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The Marketer and the Broadband Service Provider: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

A custom Heavy Reading survey report produced for Calix



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1. INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

The telecom landscape continues to acclimatize itself to the adoption of cloud technologies. Accordingly, broadband service providers (BSPs) are now confronting the reality that the fusion of cloud platforms with agile software is fueling the creation of a digital services landscape.

The endgame of the digital thrust is to create a services fabric in which content can be supported on any network by any subscriber. This journey will have a profound impact on the sales and marketing strategies of BSPs of all sizes, as well as on their subscribers who consume the services.

To understand these implications for BSPs serving 100,000 or fewer subscribers in the US and Canada, Heavy Reading, in collaboration with Calix, conducted an exclusive survey of C-level executives in the first half of 2022 who performed sales and marketing roles. The topics addressed included:

- Effect of changes in the competitive landscape on revenue generation
- Primary strategies to grow revenue base and respond to competitive threats
- The role and importance of digital marketing tools
- Use case marketing priorities
- Preferred marketing channels
- Marketing goals and challenges
- The importance of subscriber data

1.1 Executive key findings

- C-levels' lead marketing goal is simply to build the brand (25%). Additional goals are more tangible and include launching new products (19%) and acquiring new subscribers (18%).
- More than half of the C-levels surveyed (55%) are "extremely confident" they will be able to achieve service differentiation in a changing competitive landscape. However, less than half are "extremely confident" in their ability to reduce customer churn (39%) and break into new markets and grow average revenue per user (ARPU) and market share (both 40%).
- 78% of C-levels expect they will integrate additional marketing tools over the next three years.
- More than seven out of 10 (72%) C-levels surveyed are focused on internal regional revenue growth strategies. The preferred internal market-facing strategy is to increase market share in an existing service area (34%). 25% are focused on diversifying the subscriber base within the region while 12% advocate upselling the existing subscriber base.
- Based on "extremely concerning" inputs, the competitors that C-levels are most concerned about are Tier 1 fixed service providers (34%), similar sized adjacent wireline service providers (31%), and webscale companies (30%).

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- Most C-levels believe that an effective competitive response hinges on partnerships. Of these, leading the way is the creation of new infrastructure partnerships with companies such as utilities (67%), followed by new partnerships to launch new services and break into new markets (both 57%).
 - Many C-levels believe that cloud marketing will be vital for driving subscriber growth. Leading the way is digital marketing (57%), followed by subscriber loyalty programs (45%) and social media marketing (40%). Heavy Reading views the fact that two of the three top priority responses are cloud-based as significant and further evidence that cloud-driven digital marketing has already established itself as a dominant marketing force.
 - C-levels' "top priority" marketing use cases include managed Wi-Fi (46%), home network cybersecurity and device security (both 45%), and professional home monitored security (42%). Rounding out the top five is social media monitoring (39%).
 - Although C-levels understand the value of social media channels, only 9% of C-level-led companies are pulling data from social media for creating targeted audience lists. Instead, they continue to rely upon traditional approaches such as utilizing actual bandwidth data (33%), as well as manual managed email lists (27%) and potential lead tracking (also 27%).

1.2 Methodology

This research report is based on a comprehensive online 25-question survey launched in the first half of 2022. Only C-level executives who worked for BSPs serving 100,000 or fewer subscribers in North America and *who performed sales and marketing roles* were allowed to take the survey.

These C-level respondents were invited to take the survey on the understanding of anonymity (i.e., that their names, job titles, and employers would not be made available to the study's sponsors or eventual readers) and that the results will only be presented in aggregate form. Respondents were not told who sponsored the study.

The C-levels who qualified were CEOs (33%), vice presidents (28%), general managers (21%), or directors (18%), split between the US (85%) and Canada (15%). The full demographic breakout of respondents is provided in the **Appendix – Survey demographics** section of this report.

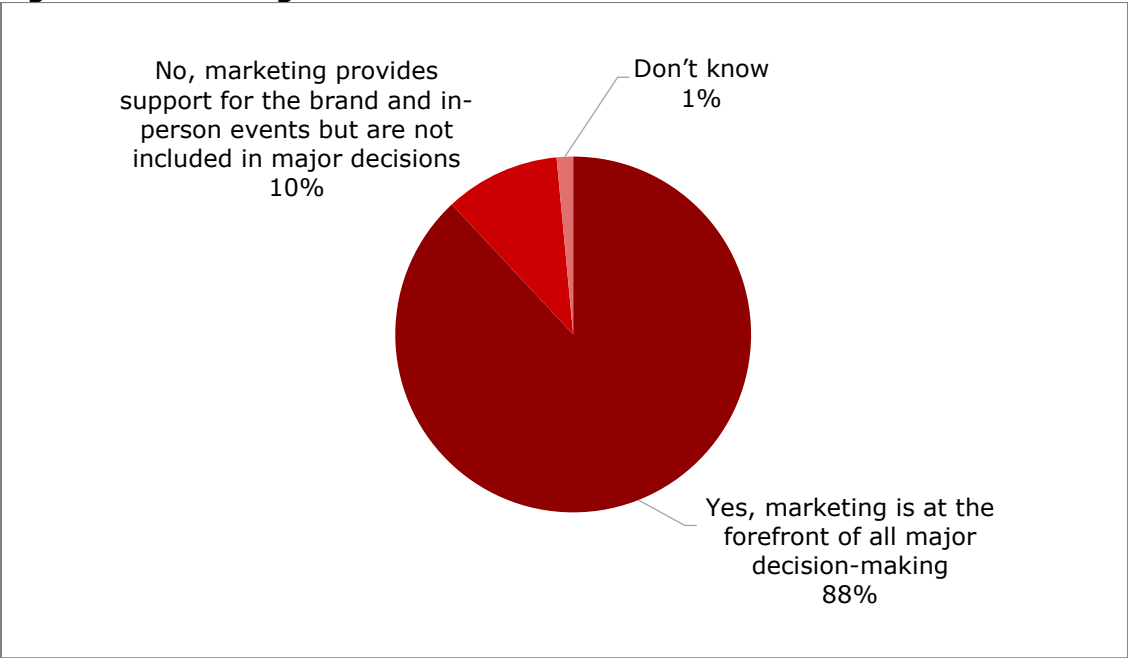
2. MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGIES

This survey focused on C-levels' sales and marketing strategies. Therefore, the logical point to commence the discussion was to assess to what extent these C-levels believed that their companies were "marketing-led" organizations.

Since many of the respondents are involved in leading and defining these marketing strategies, it is not surprising that nearly 9 out of 10 respondents (88%) believe that marketing is at the forefront of all major decisions, as shown in **Figure 1**.

Such a strong level of support can be viewed only as validating that a robust marketing strategy is crucial for competing in an increasingly crowded market.

Figure 1: Marketing led

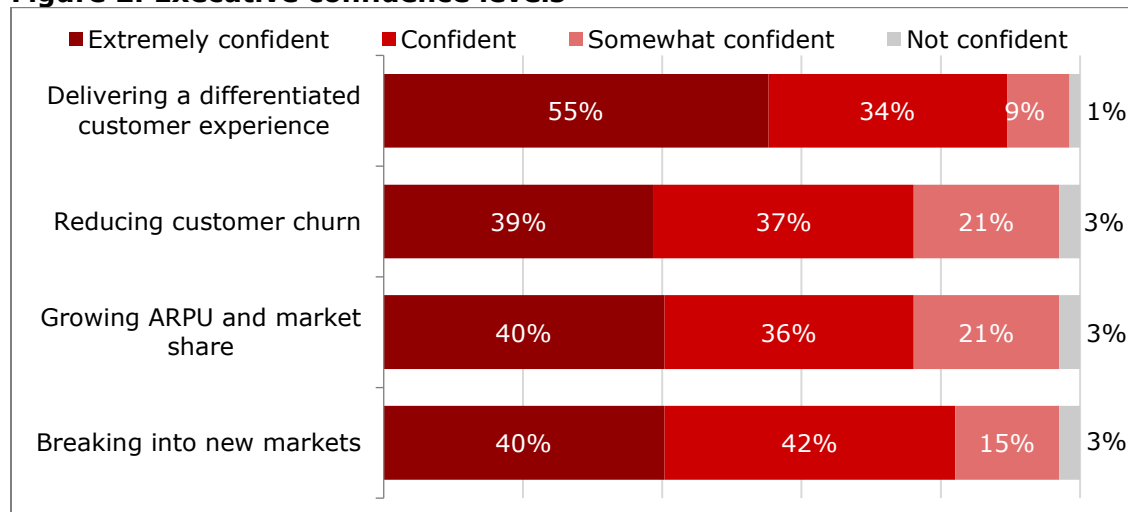


Question: Do you consider your organization to be a "marketing-led" organization? (n=67)
Source: Heavy Reading

One tangible and measurable outcome of an effective marketing strategy is the ability to achieve service differentiation. As **Figure 2** below illustrates, based on "extremely confident" input, more than half of these C-levels (55%) believe that they will be able to achieve this service differential goal.

Similarly, they are also "extremely confident" in their ability to reduce customer churn (39%), as well as break into new markets and grow ARPU and market share (both 40%).

