

Build, Buy or Bolt-On? The Economics of Outsourced B2B Pipeline Generation

A Trueleads white paper · Tom Happé, Founder & CEO · October 2026

Executive summary

For most B2B technology vendors, outsourcing pipeline generation to a specialist delivers qualified conversations faster, at lower Year-1 cost and with far less risk than hiring SDRs or building a DIY stack.

Sales leaders have four ways to create outbound pipeline: hire in-house SDRs, use a generic outsourced agency, build their own tooling, or engage a specialist outsourcing partner. On paper, each can work. In practice, the economics diverge sharply in Year 1.

- **In-house SDRs** cost £85K–£135K fully loaded in Year 1, take 3–6 months to produce, and stay under two years on average.
- **Generic agencies** cost £40K–£100K a year, launch in 4–6 weeks, but quality and visibility vary widely.
- **DIY tooling** looks cheap at £500–£1,500 a month, but the real cost is the time of the person running it, and execution risk sits entirely with you.
- **Specialist partner** typically costs around £3K a month (about £36K a year), goes live in two to three weeks, commits to output targets, and offers an exit at six months if targets are missed.

The argument of this paper is simple. Outsourcing to a specialist converts a fixed, slow and risky cost (headcount) into a variable, fast and accountable one (a contracted service with output targets). The money saved is only part of the case; the bigger gains are time to pipeline and risk transferred to the provider.

The pipeline problem

Getting in front of enterprise buyers is harder than it has ever been, and the cost of getting it wrong falls on the vendor.

- **Buyers avoid sellers until late.** In a 2025 Gartner survey of 632 B2B buyers, 61% said they prefer an overall rep-free buying experience ([Gartner](#)).
- **Irrelevant outreach gets you blocked.** The same survey found 73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach. Volume without relevance now damages the brand.
- **Buyers research on social first.** Industry research suggests around three-quarters of B2B buyers use social media to research vendors, with LinkedIn the most trusted channel ([Folk](#)). LinkedIn reports that social selling leaders create 45% more opportunities than peers ([Oktopost summary of LinkedIn Sales Solutions](#)).
- **Fewer SDRs are hitting quota.** The Bridge Group's 2025 study of 351 B2B companies found only 60% of SDRs at quota, the lowest share in its series ([CIENCE summary of Bridge Group 2025](#)).

The implication: pipeline now depends on relevant, exec-level, multi-touch engagement where buyers already are. That is a craft and a system, not just headcount. The question is who is best placed to run it.

Option 1: Hiring in-house SDRs

A UK SDR costs £85K–£135K in Year 1 once everything is counted, and delivers full output for only part of that year.

Salary is the visible part. RepVue puts the UK SDR median at £39,125 base and £58,688 OTE ([RepVue](#)). The rest of the cost is easy to miss:

Cost line (Year 1, UK)	Estimate
Base salary	£35K–£45K
Commission at target	£15K–£20K
Employer NI (15%) and pension	£9K–£11K
Recruiter fee (15–20% of base)	£5K–£9K
Tools and data per seat	£6K–£15K
Manager time (10–20% of a sales leader)	£10K–£20K
Ramp, equipment and overhead	£5K–£15K
Total	£85K–£135K

Estimates built from the benchmarks cited; adjust to your own payroll and stack.

Time to value is long. A typical vacancy takes 45–60 days to fill ([MarketBetter](#)). The Bridge Group's 2025 average ramp is 3.0 months ([Bridge Group](#)). Decide to hire in January, and full output often arrives in May or June.

Tenure is short. Bridge Group puts average SDR tenure at 1.9 years, and 58% of companies report 12–23 months. Other analyses put it at 14–18 months. Either way, many vendors pay for a second hire and a second ramp before the first one has paid back.

Performance is uncertain. Only 60% of SDRs reach quota (Bridge Group, 2025); RepVue's UK figure is 62.4%. Roughly four in ten hires will under-deliver, and you carry that cost.

Management is on you. Someone must recruit, coach, build messaging, maintain data and tools, and review activity. For a founder-led or lean sales team, that time usually comes out of closing deals.

Option 2: Generic outsourced agencies

Generic agencies solve the speed problem but often swap it for a quality and visibility problem, at £40K–£100K a year.

Market guides put outsourced SDR services at roughly \$3,000–\$15,000 a month, depending on scope and channels ([Revnew](#)). Setup fees of \$1K–\$15K and 3–6 month minimums are common ([GigRadar](#)). In UK terms, most mid-market programmes land at £3K–£8K a month plus setup.

