in every revenue band trended down. Compounding that shift in this year's sample in terms of annual revenue, with more smaller companies, also shifted the budget size sample slightly lower, contributing to the appearance of the larger jump in sub-\$50,000, non-headcount budgets in 2024.

Non-headcount budget (2022-2024)



Non-headcount budget by revenue (2022-2024)

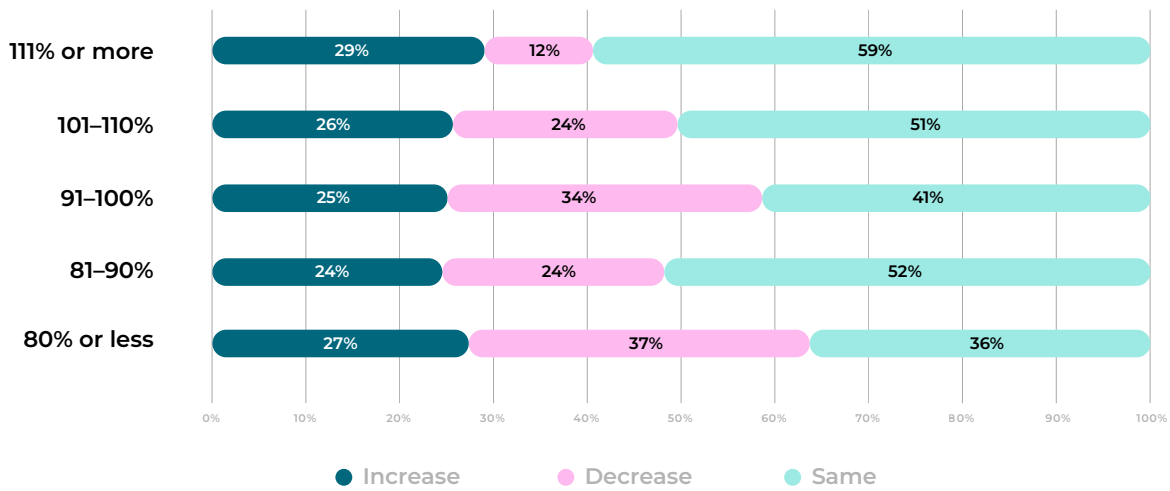


Trend 4: Companies with higher NRR are more likely to invest in CS.

Another interesting trend is that organizations with the highest NRR were the most likely to increase their customer success budgets in 2024.

The CS function, which typically owns NRR, requires a fine balance between technology and human touch. Limiting investment in either can impact performance. When performance is down, it is time to assess, take action, and make the changes needed to improve.

Budget changes by NRR (2024)



Trends in customer success reporting and revenue ownership.

Trend 1: CS is still facing a reporting structure shell game.

In the last two years we have seen a shift in CS team reporting structure.

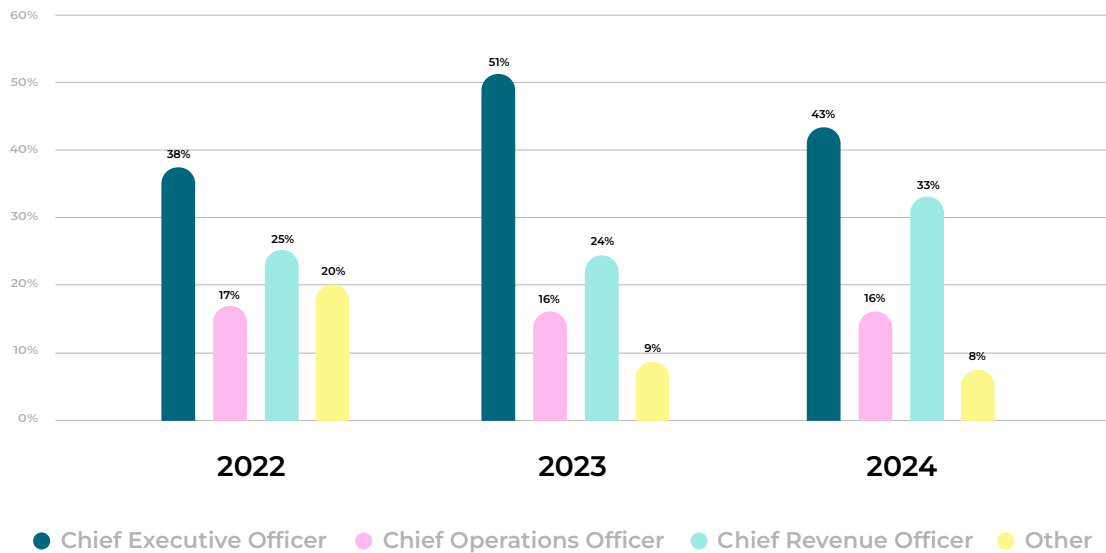
The largest group of CS teams still report to the CEO. While this group is smaller (43%) than 2023 (51%), it is still larger than 2022 (38%).

However, there has been a significant increase in CS teams reporting to the chief revenue officer (CRO) in 2024 (33%) compared to 2023 (24%). CS teams in smaller companies tend to report to the CEO, whereas leaders in larger organizations report to the CRO.

“Put the CRO in charge of customer success, you get more revenue from the base. You just burn a ton of goodwill and customer happiness.”

—Jason Lemkin
SaaStr

Who does the head of CS report to on the executive team? (2022-2024)



More CS leaders report to the CEO in companies of under \$50 million in revenue, while more report to the CRO in companies with more than \$50 million in revenue.

Reporting structure by revenue (2024)

	Less than \$5M	\$5M - \$49M	\$50M - \$249M	\$250M - \$499M	\$500M or greater
Chief Executive Officer	55%	51%	31%	28%	28%
Chief Financial Officer	0%	4%	3%	2%	0%
Chief Marketing Officer (CMO or Equivalent)	3%	1%	1%	11%	4%
Chief Operations Officer	14%	17%	20%	2%	10%
Chief Product Officer	5%	3%	1%	4%	3%
Chief Revenue Officer	23%	24%	43%	53%	55%

Trend 2: Revenue ownership by CS stays consistent, while compensation for expansion takes a hit.