Figure 2: Executive confidence levels



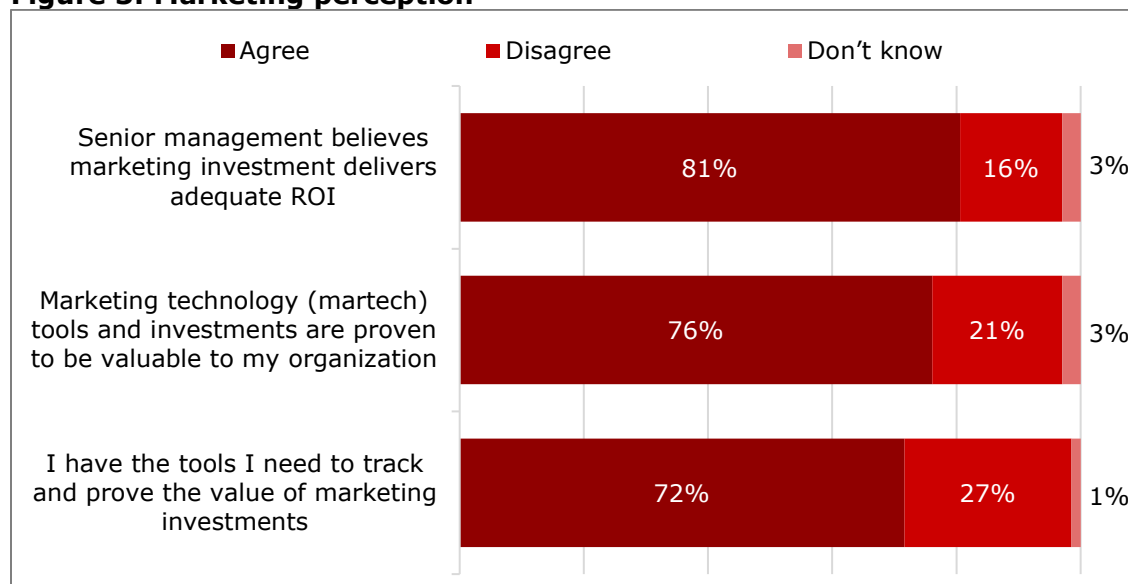
Question: How confident are you in your organization’s abilities in the following areas? (n=67)
 Source: Heavy Reading

Heavy Reading believes that one of the reasons why many of these executives are extremely confident in their ability to deliver a differentiated customer experience is that they feel they have the requisite tools and support to deliver this capability.

As **Figure 3** shows, 81% of the respondents who are senior themselves believe that marketing delivers adequate ROI. Furthermore, 72% have faith in the tools to track marketing investments.

Additionally, 76% feel that their marketing technology (martech) tools and investments have proven their value to their organization.

Figure 3: Marketing perception



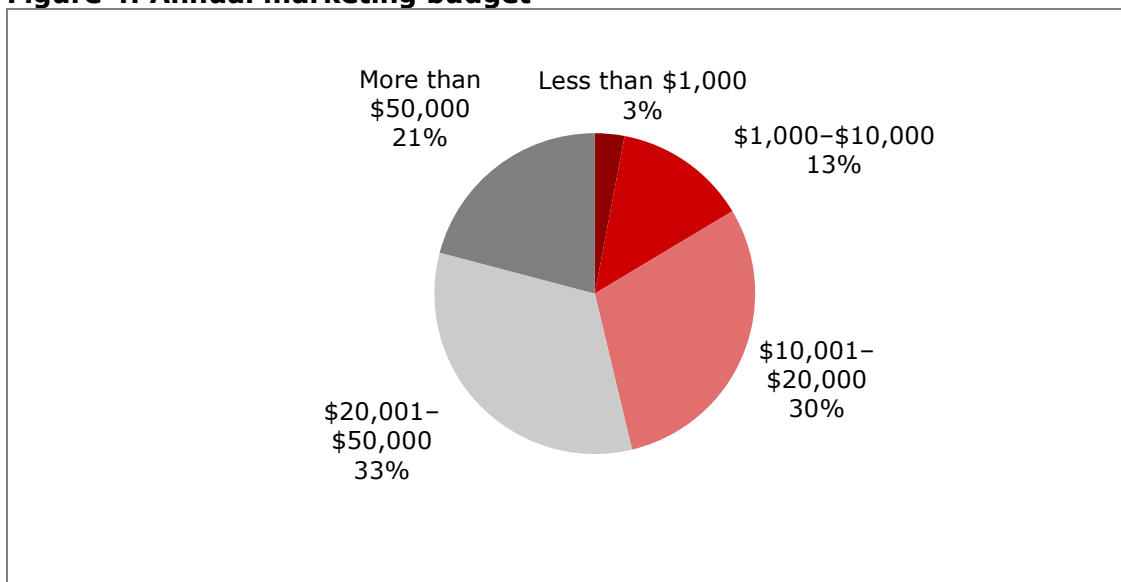
Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=67)
 Source: Heavy Reading

Understanding the levels that BSPs were funding their marketing strategies was also a key survey focus area. **Figure 4** captures four ranges that resonated with the survey respondents. Of these, the leading input was a spend of \$20,001–\$50,000 (33%), followed closely by \$10,001–\$20,000 (30%).

At opposite ends of the spectrum were the 21% of respondents who spent the most (more than \$50,000 [21%]) and those who spent the least (\$1,000–\$10,000 [13%] and less than \$1,000 [3%]).

Overall, this equates to more than 6 out of 10 spending \$10,000–\$50,000 per year. This range did not vary significantly regardless of the number of subscribers served, confirming that a baseline of \$10,000–\$50,000 per year is necessary to execute an effective annual marketing campaign.

Figure 4: Annual marketing budget



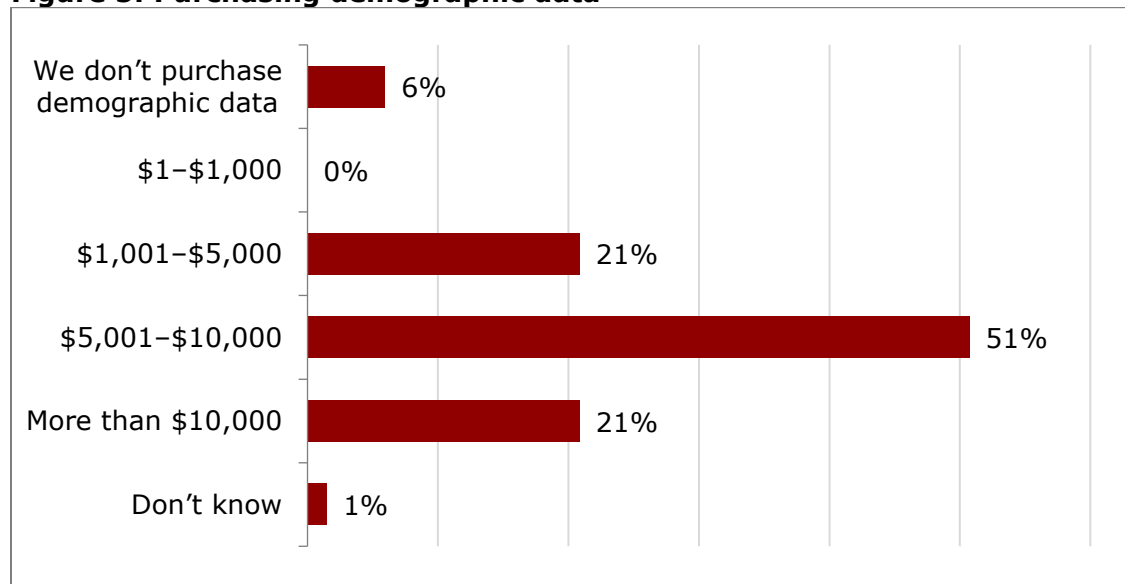
Question: What is your organization’s annual marketing budget? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

An additional budget-related topic of interest was the commitment to purchase third-party subscriber demographic data for annual marketing campaigns. Based on the data distribution captured in **Figure 5** below, the “sweet spot” is the \$5,001–\$10,000 range, with the remaining equally split between the lower and upper bands (\$1,001–\$5,000 and more than \$10,000 [both 21%]).

Since organizations typically estimate between \$10,000 and \$50,000 for their annual marketing budgets, this data confirms that the purchase of demographic data represents a significant portion of their total budget expense.