Where they fall short:

- **The wrong incentive.** Pay-per-meeting models reward volume, so providers are pushed to book bad-fit meetings ([LeadHaste](#)). Your AEs pay for that in wasted calls.
- **Email-first, volume-led.** Entry-level retainers often buy shared capacity and an email-only motion ([DevCommX](#)). That is exactly the irrelevant outreach 73% of buyers say they avoid.
- **Low visibility.** You see meetings, not the conversations, targeting or messaging behind them. When results dip, it is hard to diagnose why.
- **Lock-in.** Long minimum terms protect the agency, not the buyer. If it does not work, you are paying while you wait to leave.

Agencies are not the problem; generic ones are. The test is whether a provider specialises in your buyers, shows its work, and puts its own fee at risk on output.

Option 3: DIY tooling

Building your own outbound stack looks cheapest on the invoice and is often the most expensive in practice, because the real cost is people and the risk sits entirely with you.

A typical stack runs £500–£1,500 a month:

Tool	Approximate list price
LinkedIn Sales Navigator	£80–£130 per user/month
LinkedIn automation (e.g. Expandi)	~£75 per seat/month
Email sequencing, domains and inboxes	£150–£400/month
Data enrichment (e.g. Clay)	£120–£300+/month
Contact data	£50/month to £15K+/year
Dialler	£40–£70 per user/month

Approximate list prices; check against current vendor pricing.

The hidden costs:

- **Someone has to run it.** Targeting, copy, sequencing, list hygiene, reply handling and reporting add up to at least half a role. At £25K–£40K for 0.5 FTE, or founder time, Year-1 cost reaches £30K–£60K.
- **Deliverability is unforgiving.** Since February 2024, Google and Yahoo have enforced a spam complaint threshold of 0.3% for bulk senders ([Outreach](#)). Healthy senders aim for below 0.1% ([Mailgun](#)). One poorly targeted campaign can burn a domain for weeks.
- **LinkedIn accounts are at risk.** Misconfigured automation gets profiles restricted, often the very exec profiles you most need.
- **No benchmark.** Without data from many campaigns, a DIY team cannot tell whether 2% or 20% reply rates are normal for your market. Learning that takes quarters.

DIY suits teams that already have outbound expertise in-house. For everyone else, it moves the cost from the invoice to the calendar.

Option 4: Specialist outsourcing

A specialist partner runs done-for-you outreach for B2B technology vendors, typically exec-level LinkedIn social selling. Good ones go live in two to three weeks, cost around £3K a month and write output targets into the contract.

What a specialist partner should provide

1. **No extra headcount.** Outreach runs from the LinkedIn profiles of your senior sellers or executives. The partner handles the targeting, messaging, automation and engagement.
2. **Exec-level relevance.** Outreach is built around your ICP and account list, so buyers hear from a credible peer, not a junior SDR or an anonymous inbox.
3. **Conversations handed to your rep.** Positive responses and sales-ready opportunities go straight to your rep, with full visibility of every conversation.
4. **Benchmarks from comparable campaigns.** A partner that has run many campaigns in your sector knows what good looks like from week one.

What to expect in the contract

- A minimum number of positive conversations each month
- A target for sales-ready opportunities each month
- Activity running every week, with full visibility of conversations
- A break clause at six months if targets are missed

Typical Year-1 cost: around £36K (about £3K a month). No recruiter fee, no employer NI, no tool stack, no ramp, no backfill.

Ask any partner for anonymised results from comparable campaigns before you sign.

How the options compare

A specialist partner is the fastest to launch, the lowest Year-1 cost of the options with a dedicated team, and the only one where the provider carries the risk of missing targets.

	In-house SDR	Generic agency	DIY tools	Specialist partner
Time to launch	3–6 months	4–6 weeks	Weeks of setup	2–3 weeks
Channels	Usually one	Often email-only	Whatever you run	LinkedIn exec-level social selling
Management	You hire, coach and manage	Low visibility	100% on your team	Done for you
Year-1 cost	£85K–£135K fully loaded	£40K–£100K	£30K–£60K (tools + 0.5 FTE)	~£36K
Output	8–10 meetings/month once ramped	Varies, often unqualified	Depends on your team's time	Contracted targets, e.g. 6+ conversations and ~1 opportunity a month
Key risk	Ramp and turnover	Quality varies	Execution falls on you	Low: exit at 6 months if targets missed

ROI: what each pound buys in Year 1

In Year 1, a specialist partner at around £3K a month can deliver roughly 69 exec-level conversations for about £36K, around £520 each, with your downside capped at about £18K by a six-month exit.