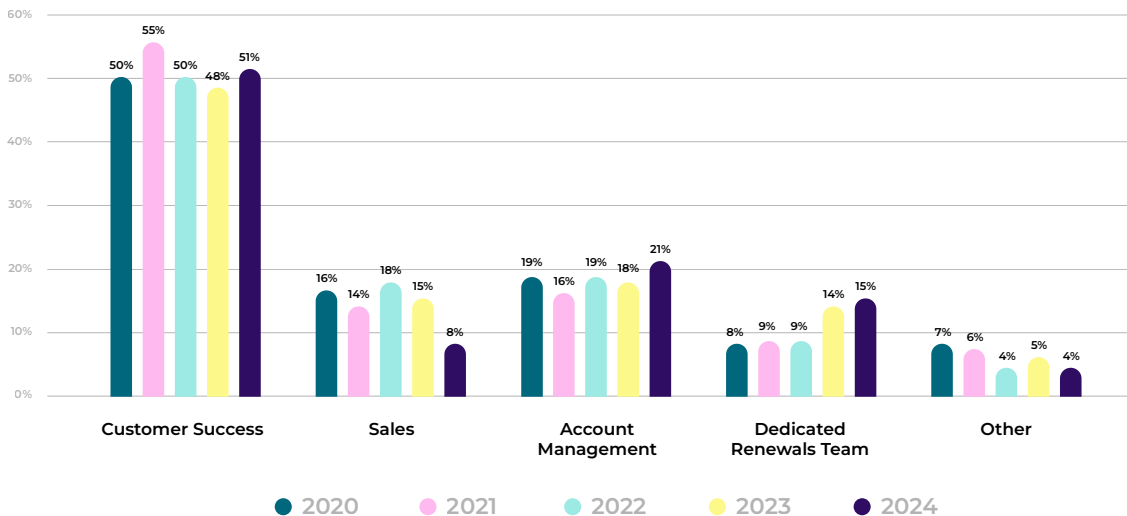
The “CS is the new sales” debate got more intense in the difficult SaaS environment, as companies shifted their CS teams under CROs. Is CS the new sales? Let’s look at the numbers.

Renewals ownership:

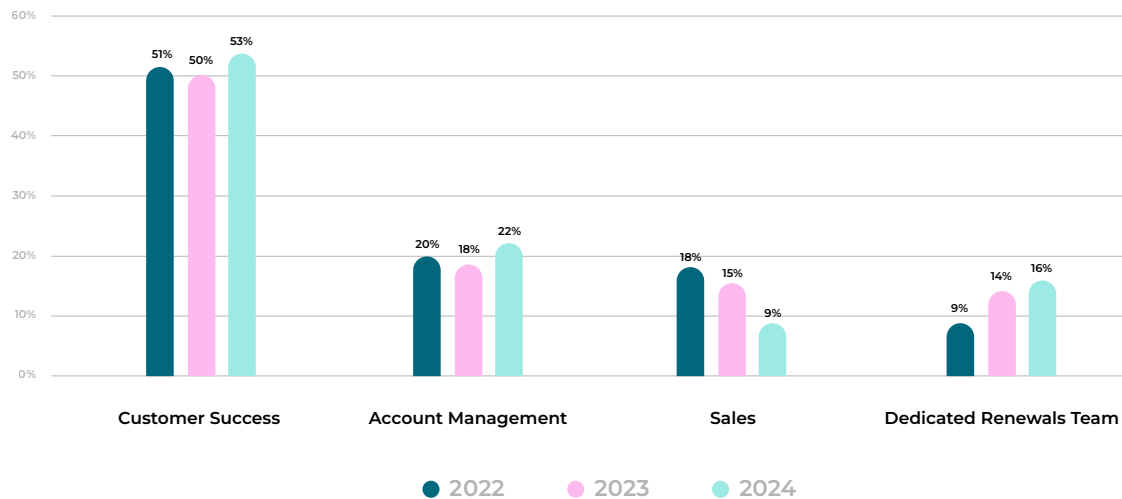
For the past five years, an approximate but consistent 50% of CS teams have “owned” the renewal process and were compensated for it.

The ownership of renewals by sales dropped again this year, from 15% in 2023 to 8% in 2024. However, this sharp decline is tempered by the rise of dedicated renewal teams, who own renewals at 15% of companies in 2024 compared to 9% in 2022.

Who owns the renewal process? (2020-2024)



Which function is compensated for renewals? (2022-2024)



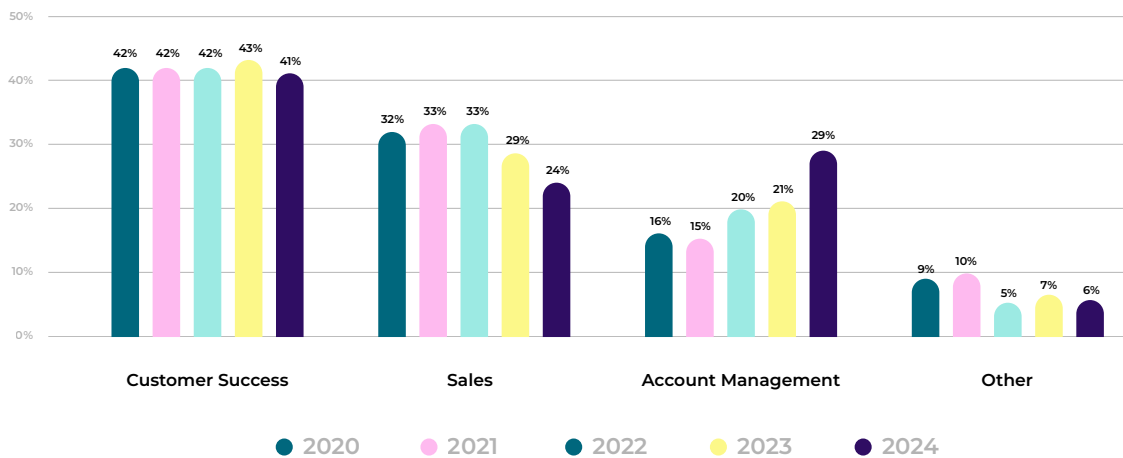
Expansion ownership:

This appears to tell a similar story, at least on the surface.