Figure 5: Purchasing demographic data



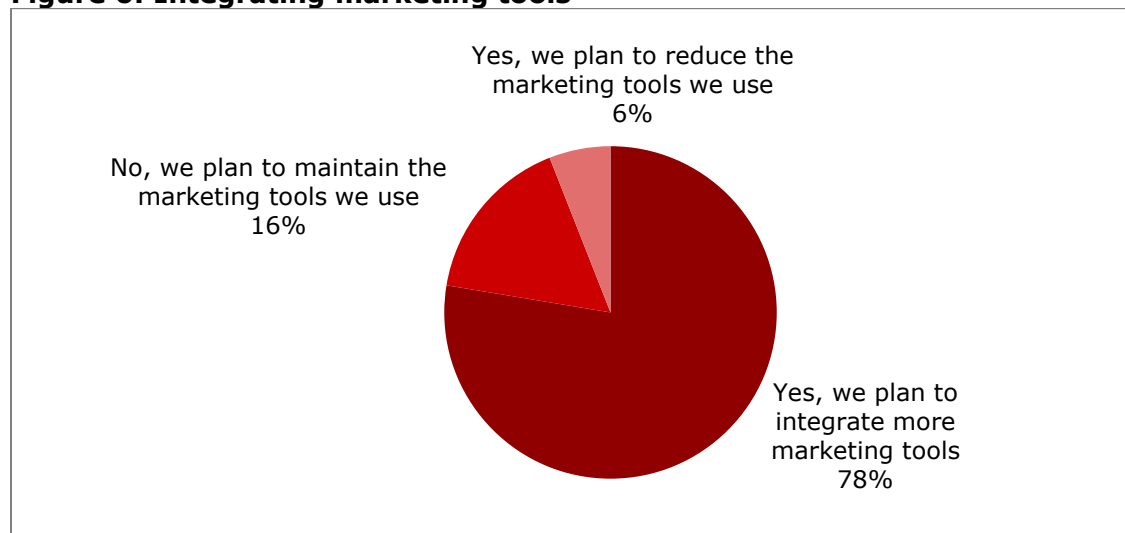
Question: What is your organization's approximate budget for purchasing third-party demographic data on an annual basis? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

In addition to investing in demographic data, BSPs may also have to revisit the marketing tools they utilize to analyze the effectiveness of specific marketing campaigns.

This theory is tested and validated in **Figure 6**. When asked if they expected their marketing tools to change over the next three years, a resounding 78% of C-levels indicated they plan to integrate more marketing tools. Heavy Reading considers this particularly strong response as further evidence of BSPs' commitment to integrating additional marketing tools in the near future.

Figure 6: Integrating marketing tools



Question: Over the next three years, do you expect the marketing tools you use to change? (n=67)

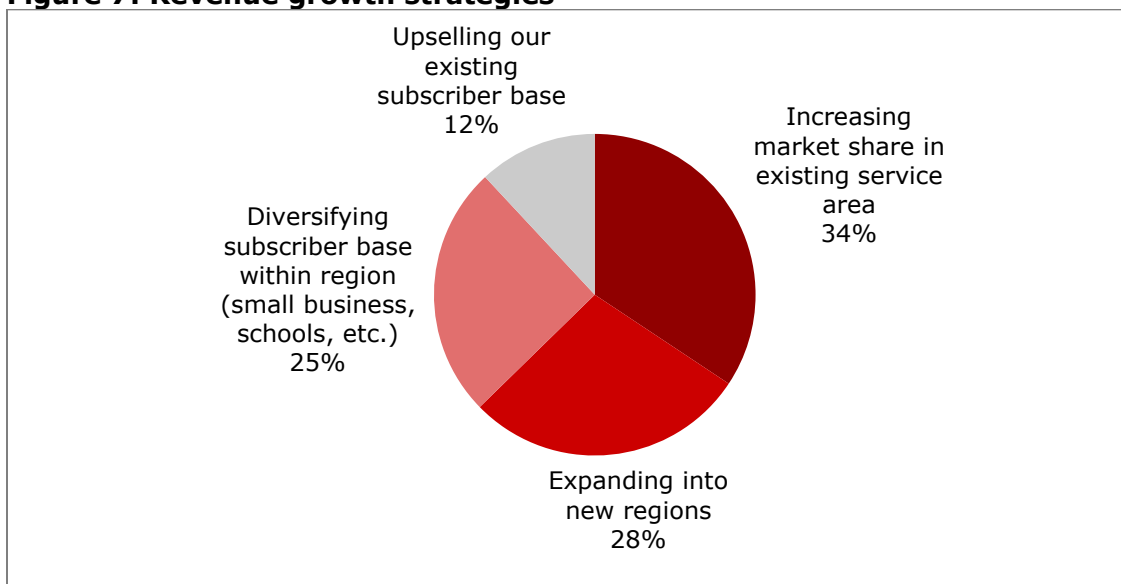
Source: Heavy Reading

The final component of an effective marketing campaign is the development of a strategy that translates marketing budgets into revenue growth. Essentially, the options range from upselling existing customers to taking customers and market share from competitors in existing markets or new markets.

More than 7 out of the 10 (72%) C-levels surveyed advocate a focus on internal regional revenue growth strategies. The breakdown of this 72% is illustrated in **Figure 7**. The preferred internal market-facing strategy is to increase market share in an existing service area (34%).

In third place was diversification of the subscriber base within the region (25%), which can be valuable to avoid creating a subscriber base that is too uniform and therefore susceptible to market and economic shifts. In fourth place was upselling the existing subscriber base (12%). The remaining 28% promoted expanding into new regions.

Figure 7: Revenue growth strategies



Question: What is your organization's primary strategy for growing its revenue base? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

3. EXECUTING THE STRATEGY

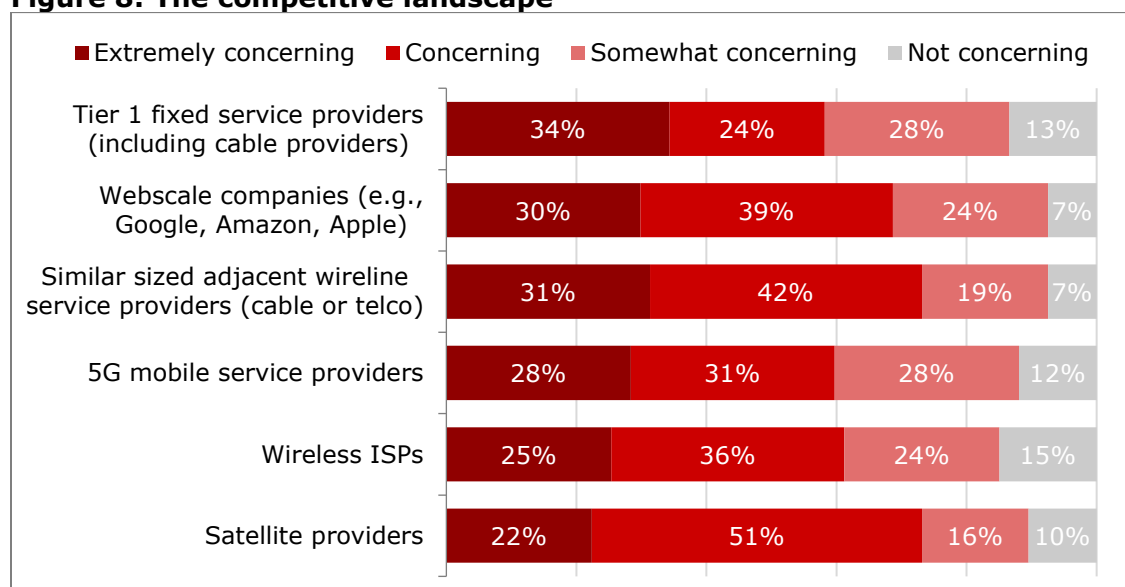
The competitive landscape has always been volatile, but the adoption of cloud-based services has unquestionably injected additional complexity into the market topography.

Consequently, BSPs need to evolve their competitive response strategies to maintain agility and market advantage. The first step in this threat management process is to rank the adversaries with the greatest potential to thwart revenue growth plans.

Based on “extremely concerning” inputs illustrated in **Figure 8**, the top three competitive threats are Tier 1 fixed service providers (34%), similar sized adjacent wireline service providers (31%), and webscale companies (30%). Rounding out the bottom three are 5G mobile service providers (28%), wireless ISPs (25%), and satellite providers (22%).

While the competitive landscape can vary significantly on a regional basis, the higher ranking of Tier 1 and webscale companies was anticipated given their aggressive marketing plans and service delivery strategies.

Figure 8: The competitive landscape



Question: How concerning are the following types of competitors regarding your organization’s ability to grow its revenue base? (n=67)

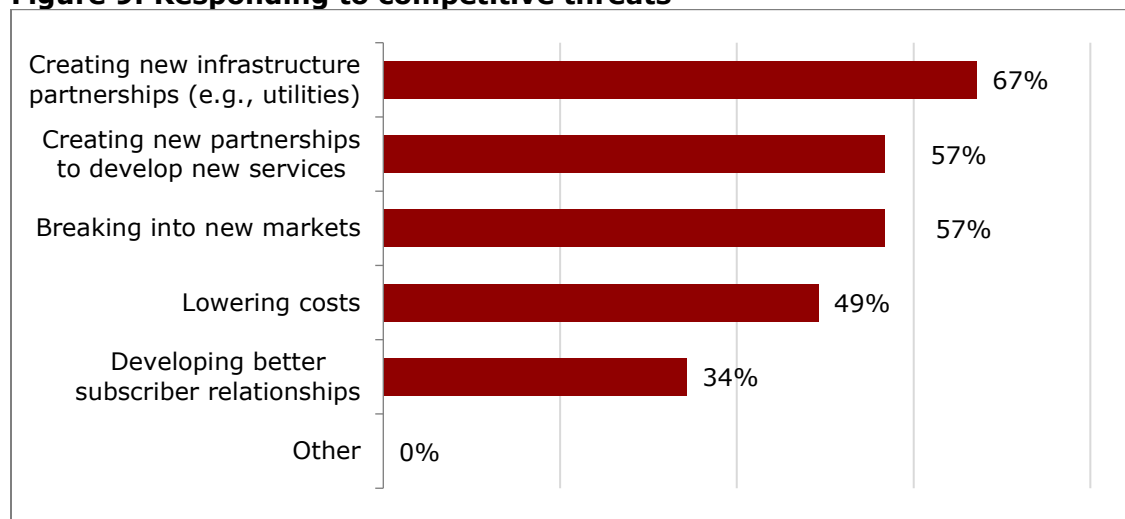
Source: Heavy Reading

Responding to competitive threats often requires new tactics.

