UPPER INDUSTRY REPORT · SALES & MARKETING / GTM

The GTM & Revenue Talent Market in 2026

How AI-accelerated sourcing finds AEs, SDRs, and GTM leaders who actually perform — a data-driven field guide for revenue-team hiring.

Edition	Reading time	Sources	Published by
H2 2026	10 minutes	12+ cited (2024–2026)	UPPER

KEY FINDINGS

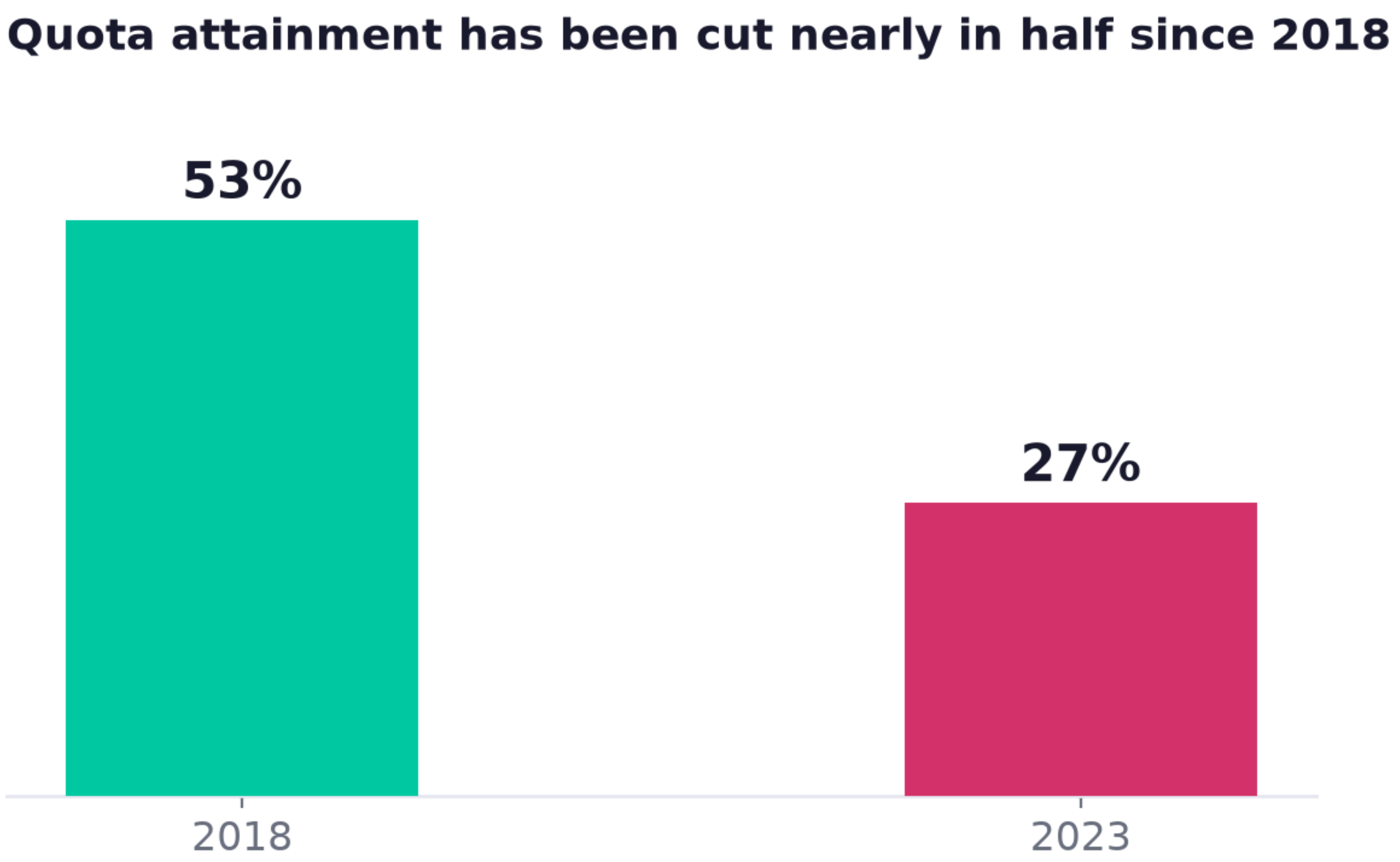
27%	of sales reps hit quota in 2023, down from 53% in 2018 — less than half the historical rate.[1]
34–35%	average sales turnover rate, roughly double the 13–17.8% cross-industry average; SDR turnover hit a 40% median in 2024.[2]
$97,690+	the average all-in cost of a single bad sales hire, once ramp time and lost pipeline are counted.[3]
3.7x	more likely to hit quota — the performance gap between sellers who use AI and those who don't.[4]
~3 candidates	compete for each open B2B sales role on average, with positions staying open roughly two months.[5]

01 — The Collapse

Why has quota attainment fallen so far?

