

Call it a Comeback:

**HOW BUSINESS LEADERS ARE
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS IN 2024**

Business leaders are eager to leave 2023 behind. In the wake of a turbulent year defined by a scaled-back final quarter and notable employee unrest across various industries, it's time to proactively reshape the narrative as we settle into the new year.

Last year's challenges, though formidable, have sparked a wave of optimism headed into 2024 as resilient business leaders sharpen their strategies — or else pivot to entirely new tactics — in preparation to navigate the uncertainties ahead.

As we turn the page on the past and look toward the future, Kickstand surveyed over 600 business leaders to shed light on the budgeting trends and strategic outlooks that will define 2024.

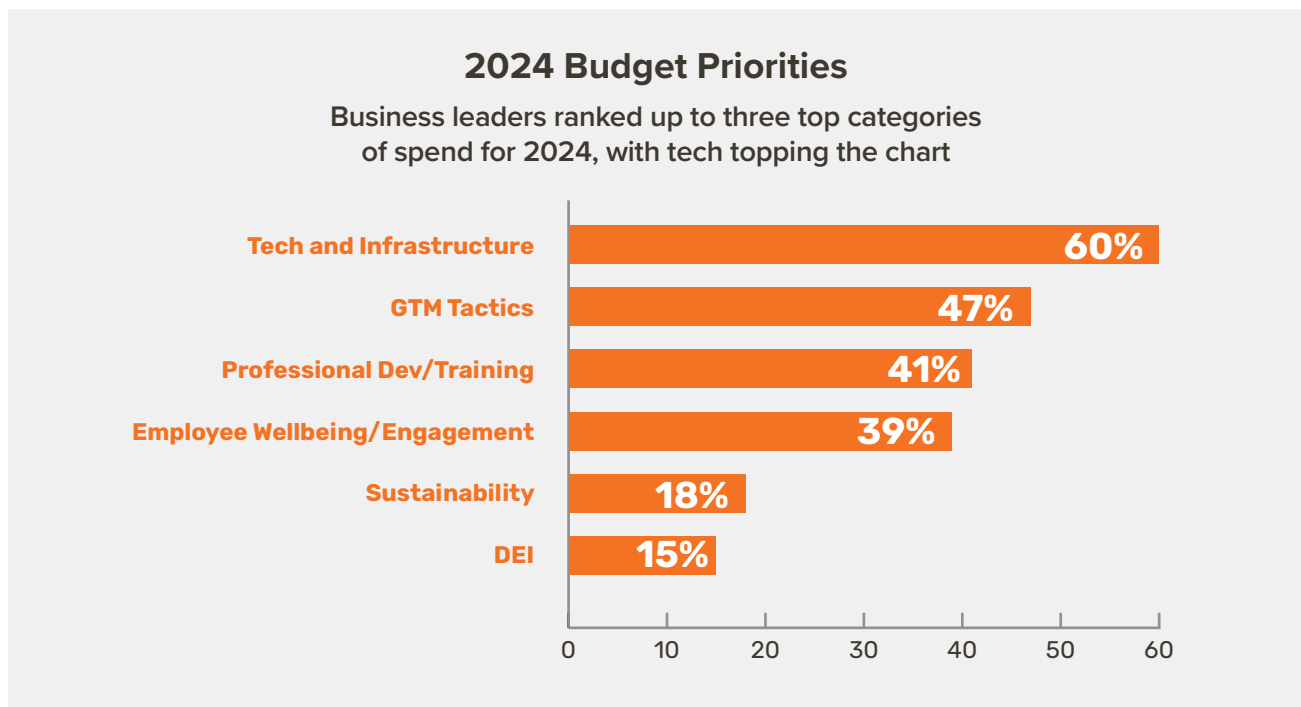
2024 Budget Trends: Prioritizing Growth and Efficiency

Kicking off 2024, leaders are balancing a sense of market optimism with continued challenges regarding predictability. While 36% happily reported a lack of budgetary strain, over a third (35%) admitted that traditional revenue-generating tactics were less effective in 2023 than in previous years.