Figure 9 below confirms C-levels’ belief that an effective competitive response hinges on adopting new approaches. Of these, leading the way is the creation of new infrastructure partnerships with companies such as utilities (67%), then new partnerships for new services and breaking into a new market (both 57%).

The strong level of support for partnerships makes sense, given that cloud adoption is driving ecosystem innovation and partnerships can represent a “win-win” for smaller BSPs in both a revenue growth and cost reduction context.

Figure 9: Responding to competitive threats



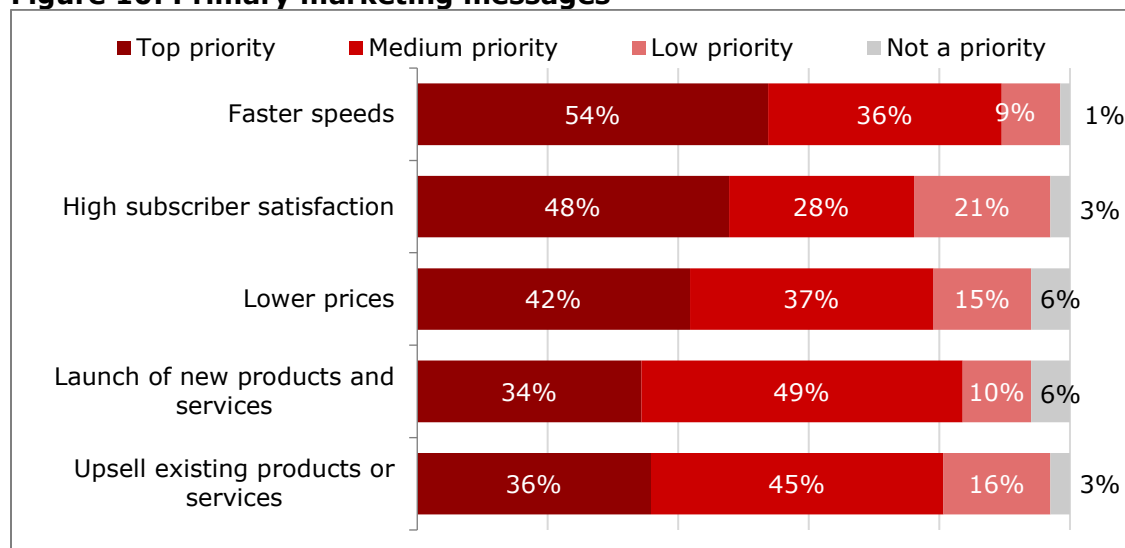
Question: How is your company responding to competitive threats? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

In addition to navigating the competitive landscape, BSPs must also continually hone their marketing messages to attract and recruit new subscribers. As **Figure 10** illustrates, based on “top priority” responses, the C-levels are following a pragmatic marketing message strategy centered on faster speeds (54%), higher subscriber satisfaction (48%), and lower prices (42%).

This is judicious given that many of their competitors are also focusing on network speed to enhance the quality of experience. The third-place ranking of lower prices (42%) reinforces that pricing remains a foundational event of any effective market strategy to recruit new subscribers.

Figure 10: Primary marketing messages



Question: How important are the following primary marketing messages to recruiting new subscribers? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

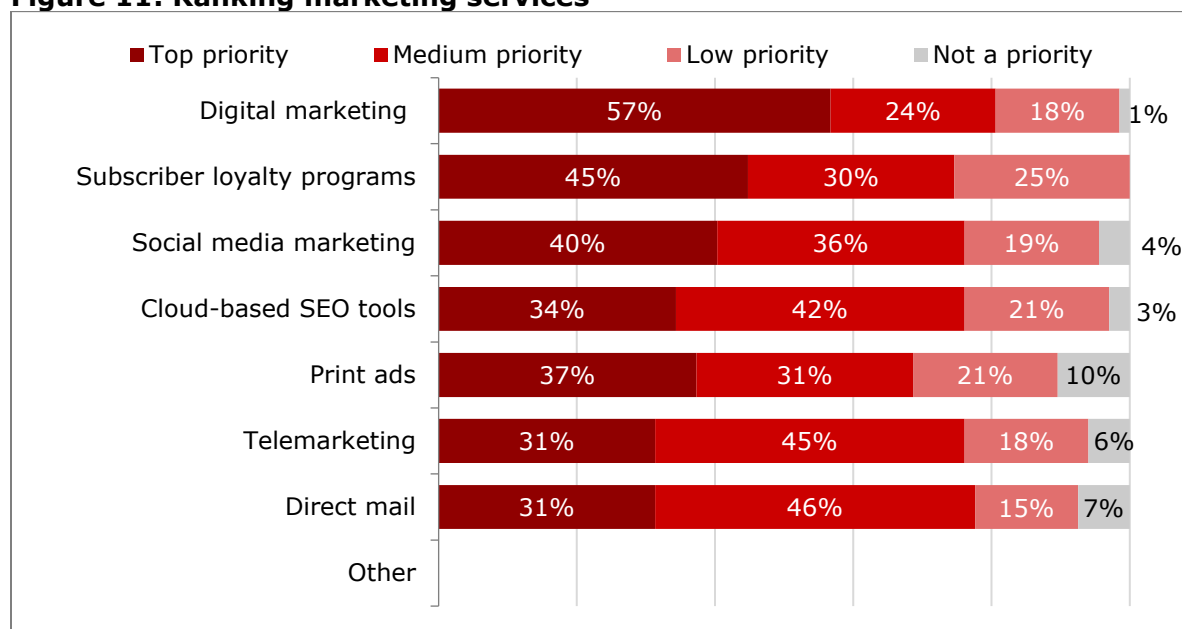
Once the marketing message fundamentals have been prioritized, C-levels need to select the preferred partners, tools, and marketing media channels they will utilize to disseminate their marketing overtures to new subscribers.

As **Figure 11** below shows, there are several key “top priority” components of what C-levels view as vital for driving subscriber growth. Among these, leading the way is digital marketing (57%), followed by subscriber loyalty programs (45%) and social media marketing (40%).

Heavy Reading views the fact that two of the three top priority responses are cloud-based as significant and further evidence that digital marketing has already established itself as a dominant marketing force.

However, the solid “top priority” scoring of traditional approaches such as print ads (37%), telemarketing, and direct mail (both 31%) indicate these still represent relevant approaches for reaching new subscribers *in the right setting* (see **Figure 18**).

Figure 11: Ranking marketing services



Question: How important are the following marketing services toward reaching your organization’s subscriber growth goals? (n=67)

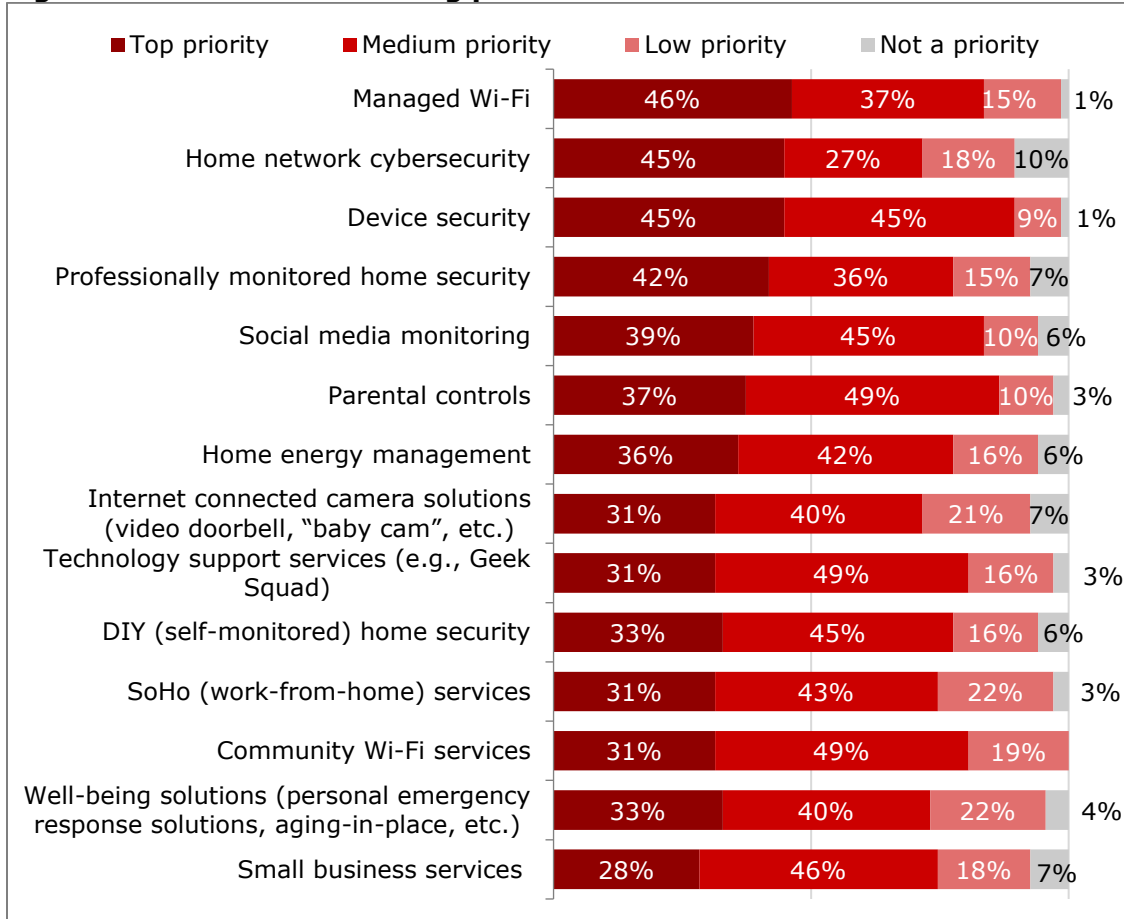
Source: Heavy Reading

Selecting use cases that resonate with customers is the final critical step in monetizing services delivery and subscriber growth. The challenge here is the difficulty associated with isolating the correct use cases in a dynamic market.