> **Less than half the reps who hit quota in 2018 do today — this is structural, not cyclical.**

Salesforce's State of Sales research (6th edition) found that only **27% of sales reps hit quota in 2023**, down sharply from **53% in 2018** — a collapse of nearly half in five years.[1] The drivers are structural: buying committees have grown larger and more cross-functional, self-serve research means buyers engage sellers later in the cycle, and deal complexity has risen even as budgets tightened.



Source: Salesforce, State of Sales, 6th Edition.

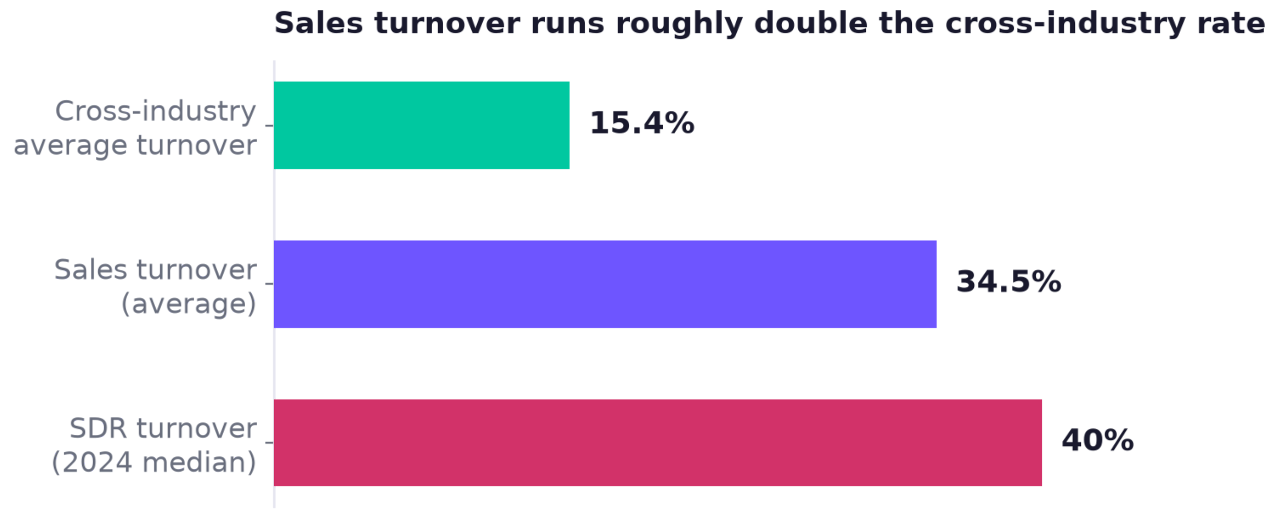
This isn't a hiring-volume problem — it's a hiring-quality problem. When barely a quarter of reps hit number, the cost of misjudging who will perform compounds across every open seat on the team.

02 — The Churn

Why does sales turnover run so much higher than everywhere else?

> **Sales turnover runs roughly double the cross-industry average — and SDR turnover is even worse.**

Sales turnover averages **34% to 35%**, compared with a **13% to 17.8% average across all industries** — meaning a sales organization can expect to lose roughly a third of its team every year just from baseline attrition.[2] The Bridge Group's 2025 SDR Metrics & Compensation Report found **SDR turnover hit a 40% median in 2024**, with average SDR tenure sitting at just **1.9 years**.[6]



Sources: cross-industry benchmarks; Bridge Group 2025 SDR Metrics & Compensation Report.