This led budget owners to hedge their optimism by creating conservative and flexible models that acknowledge a certain level of unpredictability. In fact, nearly half (46%) of respondents with a hand in budget planning agreed that planning for 2024 was more difficult than it was for 2023, and over a third (36%) say it was even harder than it was for 2021 — which as we all no doubt recall, was the very definition of “unprecedented times.”

But of course, it’s not just the unpredictability factor. Financial struggles have led many companies to operate ultra-conservatively, and 62% of those who are responsible for budget planning say that budgets are tight headed into 2024.

So with many organizations staring down a scarcity of resources, how are leaders prioritizing spend? When budget planners were asked to select their three biggest priorities, there were clear winners, as well as some glaring areas of deprioritization.



A Closer Look at Top Investment Priorities

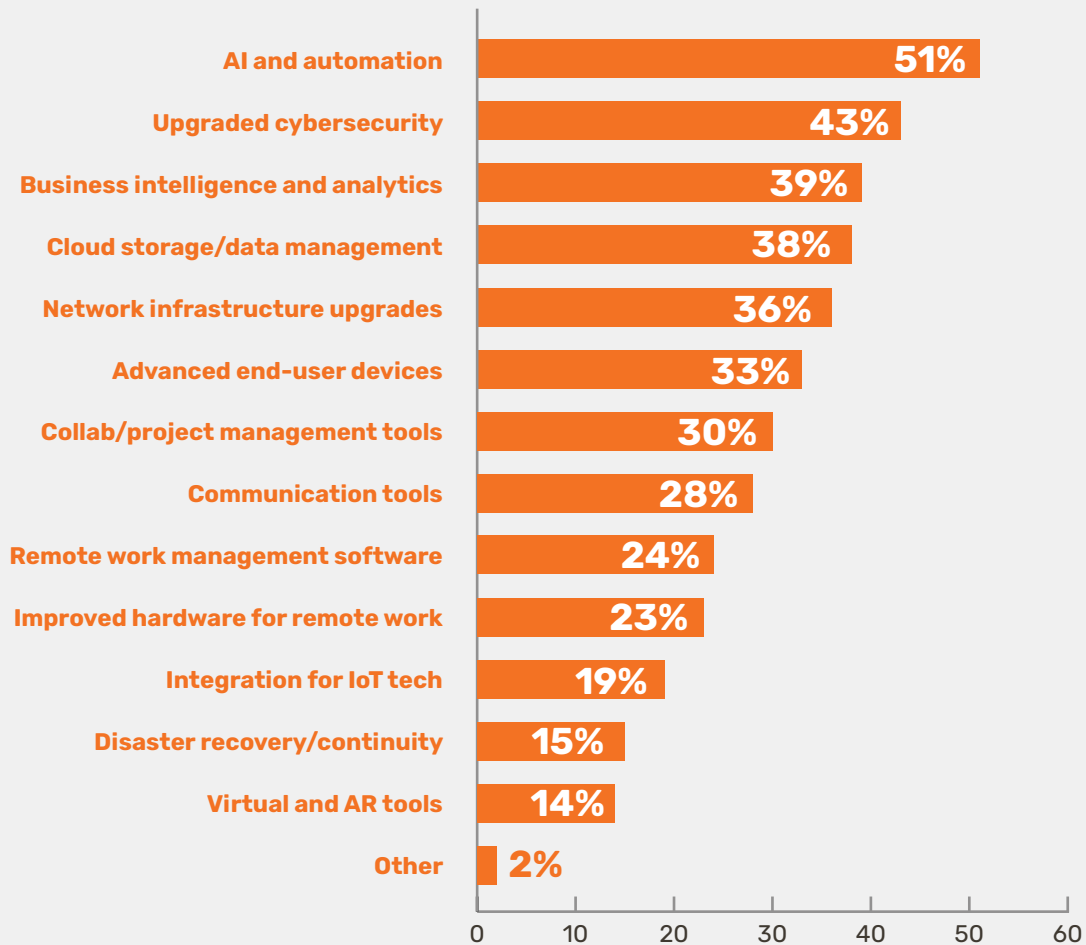
Technology Investments in 2024: Leading the Charge in Corporate Strategy

Technology and infrastructure investments dominated 2024 budgeting priorities, emerging 28% more favored than the next highest category and indicating that companies are focusing heavily on improving efficiency to stay competitive in a tech-driven economy.