Figure 12 below provides insights into C-levels’ intuitive use case rankings. Based on “top priority,” managed Wi-Fi (46%), home network cybersecurity and device security (both 45%), and professional home monitored security (42%) lead in a tightly bundled grouping. Rounding out the top five is social media monitoring (39%).

The focus on device and home network security is not surprising, given carriers of all sizes are now being increasingly pressured by their business and residential customers to secure their networks and devices.

Figure 12: Use case marketing priorities



Question: Over the next three years, how much marketing priority will each of the following use cases receive? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

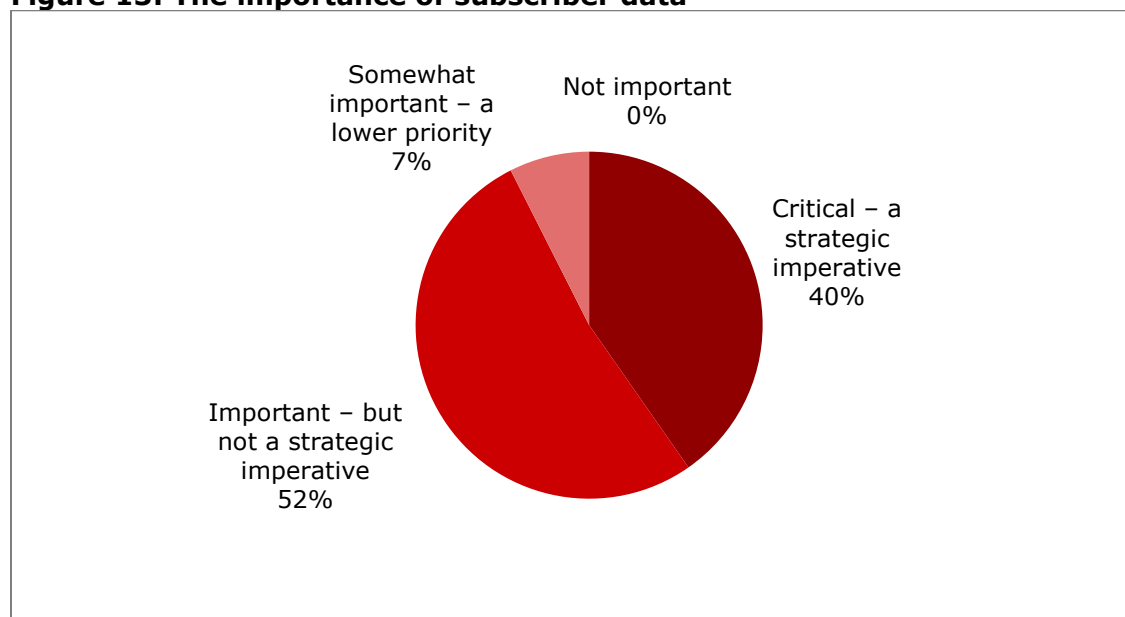
4. THE POWER OF DATA

Many C-levels believe they will need to integrate additional marketing tools in the next three years to maintain competitive equilibrium (see **Figure 6**).

Since the effectiveness of these tools directly relates to the efficacy of the subscriber data, it stands to reason that utilizing subscriber data should be an important consideration in driving new revenue streams.

As **Figure 13** shows, more than 9 out of 10 C-levels (92%) believe that subscriber data is either “critical” or “important” for driving new revenue growth. 40% of the respondents believe that subscriber data will be “critical,” while 52% assess it as “important,” leaving little room for doubt about the relationship between subscriber data. This question was also carried over from the previous survey. The results were almost identical (“critical” 44%; “important” 52%), which reinforces the strategic role of subscriber data.

Figure 13: The importance of subscriber data



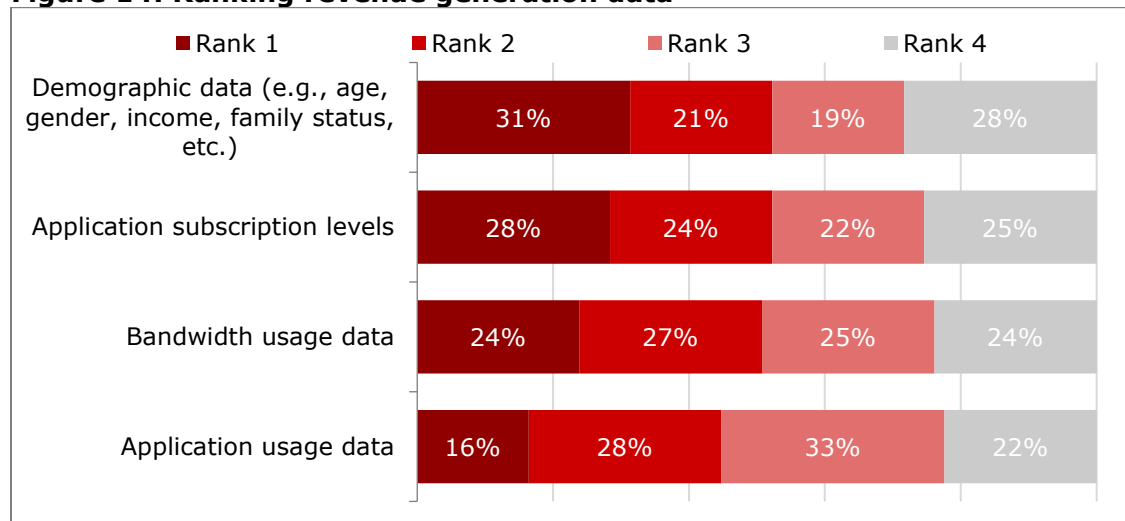
Question: How important is it for your organization to utilize subscriber data to drive new revenue and service opportunities? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

Having established that data plays a crucial role in revenue growth, the logical next question is: Which data is most important? When asked to rank data from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important), as **Figure 14** below shows, demographic data (31%) had a slight lead over application subscription levels (28%) and bandwidth usage data (24%) in terms of data value in a revenue generation context. Well behind was application usage data (16%).

Heavy Reading believes the top rankings of demographic data, application subscription levels, and bandwidth usage data stem from the dual need to both target specific services to certain markets and demographics and understand the services that will drive additional revenue growth associated with data/ bandwidth consumption.

Figure 14: Ranking revenue generation data



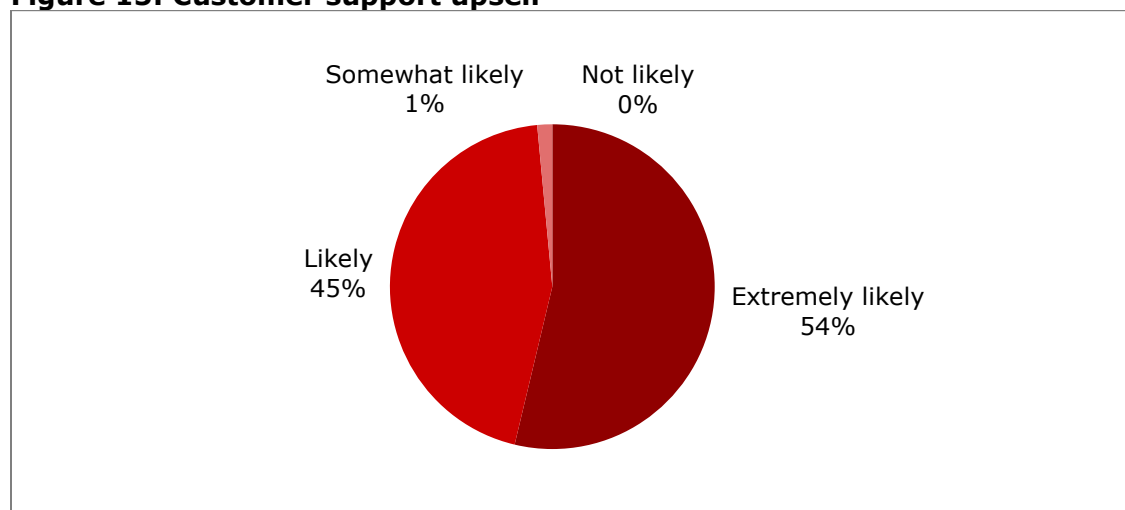
Question: How important are the following factors to revenue generation? (Rank 1 = most important and Rank 4 = least important) (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

Although upselling existing customers was not viewed by many marketing C-levels as a priority for driving new revenue growth (see **Figure 7**), 99% of these same C-levels plan to use customer support teams to upsell new services.

