SURVEY RESULTS

Marketing Relationship Survey

The delivery gap

Alookat what clients say drives agency breakups, what agencies see, and where both sides can improve the partnership.

2025

Research by Setup® in partnership with The CMO Institute

Delivery and value top the list

Theclearest differenceinthiseditionishowclientsandagenciesexplainwhya relationship ends.

61%
Clients cited dissatisfaction with delivery

61%
Clients cited dissatisfaction with value

75%
Agencies cited client budgetcuts

Both sides see different warning signs

Clientsmostoften pointed to delivery andvalue.Agency respondents most often pointed to budget cuts and changes in client leadership.

Many clients expect to stay

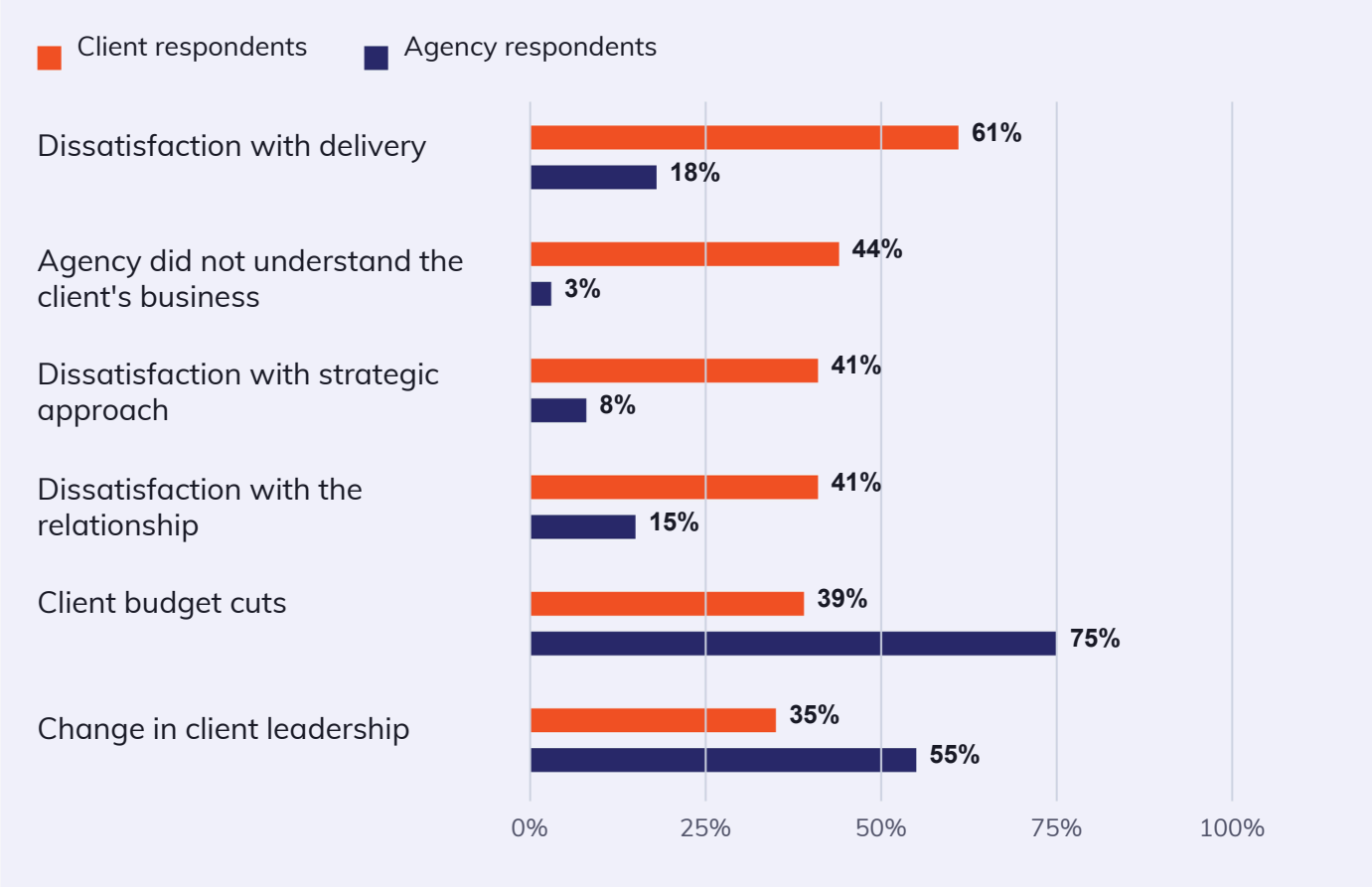
Seventy-two percent of clientrespondents said they were unlikely to switch agencies within six months. Eighty-three percent said they would work with their agency again if they changed roles or companies.

Specialist fit matters

Clients showedinterest inspecialist partners. Web and mobile design and development led the published list of services clients hired agencies to provide.

Clients and agencies see different reasons for breakups

Selected reasonsclientsgaveforendingagencyrelationshipsandreasonsagencies believed clientsleft.



Source: Setup 2025 published results. Percentages represent selections within each respondent group. The chart shows reasons with figures published for both groups.

Clients cited delivery 43 percentage points more often than agencies did. Agencies cited budget cuts 36 points more often. Value tied for first among clients at 61%.

Clients see value in staying and in hiring specialists

The retention and roster questions capture different decisions clients face about their agency relationships.

72%
Clients unlikelytoswitch within sixmonths

83%
Clientswould workwith theiragency again

26%
Clientsagreed generalists arebetterthan specialists

Retention

Awillingnessto stay gives partners a chance to discuss where delivery, strategy or value could improve.