Seventy-six percent of those who selected technology as an investment priority said that they will spend more on this category than they did last year, with particular focus on AI and automation:

Tech + Infrastructure 2024 Budget Allocation

Business leaders investing in tech this year detailed their top areas of spend, with a strong lean towards AI



It was probably inevitable that AI and automation would emerge as a 2024 budgeting darling — particularly among younger business leaders from the “Gen Z” cohort, who were 24% more likely than average to name this as a priority investment for the year, as well as those employed in the Manufacturing sector, who were 22% more likely than average to say the same.

Other investment priorities reveal an emphasis on data-driven decision making, business resilience, and perhaps provoked by a rise in publicized attacks, increased cybersecurity — a particular concern for those employed in the Healthcare/Pharmaceutical sector, who were 49% more likely than average to name this as a budget allocation for 2024.

Revitalizing GTM Strategies: Marketing and Sales Focus for 2024

The emphasis on investment in marketing, sales, and customer success (GTM) tactics is a welcome sight after the slashed budgets and “do more with less” mentality of 2023. Business leaders’ investment plans for 2024 seem to indicate a pivot away from survival mentality and back toward strategic investments in the core pillars of business growth. Of those who said they’ll prioritize GTM tactics in 2024:



71%

will invest in Marketing



65%

will invest in Sales



52%

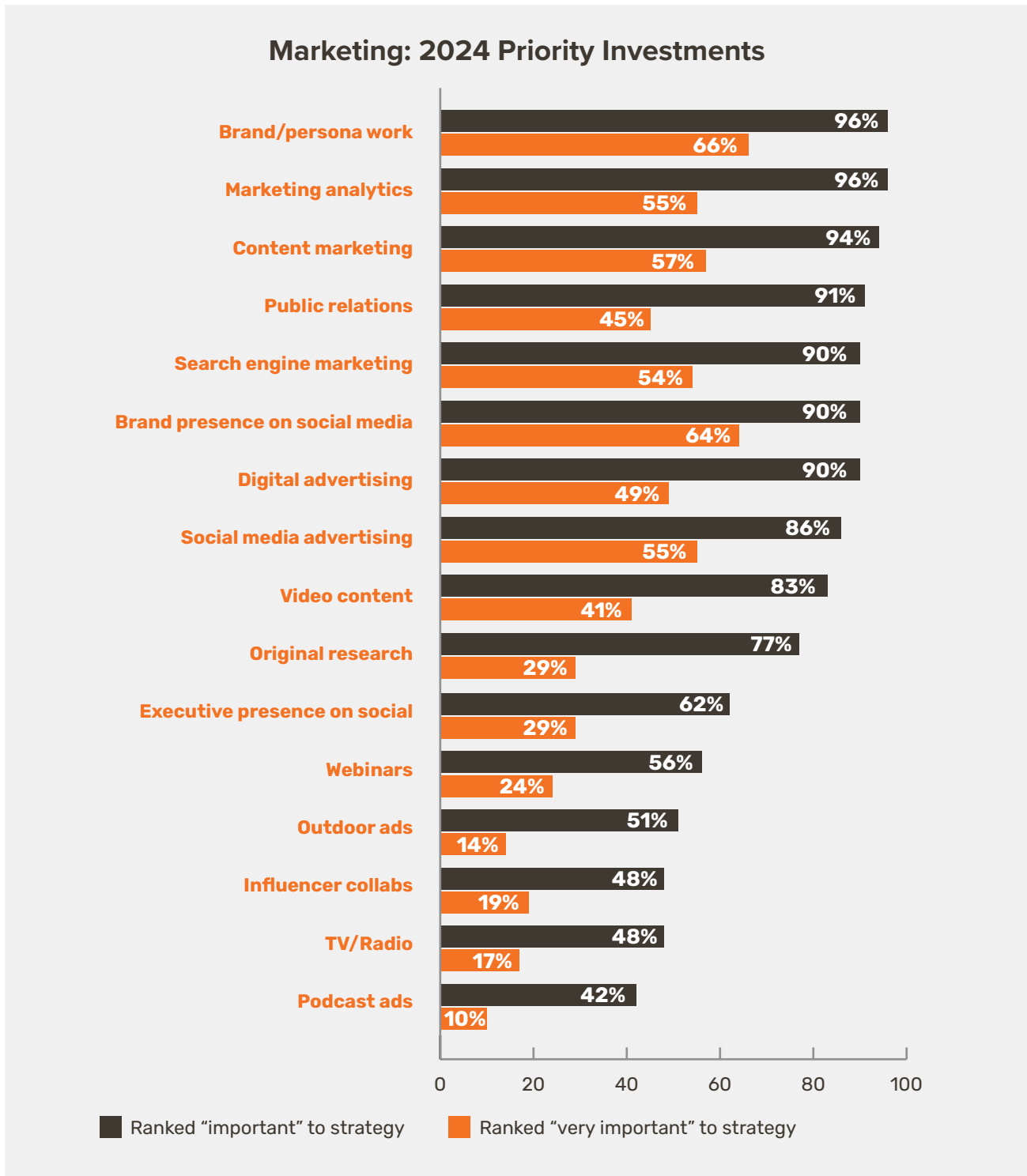
will invest in Customer Success

With 67% of those who budgeted for GTM tactics anticipating their spend to increase over last year’s — and only 4% expecting it to decrease — it’s clear that there are big plans for going to market this year. In executing these GTM strategies, companies are weighing the benefits of internal hires against external agency expertise. While the majority (52%) prefer building internal teams, nearly a third (32%) are opting for a hybrid approach, blending in-house talent with external agency strengths and suggesting a quest for both control and specialized expertise.

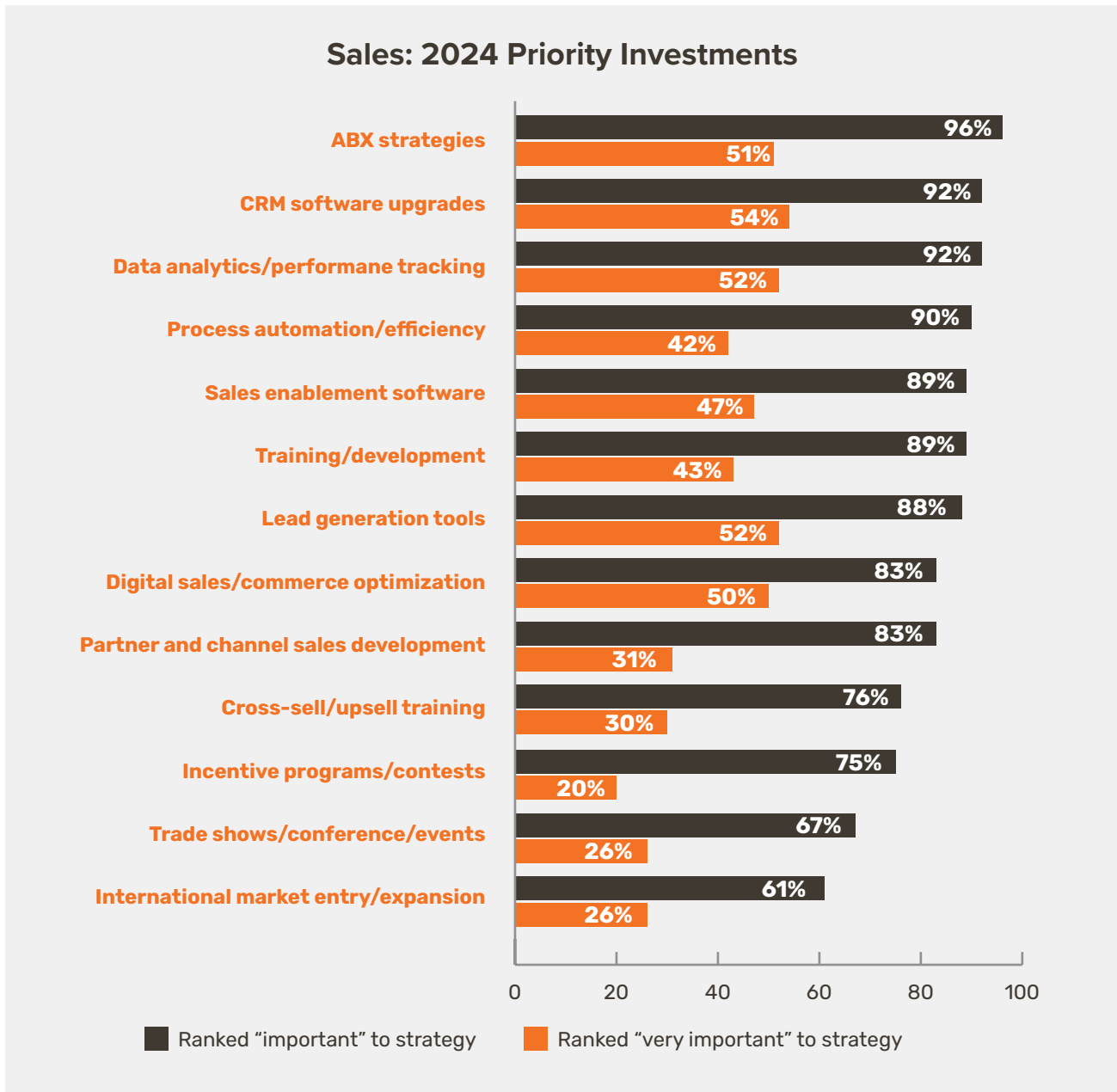
The majority (71%) of those with intentions to invest in their GTM function this year will include marketing in the budget, potentially suggesting a rebound strategy after the budget cuts of last year. This renewed focus could stem from the need to rebuild brand presence and adapt to evolving trends, in an attempt to compensate for lost ground in 2023 and reestablish or expand market share.