Of these, as shown in **Figure 15**, more than half (54%) believed it was “extremely likely” while 45% believed it was “likely” they would adopt this practice. There are several factors why this approach has such strong support, including the ability to leverage demographic data in customer support sessions with clients to enable meaningful upsell opportunities.

Figure 15: Customer support upsell



Question: How likely is your organization to use its customer support team to upsell new services? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

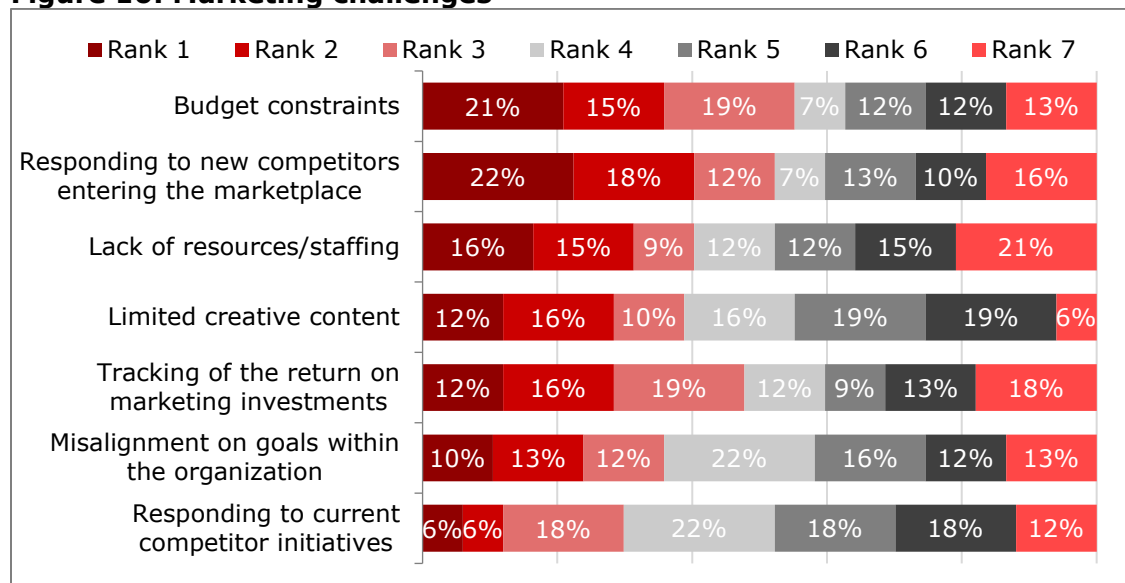
5. GOALS, CHALLENGES, AND CHANNELS

This section of the report documents C-levels' marketing goals and preferred channels, as well as the challenges they face in attaining their goals.

Figure 16 illustrates the top three marketing challenges based on "rank 1" inputs are people, money, and competition related. Of these, responding to new competitors entering the marketplace (22%) leads the challenge list, followed by budget constraints (21%) and lack of resources/staffing (16%).

These rankings were not unforeseen since budget and staffing related challenges are perennial issues. The challenge associated with new competitors is consistent with previous input that C-levels are increasingly concerned about the revenue implications of Tier 1 and webscale companies entering their territory (see **Figure 8**).

Figure 16: Marketing challenges



Question: What are your organization's biggest marketing challenges? (n=67)

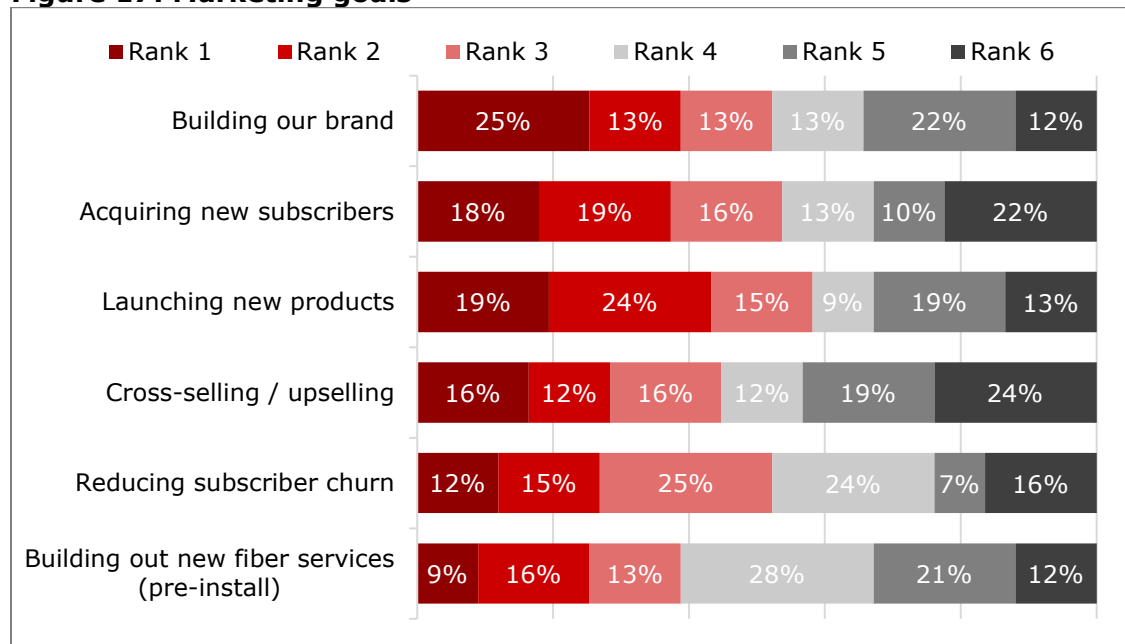
Source: Heavy Reading

In addition to documenting C-levels' marketing challenges, the survey was also designed to document their marketing goals and objectives.

The input in **Figure 17** confirms there are several top-ranking "rank 1" priorities. Of these, the leading goal is simply to build the brand (25%). Additional goals are more tangible and include launching new products (19%) and acquiring new subscribers (18%), as well as the previously discussed cross-selling and upselling opportunity (16%) (see **Figure 7** and **Figure 15**).

While no single definitive sequence of goal rankings can apply to all BSPs, Heavy Reading agrees that building the brand is a logical starting point. Without a positive brand image, which we consider vital in the digital era, it will be exceedingly difficult to realize the adjacent goals of acquiring new subscribers, upselling, and even launching new products.

Figure 17: Marketing goals



Question: What are your organization's most important marketing goals? (n=67)

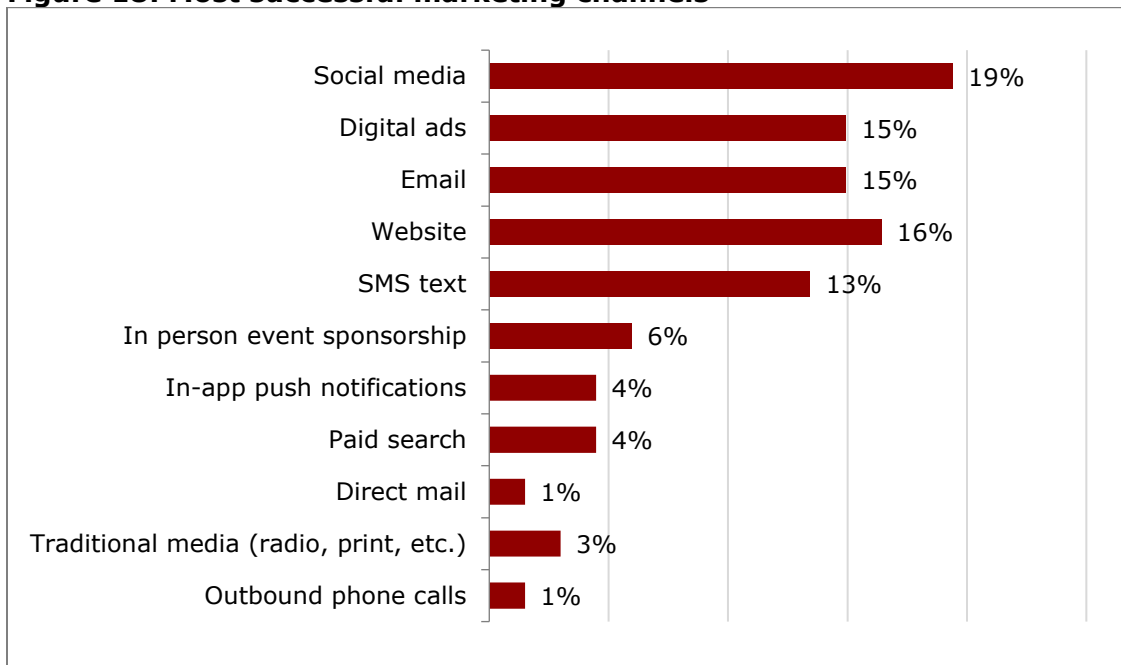
Source: Heavy Reading

Another critical decision point in the marketing journey is selecting the correct channels for campaign execution. C-levels believe that social media marketing is valuable for driving subscriber growth but that other traditional approaches are also relevant (see **Figure 11**).

Consistent with this view, as shown in **Figure 18** below, C-levels also feel that social media (19%) represents the most successful market channel. Here again, though, other traditional channels remain in the mix.