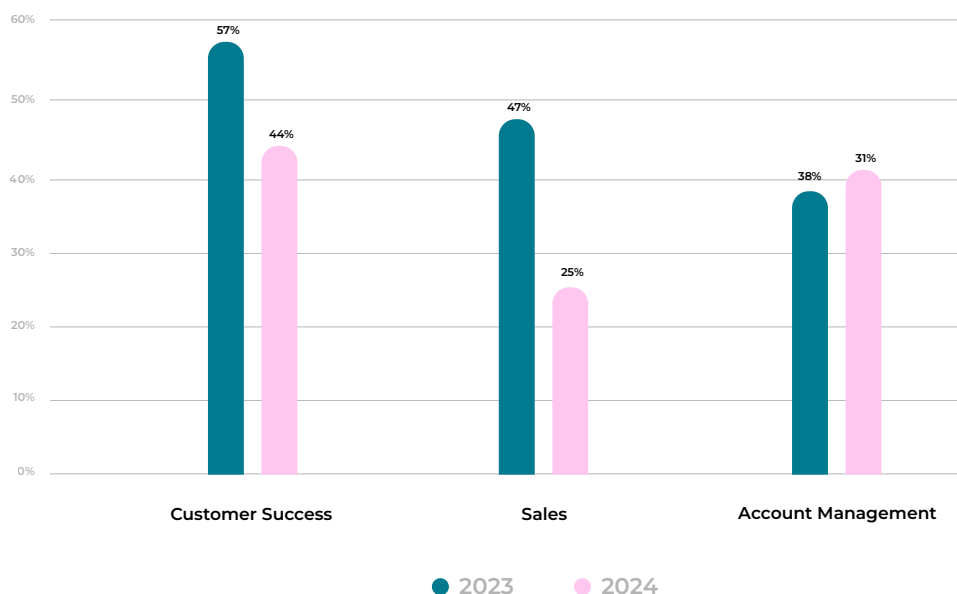
For the past five years, roughly 40% of CS teams have owned expansions. As with renewals, account management teams have become more likely to handle expansions, jumping from 20% in 2022 to 29% in 2024. Sales ownership of expansions, meanwhile, has dipped from 33% in 2022 to 24% in 2024.

Despite having been the largest owners of expansions for the past five years, CS teams have become substantially less likely to be compensated for them. Just 44% of CS teams are compensated for expansions in 2024, compared to 57% in 2023; another messy consequence of the confusion around what to do with CS teams.

Who owns expansions? (2020-2024)



Which function is compensated for expansions? (2023-2024)



Deep dive: The connection between NRR, expansion ownership, and training.

Perhaps due to shifting roles, lack of training, or lack of incentive compensation, companies where CS teams own expansion report having lower NRR.

Within the highest self-reported NRR band, only 35% of CS teams own expansion. Within the lowest NRR band, 56% of CS teams own expansion.

Conversely, companies where account management teams own expansion trend towards higher NRR.

Expansion ownership compared to NRR (2024)

Who owns expansion	<=80%	81-90%	91-100%	101-110%	>=111%
Account Management	17%	24%	36%	33%	40%
Customer Success	56%	50%	44%	40%	35%
Sales	27%	27%	20%	27%	26%

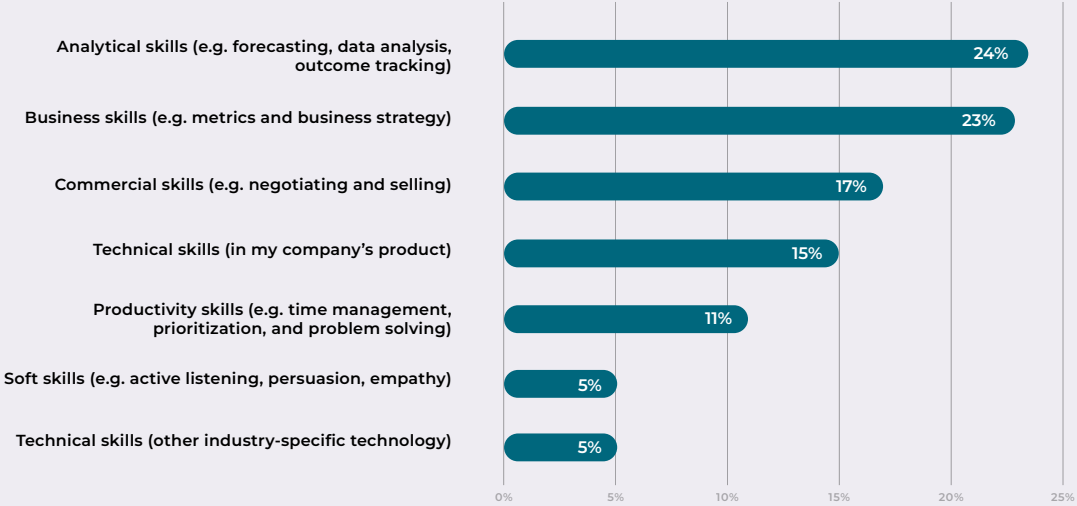
How can CS leaders address the factors that might be driving this correlation?

1: Invest in your CSMs' business skills.

Revenue ownership is a recent development for many CS teams, and many CSMs have not been trained to sell. They are smart, technical problem solvers trained to help their customers succeed. If CSMs are going to own expansions, they need the skills to support them to do it successfully.

Per the **2024 CSM Confidential Report**, when asked to pick the skillset in which extra training would make the most difference to their effectiveness, nearly two-thirds of CSMs picked hard business skills including analytical skills (24%), business/strategic skills (23%), and commercial skills (17%).

If you could have more training to make you a more effective CSM, which of these options would make the biggest difference? (2024)

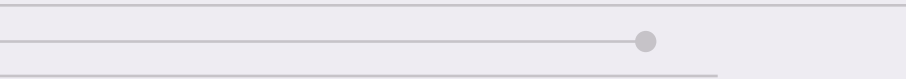


2: Revisit complementary roles like customer marketing.

Another, complementary option to assist CS teams in growing renewal and expansion revenue is to invest in customer marketing. Currently, only 53% of respondents report having a customer marketing function, which ideally works hand-in-hand with CS.

At ChurnZero, we chose a customer marketing professional with experience in CS and customer success platform (ChurnZero) use. She was able to access customer data to segment customers based on needs, software editions, vertical market segments, or customer journey stages to create more impactful communications and to use ChurnZero's in-app tools to streamline emails and increase their timeliness and relevance.

Engagement rates on these customer marketing assets soared beyond average benchmarks. Within weeks, ChurnZero attributed 17% of its cross-sales pipeline to this collaboration between customer marketing and CS. 16% of the deals generated were closed within months.



Trends in customer success charters and metrics.

Trend 1: Customer success charters don't yet reflect revenue priorities.

Despite half of CS teams owning the renewal process and almost half owning expansions, CS charters over the last four years have stayed remarkably stable, with a primary focus on onboarding and adoption. The only change occurred in 2023, when renewals and engagement switched places to third and fourth place, respectively.