Looking closer at specific areas of investment and their importance to overall strategy, there is massive emphasis on brand work and analytics tools, followed closely by content marketing and public relations. This breakdown suggests the importance of data-driven brand identity and multichannel storytelling to overall 2024 marketing strategy.



Sales came in as the second highest GTM priority among respondents planning to invest (65%), suggesting a continued focus on direct revenue generation. A closer look at specific allocation priorities shows that investment in sales will pivot around revamping traditional approaches this year, with a whopping 96% of sales-minded respondents expressing the importance of account based sales and marketing (ABX) tactics to their strategies. CRM software upgrades were also extremely high on the list, reflecting a conscious shift toward personalized, data-driven sales experiences. Also of obvious importance to sales strategy for this year are improvements to efficiency, with a vast majority of those who will invest in sales citing the importance of sales data analytics (92%), automation (90%), and enablement (89%) to their plans.



The fact that more than half of those who will allocate budget to their GTM function this year intend to funnel dollars toward all three areas — marketing, sales, and customer success — indicates a balanced approach to growth, and the importance of addressing customer retention as well as acquisition. Notably, for those investing in customer success this year (52%), almost no area was deemed “unimportant:”



Overall, responses indicate that businesses are looking to create a more robust, customer-centric foundation for growth, balancing immediate revenue generation with long-term customer relationship building. The increasing alignment between marketing, sales, and customer success implied within this data set is likely to forge stronger connections with markets and customers.

Moving into the new year, these GTM strategy investments paint a hopeful picture of businesses that are more adaptable, more customer-focused, and more data-savvy. Companies are gearing up not only to put the struggles of 2023 in the rearview but to redefine their relationships with customers and with the market at large.



DEI and Sustainability in 2024: Understanding Lower Investment Priorities

The breakdown of 2024 budget priorities reflects a pragmatic approach to economic pressures, in which immediate business growth and operational efficiency take precedence. However, the lower allocations for DEI (15%) and sustainability (18%) don't diminish their importance; these areas are still key to long-term business success, not to mention ethical operations.

For those prioritizing DEI investment in 2024, the focus is on diversity recruitment (73%) and inclusive leadership training (65%), in recognition of a diverse workforce as a competitive advantage.