These include the website as a channel (16%), as well as digital ads (15%) and traditional channels encompassing email (15%) and SMS text campaigns (13%). The low ranking of traditional media such as print and radio (3%) and direct mail (1%) does, however, also confirm that while they may be relevant on some level, they are less of a factor moving forward.

Figure 18: Most successful marketing channels

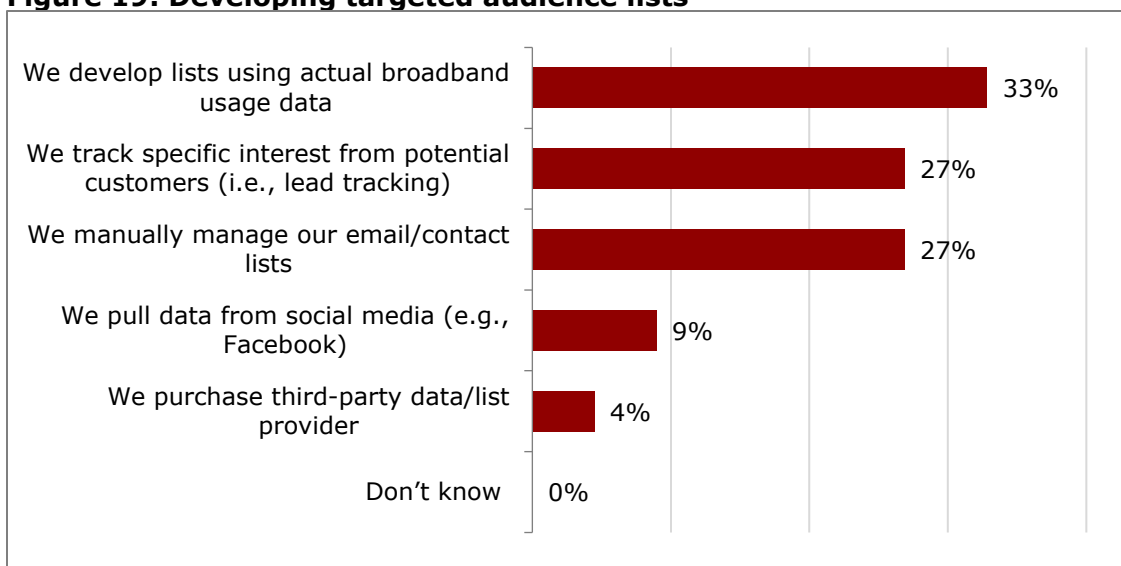


Question: What is your organization's most successful marketing channel? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

Although C-levels understand the value of social media channels, as depicted in **Figure 19**, only 9% have started pulling data from social media for creating targeted audience lists. Instead, they continue to rely on traditional approaches such as utilizing actual bandwidth data (33%), as well as manual managed email lists (27%) and potential lead tracking (also 27%).

Figure 19: Developing targeted audience lists



Question: Which of the following represents your organization's primary approach for developing a targeted audience list? (n=67)

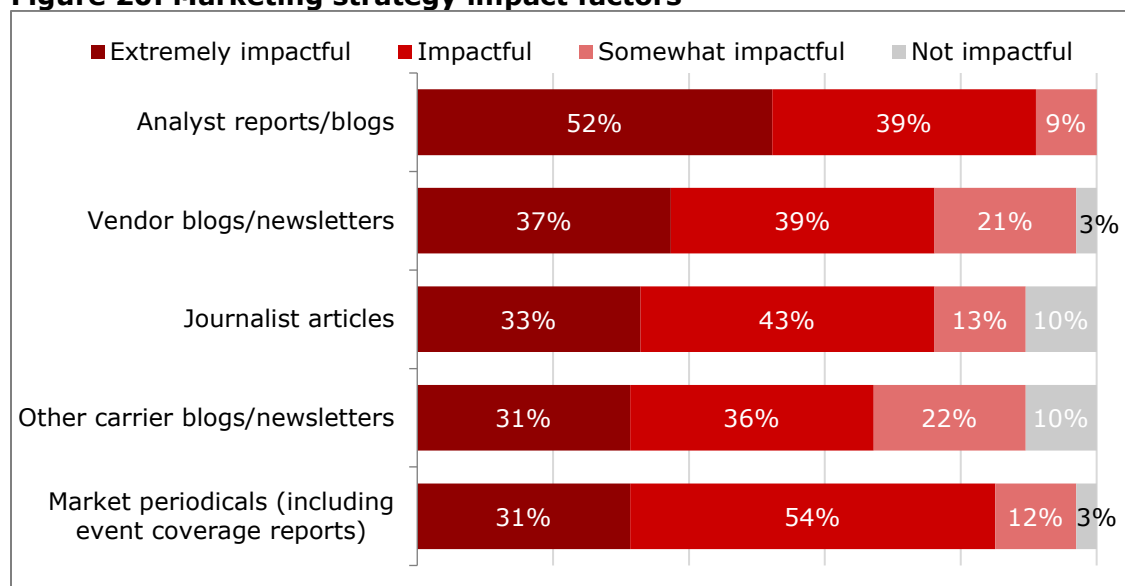
Source: Heavy Reading

One of the final considerations that C-levels must address in executing and fine-tuning their marketing strategies is assessing which external information sources have achieved “trusted” status and therefore have the greatest impact.

Based on “extremely impactful” inputs, as illustrated in **Figure 20**, C-levels are relying on numerous sources. Leading the way by a considerable margin is analyst reports/blogs (52%), with the remaining four tightly grouped in the following order: vendor blogs/newsletters (37%), journalist articles (33%), and other carrier blogs/newsletters and market periodicals (both 31%).

Heavy Reading believes that analyst reports/blogs stand out because they are typically based on independent research and provide an unvarnished business and technical impact assessment of industry trends that can affect marketing campaigns and strategies.

Figure 20: Marketing strategy impact factors



Question: To what extent do the following impact the creation of your marketing strategies? (n=67)
 Source: Heavy Reading

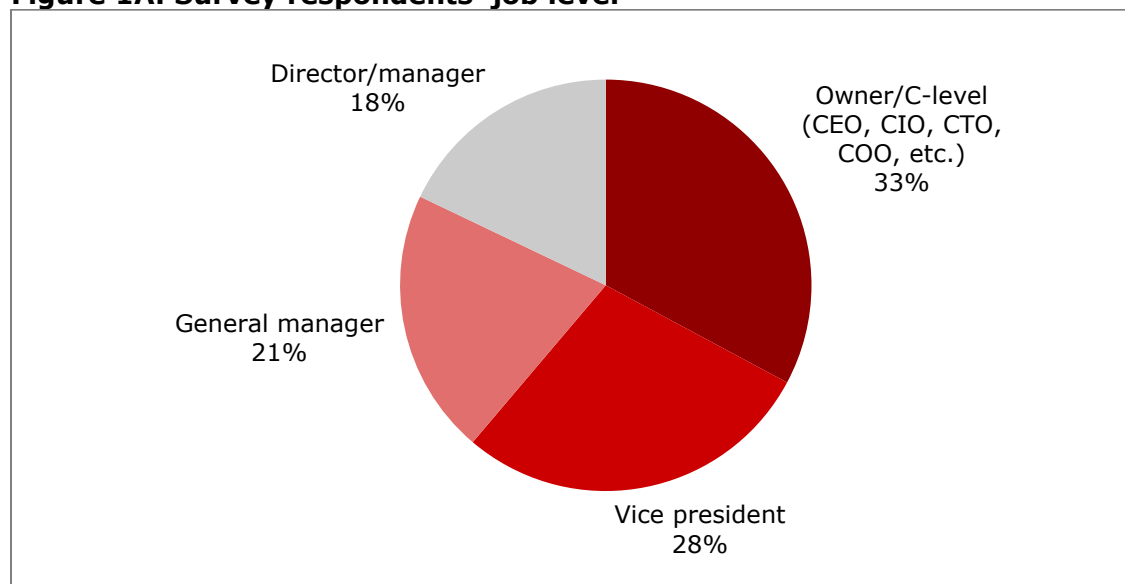
APPENDIX – SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

This research is based on a 25-question custom survey of North American BSPs jointly developed by Heavy Reading and Calix and fielded globally by Light Reading parent Informa Tech in the first half of 2022.

The survey exclusively targeted C-level sales and marketing executives who worked for Tier 2/3 operators serving 100,000 and fewer subscribers in Canada or the US.

As shown in **Figure 1A**, the C-levels who took the survey represented a mix of CEOs (33%), vice presidents (28%), general managers (21%), and directors (18%).