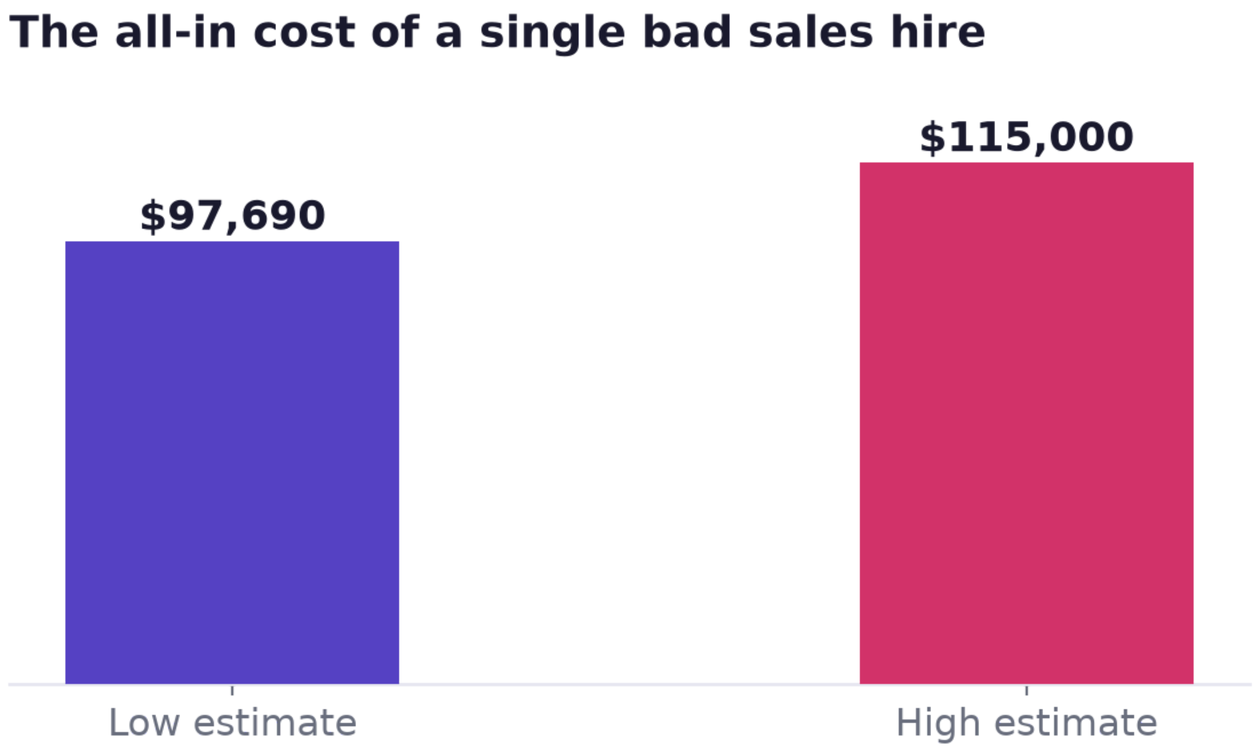
There's a silver lining in the same data: SDR ramp time has actually improved to **3.0 months**, the fastest on record and down from 3.8 months in 2014 — showing that when onboarding and enablement are done well, new reps can reach productivity faster even in a high-churn environment.[6]

03 — The Cost

What does a bad sales hire actually cost?

> **Close to six figures per mis-hire — and that's before counting the pipeline it never generated.**

Research from DePaul University, cited via CACI, puts the true cost of replacing a sales rep at **$97,690 to $115,000** once recruiting costs, ramp time, management time, and lost sales opportunity are all counted.[3] With SDR turnover at 40% and sales turnover at 34-35%, that cost compounds fast across a growing revenue team.



Source: DePaul University research via CACI, "The True Business Cost of Replacing a Rep."

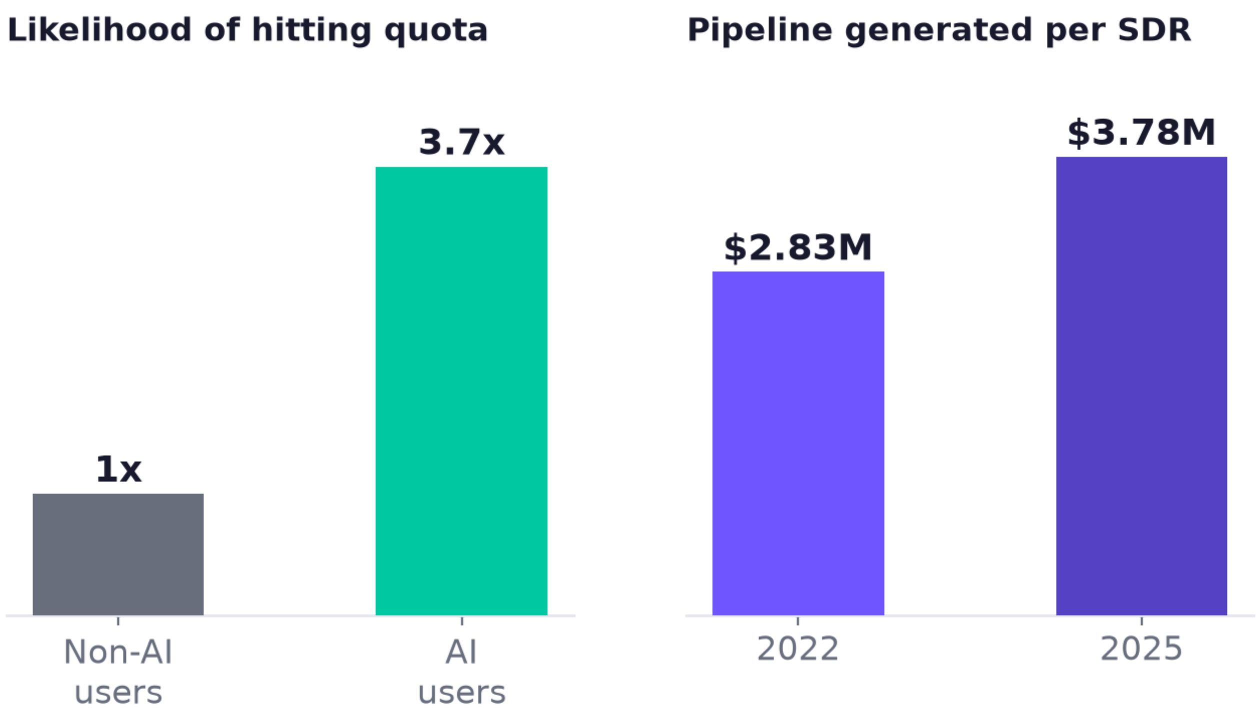
Gartner data (via Business Wire) shows the supply side is just as tight: roughly **three candidates compete for each open B2B sales role** on average, and open sales positions stay unfilled for about **two months** — meaning revenue leaders can't just "hire more carefully" from an abundant pool; the market itself is thin.[5]