Meanwhile, expansion has remained at the bottom of the list in fifth place, beating only enablement, which we added as a new option this year. For the 41% of CS teams who own expansion, the lack of focus on this goal is concerning. It may also help explain the correlation between CS expansion ownership and lower NRR discussed in the previous section.

Customer success charters (2021-2024)

Priority	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	Onboarding	Onboarding	Onboarding	Onboarding
2	Adoption	Adoption	Adoption	Adoption
3	Engagement	Engagement	Renewals	Renewals
4	Renewals	Renewals	Engagement	Engagement
5	Expansion	Expansion	Expansion	Expansion
6	-	-	-	Enablement

Trend 2: Churn rate is the top metric and priority for 2024 and beyond.

In our data on how CS leaders ranked their most important/helpful metrics, the spread between the top and bottom metrics is relatively small.

However, net revenue retention (NRR), gross revenue retention (GRR) and churn rate have consistently ranked at the top across the years, whereas things like customer lifetime value (CLV), Net Promoter Score® (NPS) and earned growth rate have stayed toward the bottom.

One difference, however, is that churn rate is now ranked highest for importance this year. The chart below shows its rise over time as economic conditions worsened.

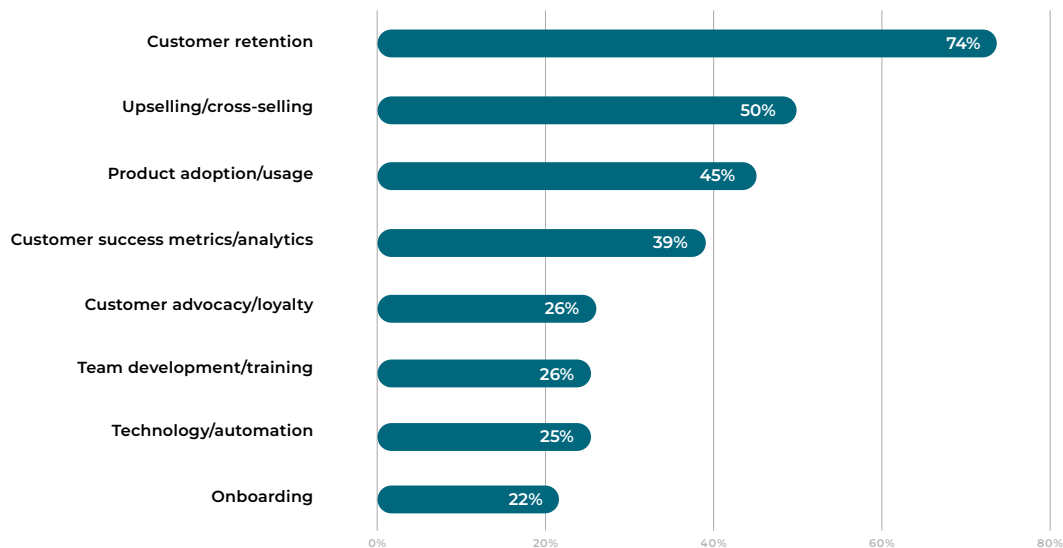


Customer success metrics (2022-2024)

2022	2023	2024
Net revenue retention (NRR)	Net revenue retention (NRR)	Churn rate
Gross revenue retention (GRR)	Churn rate	Net revenue retention (NRR)
Churn rate	Expansion revenue	Gross revenue retention (GRR)
Logo Retention rate	Gross revenue retention (GRR)	Expansion revenue
Expansion revenue	Health scores	Health scores
Health scores	Logo retention rate	Logo retention rate
Customer lifetime value (CLV)	Net Promoter Score	Net Promoter Score
Net Promoter Score	Customer lifetime value (CLV)	Customer lifetime value (CLV)
Earned growth rate	Earned growth rate	Earned growth rate

We asked respondents to identify their top priorities for the next 12 months. Overwhelmingly, retention is the top priority, followed closely by expansion.

What are your top priorities for the coming year (2025)?



How often was the priority mentioned?

Trend 3: Strategies are in an ongoing state of “in progress.”

Aside from establishing a clear delineation between CS and technical support, most CS teams report that their strategies are only partially implemented, a trend we have seen since the CS Leadership Study began in 2020.

There are some differences in implementation success, however, based on annual revenue. Larger companies (\$500 million or greater) have far greater implementation rates, specifically for the voice of the customer and having a separate customer success function. Mid-sized companies (\$50 - \$499 million) have the largest completion of customer enablement and executive sponsorship of key accounts. Smaller companies have the lowest rates of implemented strategies.

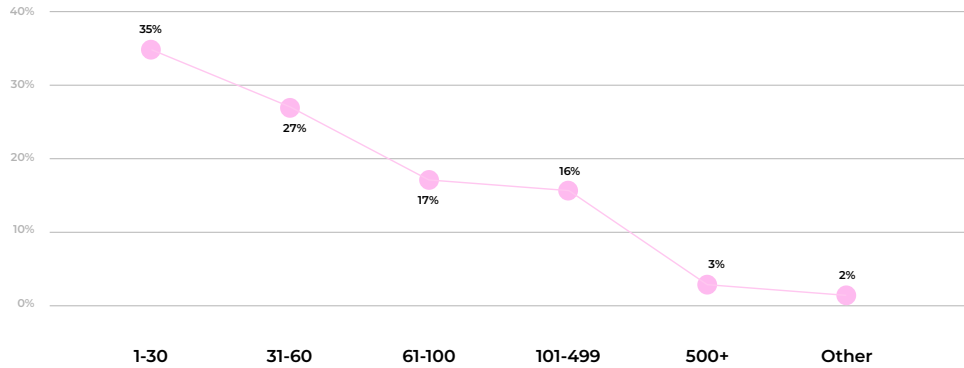
Customer success strategies implemented (2024)

	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented but planned in the next 12 months	Not implemented
Digital customer success	17%	46%	19%	19%
Voice of the customer program	17%	40%	18%	24%
Customer enablement program	24%	40%	15%	21%
Executive sponsor program for key accounts	23%	34%	18%	26%
Consistent segmentation model across all business units	31%	35%	16%	18%
Separate customer success function (often referred to as CS operations) for team enablement and training	28%	24%	12%	36%
Delineation between technical support and account ownership	54%	29%	7%	9%
Customer health score visible to all customer-facing roles	34%	34%	20%	12%
Central location to track customer financial, operational, product, support, and demographic information	32%	41%	16%	11%
Standardized processes for tracking customer data that is available to all customer-facing roles	30%	46%	18%	7%
Tailored dashboards available to executive, management, and individual contributor levels that provide access to critical information that informs customer health	20%	46%	24%	10%