And for those who will invest in sustainability and/or environmental initiatives, the most common investment by far was in eco-friendly office supplies and materials (71%), which was 42% more likely to be chosen than the next closest runner up, waste reduction programs (50%). These numbers suggest a nascent shift toward environmentally responsible business practices — but one that's likely to trend upward rather than down.

This is because a significant variance is observed in the attitudes of young business leaders, particularly those from the "Gen Z" cohort. These leaders were considerably more inclined toward prioritizing DEI (93% more likely), but on environmental issues, they're even more passionate. In fact, this generation of leaders was a whopping 139% more likely to say they'll prioritize sustainability in their 2024 budget.

Within the Technology/Software industry, a sector often at the forefront of adopting progressive policies, there was also a 44% higher likelihood of prioritizing sustainability initiatives, hinting at a potential sector-led movement toward consideration of environmental impact in business strategies.

So while immediate business needs are still dominating financial allocations this year, there are clear indicators of an undercurrent shift toward greater emphasis on social and environmental responsibility, driven by emerging generational values as well as industry trends.

As Gen Z leaders gain more influence and seniority, we can expect these areas to gain more prominence — shaping the corporate agenda toward more inclusive and conscious practices.

Top DEI investment priorities:



73%
diversity
recruitment

Top Sustainability investment priorities:



71%
eco-friendly office
supplies and materials

Forecasting 2024: Business Leaders' Predictions for the Year

As we navigate past the challenges of 2023 and strategize for the future, this data reveals a blend of optimism and pragmatism headed into 2024. Business leaders aren't just hoping for a better year; they're actively crafting strategies to ensure one.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said their companies plan to scale current strategies to improve revenue generation in 2024, but they aren't just relying on what they've tried in the past. On the contrary, 76% are looking to implement new strategies. The readiness to both iterate and innovate shows a dynamic approach to business planning, with equal emphasis on learning from the past and adapting to the future.

When it comes to their predictions for the year ahead, there's a mix of optimism and caution among business leaders:



Optimistic Outlook:

A hopeful 61% believe that 2024 will usher in improved financial performance and growth opportunities



Cautious Pessimism: On the other hand, 12% predict a more challenging year than 2023, indicating that some sectors or companies might be bracing for continued or new challenges — namely those in Manufacturing, who were 42% more likely than average to predict a rocky year ahead



Steady On:

Meanwhile, 27% expect 2024 to more or less mirror 2023

These predictions for 2024 reveal a landscape that is cautiously optimistic but seemingly prepared for varying scenarios. Companies are actively working towards growth, whether by refining their existing strategies or by boldly implementing new ones, and most seem confident they'll see results within the year. The diverse expectations reflect the complex economic environment we're operating in, but it's easy to spot the spirit of adaptability in these numbers.

Conclusion

2023 introduced plenty of new challenges and opportunities for business leaders to tackle. Navigating an uncertain economic climate and the sudden proliferation of AI-powered tools was anything but boring, and as we settle into the new year we're poised to apply the lessons we've learned and tailor our strategies accordingly.

There's no crystal ball we can turn to for insights on what 2024 has in store (AI isn't that advanced - yet!). But deliberate and savvy investments in the proper technology, relationship-building initiatives, and other priorities will help leaders start the year on the right foot.

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Kickstand

ABOUT KICKSTAND

Kickstand is a global marketing agency specializing in support of high-growth technology brands. Offering a scientific approach to PR and services that include media and analyst relations, research, content, crisis communications, and influencer marketing, Kickstand helps build well-defended market leaders in some of today's most innovative industries. For more information about our approach and how we help brands scale and successfully exit, visit www.meetkickstand.com

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Kickstand conducted an online survey of 608 individuals between December 2nd and December 14th 2023, at 95% confidence with +/- 4% margin of error. Respondents were restricted to US-based office workers employed full-time in management level or higher positions. Response representation ranged across 48 of 50 states, excluding North Dakota and Wyoming, and the highest volume of responses by industry came from Technology and Software (19.4%), Finance and Banking (13.7%), and Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals (9.1%).