Figure 1A: Survey respondents' job level



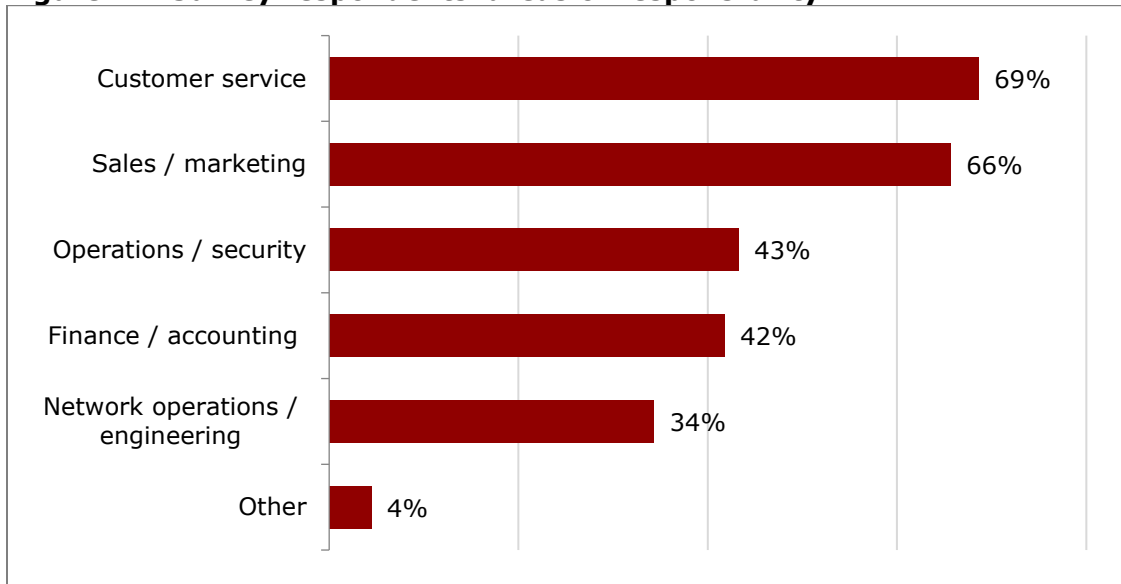
Question: Which of the following best describes your job level? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

This survey was unique in that it targeted only customer service, sales, and marketing executives. As a result, as shown in **Figure 2A** below, the two largest groups fell into customer service (69%) and sales/marketing (66%).

Since these executives typically performed several functions, Heavy Reading structured the logic of the question to enable them to capture the other functions as well if they performed customer service or sales/marketing roles. As the figure captures, the other functions they supported ranged from operations/security (43%) and finance/accounting (42%) to network operations /engineering (34%).

Figure 2A: Survey respondents' areas of responsibility

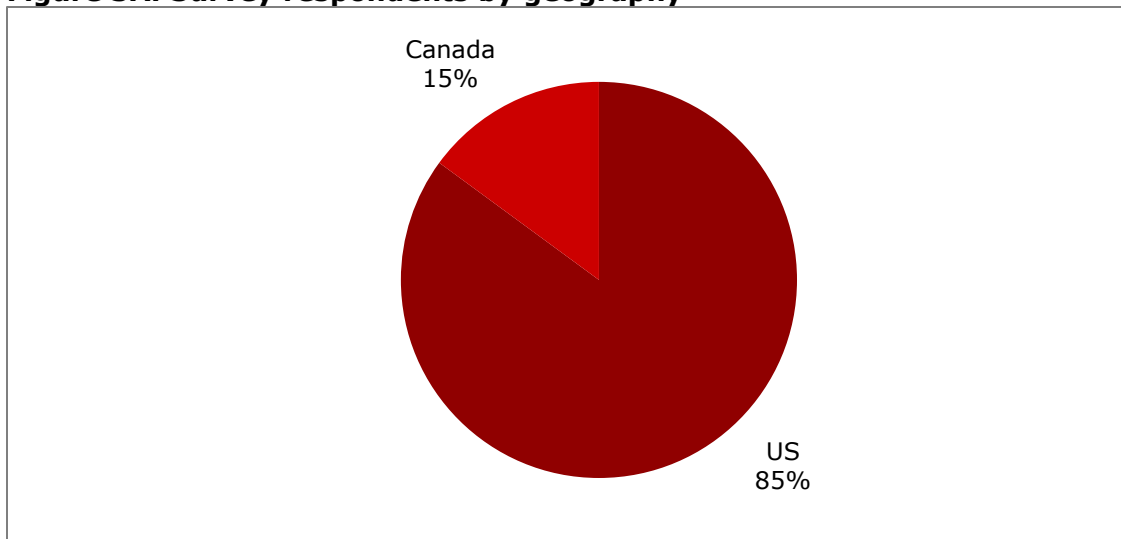


Question: What areas are you responsible for? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

These C-levels worked predominately for US BSPs. As shown in **Figure 3A**, the split was 85% US and 15% from Canada. This is considered an optimal distribution, given there are a greater number of companies with 100,000 and fewer subscribers in the US compared to Canada.

Figure 3A: Survey respondents by geography

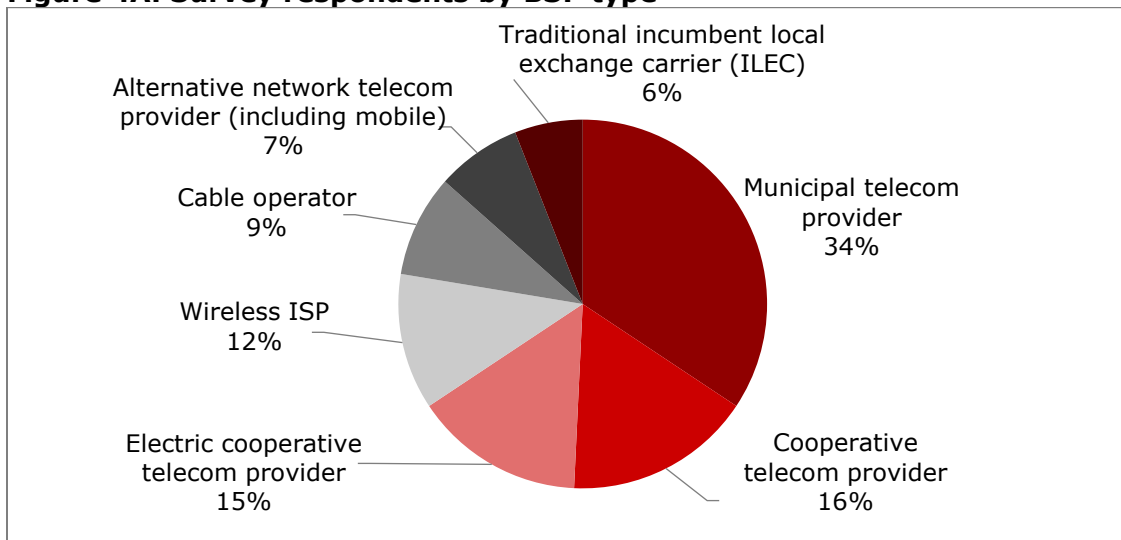


Question: Where is your company located? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

They also worked for a range of service provider types. As **Figure 4A** below illustrates, the largest data distribution was municipal telecom providers (34%), followed by cooperative telecom providers (16%), electric telecom providers (15%), wireless ISPs (12%), cable operators (9%), alternative telecom providers (7%), and traditional incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs; 6%).

Figure 4A: Survey respondents by BSP type

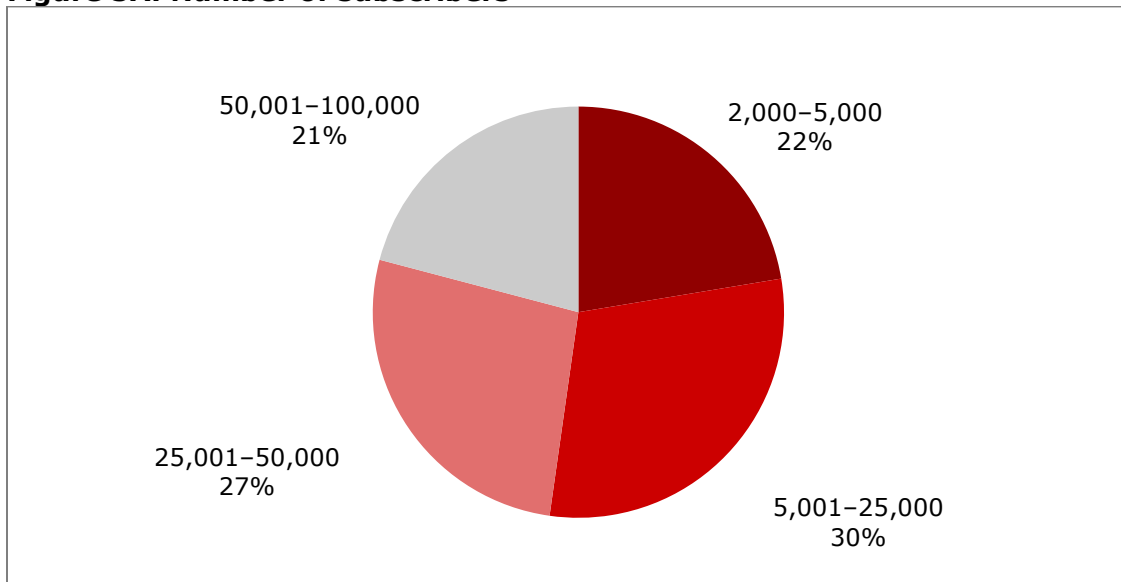


Question: What type of broadband service provider (BSP) do you work for? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

As **Figure 5A** shows, these companies were also distinct based on the number of subscribers served. The largest group worked for companies that served 5,001–25,000 subs (30%). The remaining grouping included 25,001–50,000 (27%), 2,000–5,000 (22%), and 50,001–100,000 (21%).

Figure 5A: Number of subscribers



Question: How many subscribers does your company have? (n=67)

Source: Heavy Reading

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