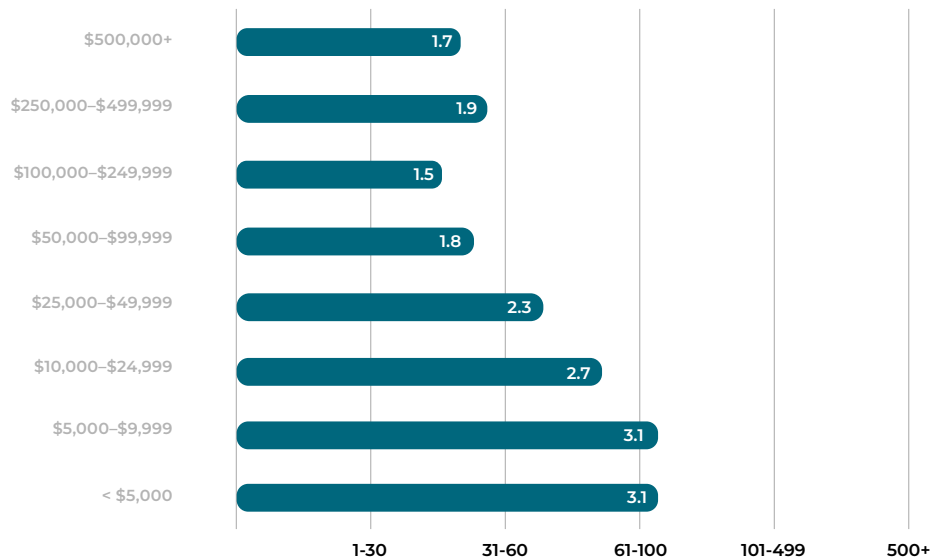
Snapshot: What the typical CSM book of business looks like.

In a new question this year, we asked CS leaders to size their average CSM book of business by number of customers. The data shows a moderate correlation between ACV and CSM load. As ACV grows, CSM load decreases.

On average, how many customers does each CSM manage? (2024)



Customer load per CSM by ACV (2024)

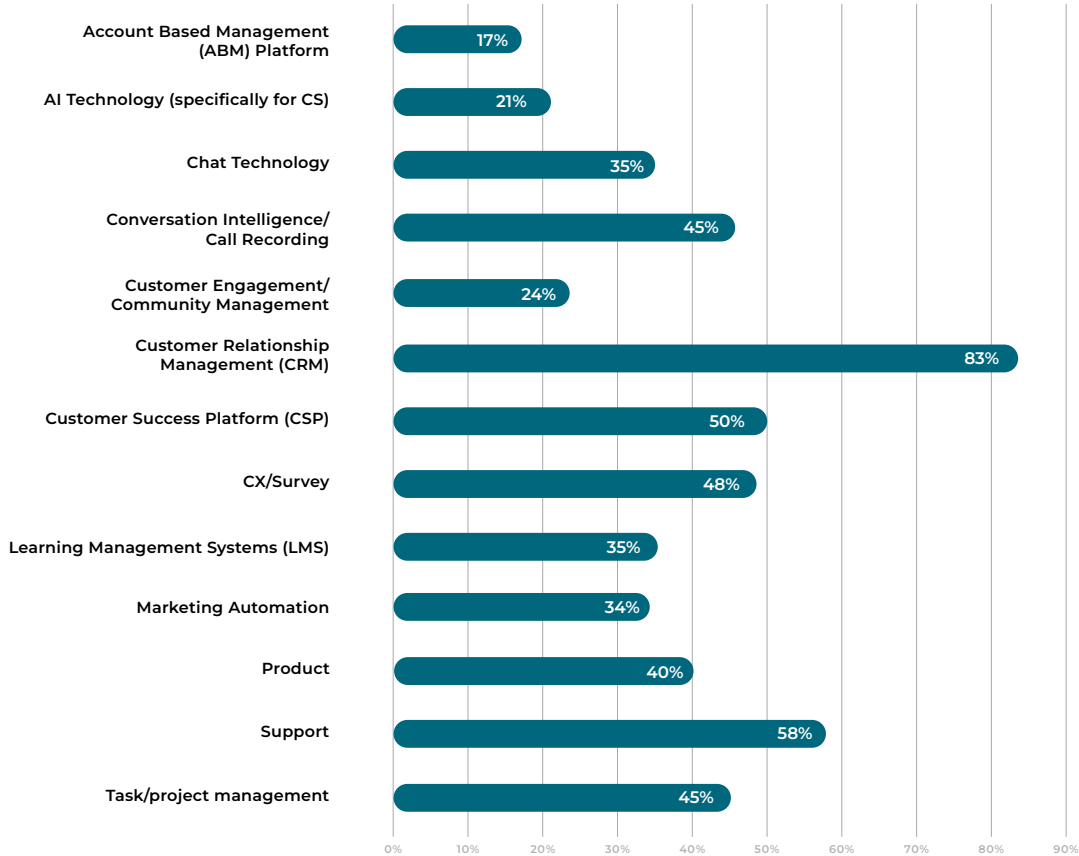


Trends in CS tech stacks and tactics.

Trend 1: The CS tech stack has matured—with one caveat.

The customer success tech stack is maturing to rival that of sales and marketing, with increased adoption almost across the board. A small but disturbing trend, however, is the slight increase in CRMs and decrease in CSPs. Anecdotally, we have seen companies shift back to sales tools from their purpose-built customer success tools due to budget cuts.

CS tech stack (2024)



Deep dive: The relationship between technology adoption and revenue.

There are statistically reliable differences in tech adoption based on company size by revenue. CS teams in smaller companies (\$5 million to \$49 million) report the largest adoption of support software (64%), which could suggest that the dividing line between CS and support has not been defined, or perhaps that no dedicated support team exists. In contrast, 69% of CS teams in larger companies (\$500 million or greater) have adopted customer success platforms, 62% have adopted LMS, and 95% use CRMs.