A relationship review can identify the specific expectations and trade-offs that matter to the client.

Roster strategy

Seventy percentof clients disagreed that one generalist made more sense than several specialists.

Evaluate the capabilities a partner will own and how that work will fit with the rest of the roster.

Agency selection takes work

Clients commonly considered several agencies and reported that the process took time.

96%
Clients considered more than oneagency

78%
Clientsfoundagency selection time-consuming

53%
Clients struggledtoget C-suite buy-in

Most-hired services

1. Weband mobile designand development
2. Branding and identity
3. Media planning and buying
4. Content creation and video
5. Social media
6. Direct marketing, email and CRM

What to evaluate

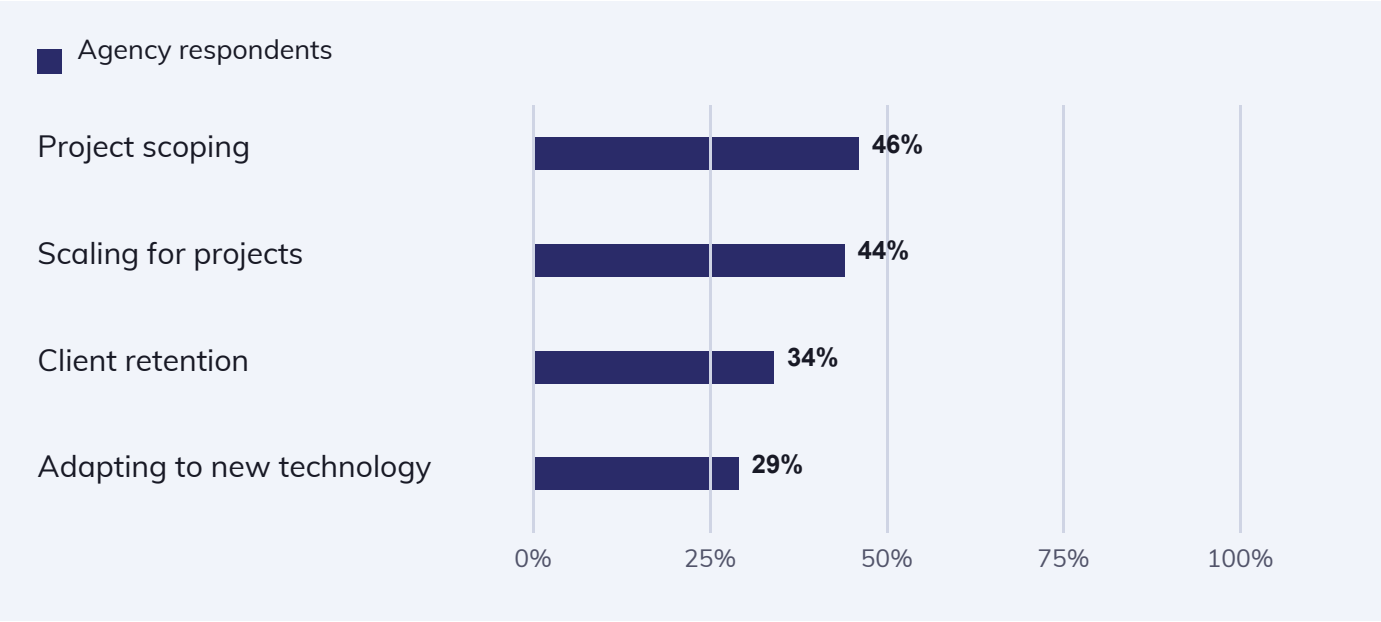
Use a working sessionto see how the

agency listens, challenges assumptions and collaborates.

Look for proof of the capabilities the brief calls for. Chemistry and professionalism both came through in client responses.

Scoping and scaling were the top agency challenges

Agency respondents most frequently pointed to two of the decisions that shape how work gets delivered.



Source: Setup 2025 published results. Percentages reflect agency respondents' selections for the challenge question.

Agree on deliverables, staffing, approvals and a process for scope changes at kickoff. Those are concrete ways to address the two most common challenges.

Referrals earn trust and AI is widely used

95%
Agencies rated referrals effective

95%
Agenciesreportedusing AI

88%
Clientsreportedusing AI

How partners find each other

Clients expressed satisfaction with word of mouth (82%), outside referrals (80%) and internet search (70%).

Agencies rated referrals (95%) and partnerships (53%) as effective ways to find clients.

How marketers use AI

Agency applicationsincludedresearch, operational efficiency, AI integration and idea generation.

Client applications included content, strategy, automation and research.

What both sides can do

Usethesepromptsinthenextpartnershipreview,kickofforselection process.

For brands

Share thebusiness goal, decision process and budget range at the start.

Explain early where delivery or value is falling short and give the agency examples.

In a search, test the team's working style alongside its capabilities.

For agencies

Agree onwhat delivery and value mean for this client. Report progress against those measures.

Review scope, staffing and timing before taking on new work.

Bring proactive ideas grounded in the client's business and explain the expected outcome.

A question for your next review

Whereareweemeetingtheoriginalbrief,and where has our definition of success changed?

About the 2025 survey

Setup conductedthis edition in partnership withThe CMOInstitute.

~100

Valid responses as describedby Setup

57% Client respondents

43%

Agency respondents

Client roles	Ninety-one percent of client respondents said they were involved in agency selection.
How to read	The report uses the named respondent group for each question. Respondents could cite several reasons for an agency breakup.
Comparisons	Treat the percentages as descriptive of the people who responded. Sample composition and question wording matter when reading across editions.
Source	This archive edition summarizes the findings Setup published for the 2025 survey.

Read Setup's published 2025 findings ›