The fair comparison is not monthly fee against salary. It is what you get in the first 12 months, and how much you have committed before you know it works.

Year 1	In-house SDR	Specialist partner
Total cost	£85K–£135K	~£36K
First output	Month 3–4 (hire, then ramp)	Week 2–3
Months at full output	~7	~11.5
Output	~55–70 meetings	69+ conversations, ~12 sales-ready opportunities
Cost per unit	£1,200–£2,450 per meeting	~£520 per conversation, ~£3,000 per opportunity
Cash committed before results are proven	£30K–£55K (fee + salary through ramp)	~£18K maximum (6-month exit)

In-house model: 45–60 day hire, 3-month ramp at half output, then 8 meetings a month (Bridge Group median quota of 10, adjusted for 60% at quota). Specialist figures are illustrative: about £3K a month, with contracted minimums of 6 positive conversations and 1 sales-ready opportunity a month.

Read the units carefully. An SDR meeting is usually a first, discovery-stage meeting. A specialist's sales-ready opportunity sits further down the funnel, and its positive conversations are with senior buyers, started from your own executives' profiles. Like-for-like, the specialist wins on cost per conversation and on how much capital is exposed.

The compounding effect. A campaign that is live in week two produces roughly four extra months of pipeline in Year 1 versus a new hire. At a typical enterprise ACV, one extra closed deal from those months pays for the service several times over.

Ask any partner for its typical, not just guaranteed, monthly output on comparable campaigns.

Efficiency and risk

Outsourcing to a specialist turns pipeline generation from a fixed, slow, risky investment into a variable, fast, accountable one.

Efficiency

- **Speed to pipeline.** Two weeks to live versus 4–6 months to a productive hire. In a quarter-driven business, that is a full quarter of pipeline recovered.
- **No management overhead.** Your sales leaders sell. They do not recruit, coach, write sequences or fix data.
- **Benchmarks from day one.** A specialist running many campaigns knows what good looks like and adjusts faster than a single team learning alone.
- **Scale up or down.** Add capacity for a new territory or product launch, or reduce it, without redundancy costs.

Risk transferred

Risk	Who carries it: in-house	Who carries it: specialist partner
A bad hire or under-performer	You (4 in 10 SDRs miss quota)	The partner (output targets)
Attrition and backfill	You (tenure under 2 years)	The partner
Tool, data and deliverability failures	You	The partner
LinkedIn account management	You	The partner (managed safely)
Results not arriving	You, after 6+ months of cost	The partner: you can exit at 6 months

When building in-house makes sense

In-house SDR teams can win on unit cost at scale, but only once a company has proven its outbound motion and can hold tenure past ramp.

Analyses suggest in-house costs can fall below agency spend at around six reps plus a manager, provided reps stay past ramp ([DevCommX](#)). Building makes sense when:

- You already know your ICP, messaging and conversion rates
- You have a sales development leader to hire, coach and retain the team
- You can absorb 6+ months of cost before the team pays back

The hybrid path. Many vendors use a specialist partner first to prove the market, messaging and conversion rates, then build in-house on that playbook. Others keep a specialist partner running executive outreach while an internal team covers volume. Either way, specialist outsourcing de-risks the decision to build.

Conclusion

For B2B technology vendors that need qualified pipeline this year, specialist outsourcing is the highest-ROI, most efficient and lowest-risk option.

- **ROI:** ~£36K for 69+ exec-level conversations and ~12 sales-ready opportunities, against £85K–£135K for a new SDR.
- **Efficiency:** live in two weeks, with no hiring, ramp or management load.
- **Risk:** output targets in the contract and a six-month exit, so the provider carries the risk of under-delivery.

Next step: model your own Year-1 numbers against an in-house hire using your ACV and targets, then shortlist partners against the criteria in Option 4.

About Trueleads Trueleads runs TrueDemand, a done-for-you LinkedIn social selling service for B2B technology vendors, built on six years of campaigns for tech vendors. - Live in two weeks, run from your own executives' LinkedIn profiles - At least 5 TrueReplies (positive conversations) and around 1 TrueSQL (sales-ready opportunity) a month - £995 a month, with a break clause at six months if targets are missed - Every conversation visible to you and handed straight to your rep **Next step:** book a 30-minute pipeline review with Trueleads. We will model your Year-1 numbers against an in-house hire using your own ACV and targets. Reply to tom@trueleads.co or visit [\[trueleads.com\]\(https://trueleads.com\)](https://trueleads.com).

Sources

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