Tech stack by company revenue (2024)

ABM platform		AI technology	
Less than \$5M	4%	Less than \$5M	16%
\$5M - \$49M	7%	\$5M - \$49M	19%
\$50M - \$249M	7%	\$50M - \$249M	16%
\$250M - \$499M	13%	\$250M - \$499M	35%
\$500M or greater	12%	\$500M or greater	36%

Chat technology		Conversation intelligence	
Less than \$5M	44%	Less than \$5M	33%
\$5M - \$49M	31%	\$5M - \$49M	47%
\$50M - \$249M	41%	\$50M - \$249M	48%
\$250M - \$499M	25%	\$250M - \$499M	68%
\$500M or greater	36%	\$500M or greater	41%

CRM		CSP	
Less than \$5M	81%	Less than \$5M	34%
\$5M - \$49M	84%	\$5M - \$49M	52%
\$50M - \$249M	82%	\$50M - \$249M	50%
\$250M - \$499M	83%	\$250M - \$499M	63%
\$500M or greater	95%	\$500M or greater	69%

Customer engagement		CX/Survey	
Less than \$5M	16%	Less than \$5M	38%
\$5M - \$49M	18%	\$5M - \$49M	47%
\$50M - \$249M	33%	\$50M - \$249M	56%
\$250M - \$499M	38%	\$250M - \$499M	38%
\$500M or greater	39%	\$500M or greater	69%

LMS		Marketing automation	
Less than \$5M	14%	Less than \$5M	25%
\$5M - \$49M	29%	\$5M - \$49M	34%
\$50M - \$249M	48%	\$50M - \$249M	37%
\$250M - \$499M	53%	\$250M - \$499M	40%
\$500M or greater	62%	\$500M or greater	44%

Product analytics

Less than \$5M	33%
\$5M - \$49M	41%
\$50M - \$249M	44%
\$250M - \$499M	45%
\$500M or greater	41%

Support software

Less than \$5M	57%
\$5M - \$49M	64%
\$50M - \$249M	56%
\$250M - \$499M	45%
\$500M or greater	61%

Task/product manager

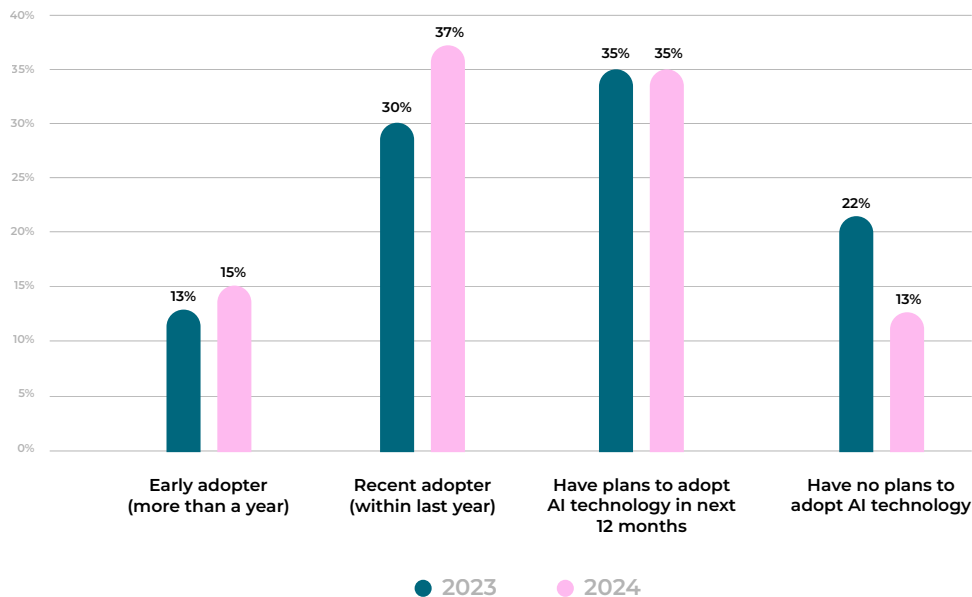
Less than \$5M	43%
\$5M - \$49M	48%
\$50M - \$249M	44%
\$250M - \$499M	40%
\$500M or greater	48%

Trend 2: AI adoption and AI usage differs.

AI can reduce repetitive tasks, is a solid research and analytics assistant, and can synthesize vast amounts of data and surface relevant, actionable facts and themes – all things that will provide a competitive advantage for customer success teams. However, even though 87% of participants have indicated that they are using or have plans to use AI in their work, only 21% have adopted it as part of their CS tech stack (see the CS Tech Stack chart).

In the [Forrester Wave Customer Success Platforms, Q4 2023 report](#), Forrester recommends that those looking for customer success platforms look for providers that prioritize digital-led strategies for success at scale, leverage AI and machine learning, and include rich reporting and integrations out of the box.

AI adoption (2023-2024)



Trend 3: In-person meetings with customers positively impact the bottom line.

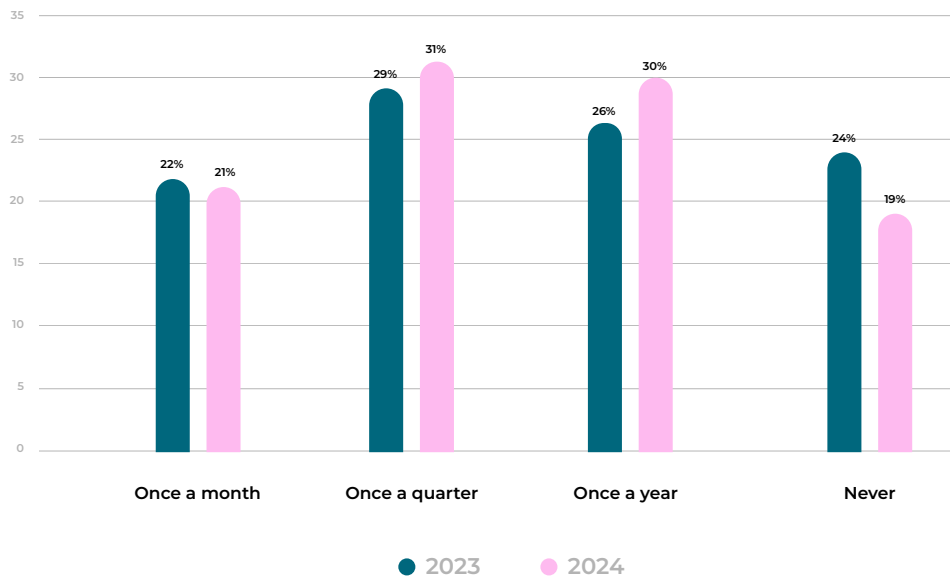
In 2023, the SaaS team asked us to include a question about the frequency of in-person (not virtual) meetings with customers. When 77% of respondents said they did meet with customers in person, it was met with some skepticism. Are that many CS teams really meeting face-to-face? Was the question confusing? To ensure there was no confusion, we made the question more explicit around in-person meetings. This year, 82% of respondents said that in-person matters.