04 — The AI Edge

Does AI actually move the performance needle for sellers?

> **Yes — sellers using AI meaningfully outperform those who don't, and the productivity data backs it up.**

Salesforce's 2026 State of Sales data found that reps who use AI are **3.7x more likely to hit quota** than non-users, and **88% of sellers using AI agents** report the technology helps them sell more effectively.[4] Pipeline generation per SDR has grown substantially in parallel — from **$2.83M in 2022 to $3.78M in 2025** — even as team sizes and ramp times shifted.[6]



Sources: Salesforce, State of Sales statistics 2026; Bridge Group 2025 SDR Metrics & Compensation Report.

"Only 27% of reps hit quota in 2023 — down from 53% in 2018. The market isn't short on sellers. It's short on sellers who actually perform."

The gap isn't closing on its own, though: Gartner projects (via a Sales & Marketing Management focus report) that **58% of sellers will need reskilling for AI-augmented selling by 2026** — meaning adoption and its benefits remain uneven across teams, and the advantage still belongs to organizations that move early.[7]

05 — The Playbook

What should a revenue leader do about it?

Five moves separate the GTM organizations that will build a high-performing bench over the next 24 months:

1. Source for performance signal, not résumé polish. With only 27% of reps hitting quota, interview performance alone is a weak predictor — score candidates on quota-attainment history and ramp speed instead.
2. Build a warm bench before the next departure. At 34-35% sales turnover and 40% SDR turnover, always-on sourcing beats reactive, post-departure scrambling every time.
3. Price in the true cost of a mis-hire. At $97,690+ per bad hire, spending more time and rigor upfront pays back immediately.
4. Reach passive GTM talent directly. With only ~3 candidates competing per open role, a posting-only

strategy leaves most of the addressable market untouched.
5. Adopt AI-augmented selling and sourcing together. AI users are 3.7x more likely to hit quota — pairing AI-native sourcing with AI-enabled sellers compounds the advantage.[4]

This is precisely the model UPPER was built to run: continuous, performance-signal-aware sourcing across AEs, SDRs, and GTM leaders — so revenue leaders build pipeline of candidates who are statistically more likely to perform, not just interview well.

Sources

1. Salesforce, "State of Sales," 6th Edition (PDF) — https://assets.ctfassets.net/f43wltp2j5se/2gHMpCURXzpMW7PJ3SlWZJ/3cad8d7e8496abbd3c0f99d5c7f16ef4/salesforce-state-of-sales-report-6-ed.pdf
2. Bridge Group, "2025 SDR Models & Metrics Report" — https://www.bridgegroupinc.com/research/2025-sdr-models-metrics-report-the-bridge-group
3. CACI, "The True Business Cost of Replacing a Rep" (citing DePaul University research) — https://www.caci.co.uk/insights/the-true-business-cost-of-replacing-a-rep/
4. Salesforce, "State of Sales Statistics" 2026 — https://www.salesforce.com/sales/state-of-sales/sales-statistics/
5. Gartner via Business Wire, sales hiring market data — https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20221212005528/en/Gartner-Predicts-Half-of-Sales-Leadership-Roles-Will-be-Filled-by-Historically-Underrepresented-Groups-Within-Five-Years
6. Bridge Group, "2025 SDR Models & Metrics Report" (SDR turnover, tenure, ramp time, pipeline data) — https://www.bridgegroupinc.com/research/2025-sdr-models-metrics-report-the-bridge-group
7. Sales & Marketing Management, Focus Report, July 2025 (PDF, citing Gartner) — https://salesandmarketing.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/SMM-Focus-Report-July-2025.pdf

This report synthesizes third-party research current as of July 2026; figures are attributed to their original sources above. Market-size figures across research vendors diverge by methodology — directional trends are emphasized over precise absolute figures. UPPER edition H2 2026 — refreshed semiannually.