We split the data on in-person meetings into a yes/no variable and found differences between those who do and don't have in-person meetings. Companies that have in-person meetings with customers also have bigger deals, better NRR, higher team growth, and lower CSM load.

It is likely that companies that sell larger deals invest more in relationships. Having in-person meetings and keeping a lower CSM load go hand in hand with the more hands-on approach these larger deals justify. At the same time, better NRR and higher team growth may be influenced by this greater investment. Companies with bigger deal sizes invest more in keeping their customers, and it appears that the investment pays off.

The differences for ACV and CSM load are moderate and the others small, but all were statistically reliable.

Frequency of CSM/customer in-person meetings (2023-2024)

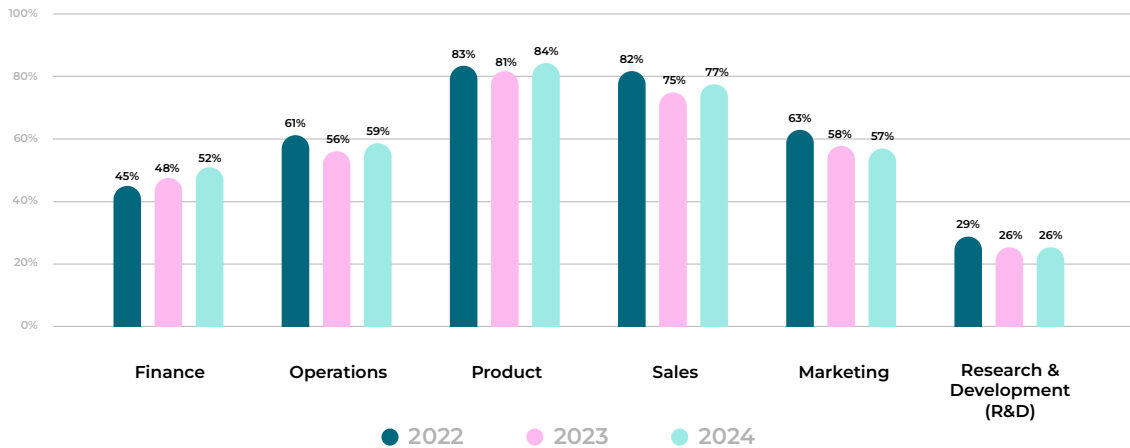


Trend 4: Internal collaboration is getting back on track.

In the past few years, we noted a decline in interdepartmental collaboration, which we believe was due to the adjustments of the remote and hybrid workforce after Covid. However, the pressure of the economic uncertainty for SaaS and the need to drive recurring revenue has increased collaboration overall since 2023, especially with finance.

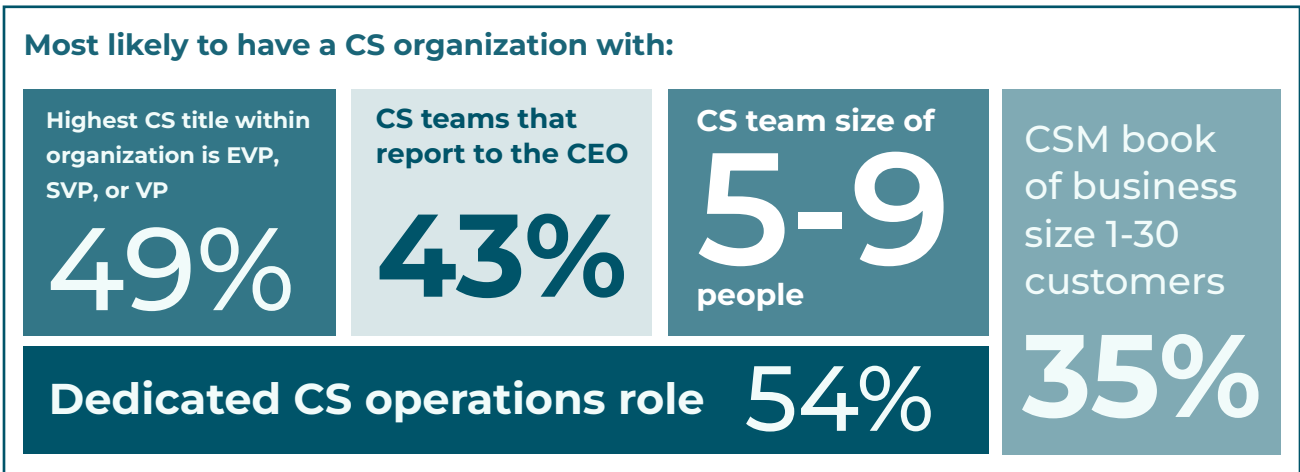
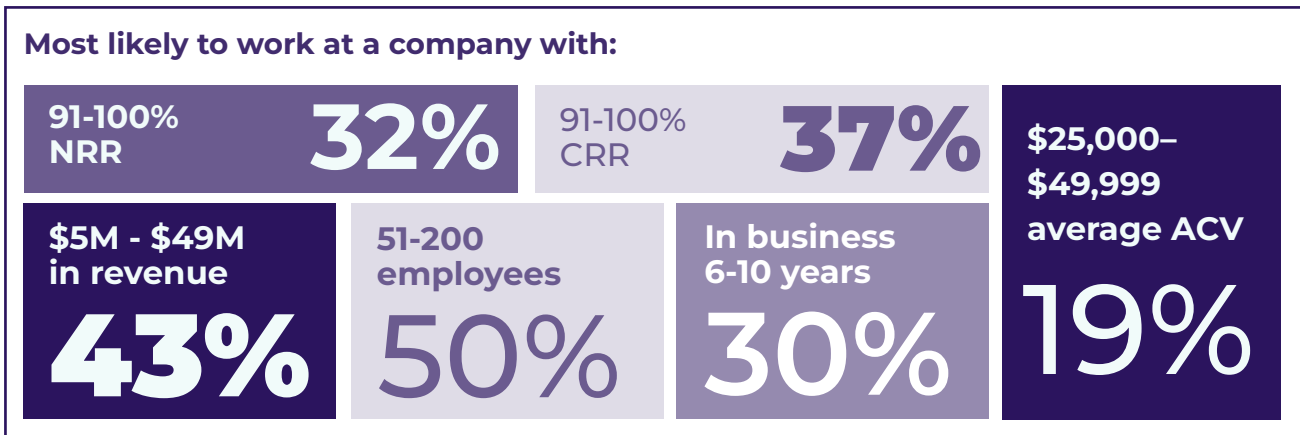
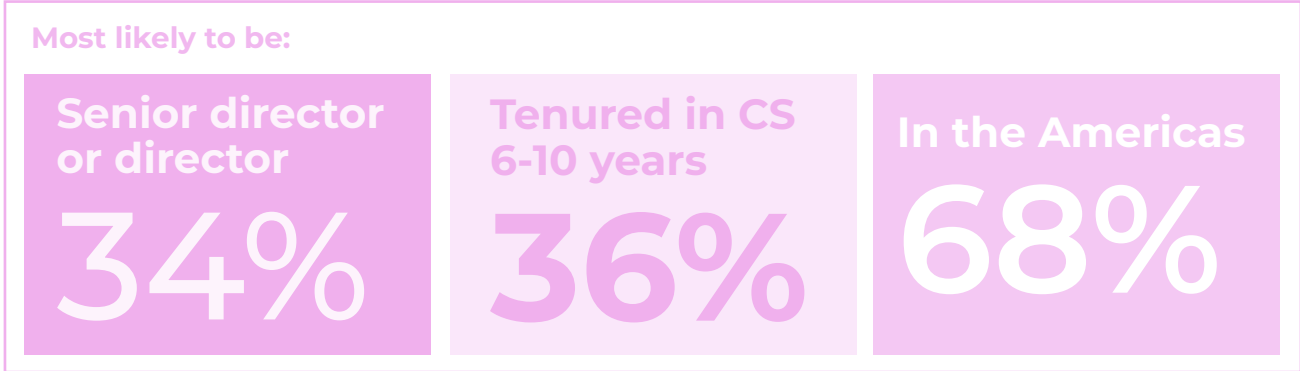
CS teams in smaller organizations (under \$50 million in revenue) are less likely to work with operations and finance than in larger companies, while CS collaboration with product or sales is consistent across all company sizes. On average, more than 80% of CS teams work with sales and product on a regular basis.

Which departments do you work with regularly to help meet your objectives? (2022-2024)



Who joined the 2024 Customer Success Leadership Study?

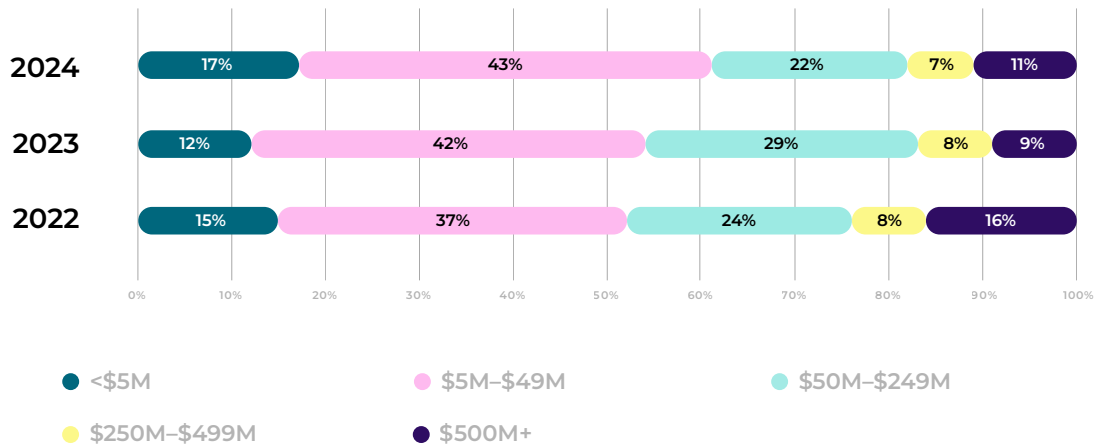
1,027 customer success leaders participated in the 2024 survey. All responses were voluntary, and all data was self-reported.



How the mix of participants' companies changed from 2022 to 2024.

Over the past two years, we have seen a shift in the revenue distribution of participating organizations. In 2024, the number of participants from the \$50 million to \$249 million revenue band was reduced, while participants from the 'under \$5 million' category and the '\$500 million or greater' category increased. This suggests that large businesses maintained their hold in the market, the small stayed small, and those in between took a hit.

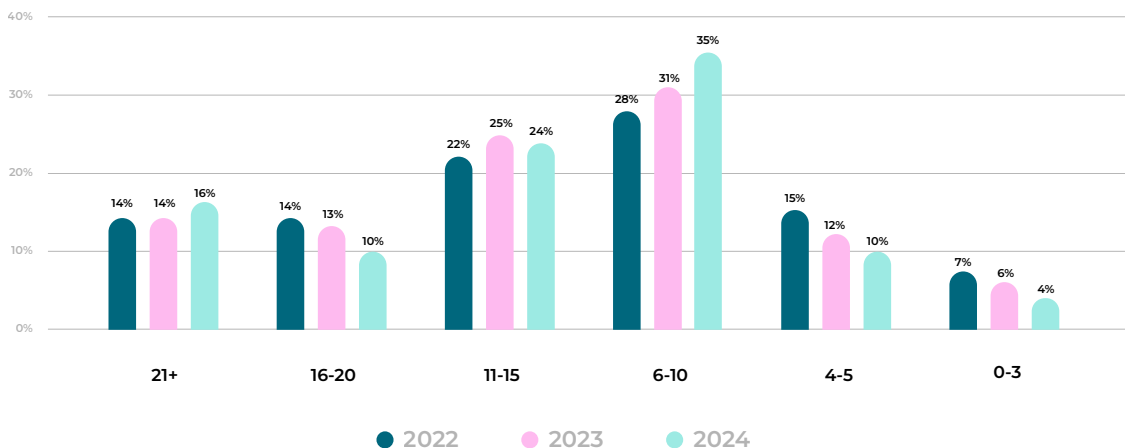
How annual revenue differs (2022-2024)



We saw fewer startups in the mix.

In a trend that parallels the lack of investment in tech startups, the number of participants from young companies (three years in business or less) has declined by 42% since 2022. Some of those small companies may not have survived the last two years. Others have been acquired by larger companies or graduated into other categories.

Years in business (2022-2024)



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