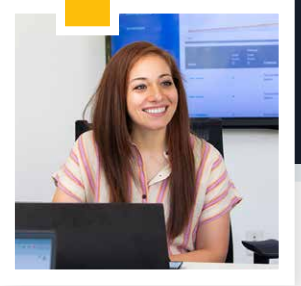


OuterBox[®]



Staying Agile in 2025:

Market Insights & Strategies for Business Growth

1,000+ OuterBox clients surveyed,
in 37+ industries,
to understand what's at stake in the new economy.
Here's what we found.

Q1



Surviving Versus Thriving in 2025

In the US, we now anticipate a market shift with every four-year political cycle. However, this administration has a more aggressive economic approach that directly impacts global trade and supply chains. We're already seeing lingering inflation and interest rate fluctuations, and experts note the potential for more inflation and possible recession.

Naturally, these variables cause shifts in consumer spending patterns and force companies to rethink pricing, product offerings, and supply chain options. Understandably, many companies are in a "survive" versus "thrive" mode.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Most companies are falling behind on **technology** that could help them withstand economic challenges. Businesses that don't adopt new technologies quickly fall behind their competition—the pressure is on.

Technology is a potential answer to growth, but it has its own challenges. Keeping up with rapid advancements in automation and efficiencies is an investment in tools and training. Additionally, client expectations have also increased in response to new tech. Take a breath here—it's a lot to take in.

OuterBox's top priority is fueling client growth.

That's why we surveyed more than 1,000 clients on how they feel today. From industrial B2B to eCommerce to professional services, we wanted to get a sense of their business outlook, areas of concern, and growth opportunities to better serve their digital marketing needs and grow their businesses.

The survey results offer insights for companies of any industry and size looking to thrive in 2025. We reviewed the results and tapped into our leadership team to understand business needs, spot trends and opportunities, and provide actionable insights.

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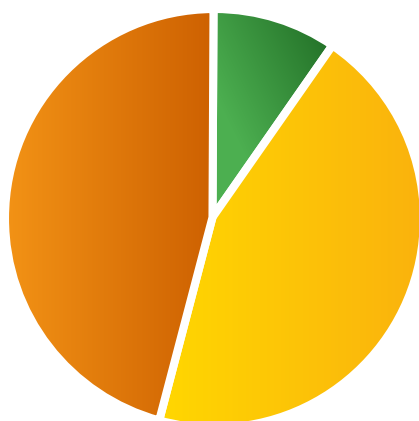
2024 in Review: Foreshadowing 2025 Challenges

2024 was a whirlwind. We saw economic turbulence such as inflation and interest rate fluctuations in conjunction with an election year, which typically sees cautious consumer spending and business investment.

OuterBox wanted to narrow the scope. By understanding the state of our clients' businesses at the time of the survey, we could better understand their 2025 outlook.

OuterBox Client Research

How would you classify business performance in 2024?



- Exceeded Expectations: **10%**
- Met Expectations: **44%**
- Did Not Meet Expectations: **46%**

"There was a lot of change within the marketing ecosystem in 2024, including several hard-hitting Google algorithm updates and the proliferation of ChatGPT and similar tools. That led to a lot of siloed channel-specific marketing playbooks being torn up and replaced with more integrated approaches." – Jeff Allen, OuterBox CEO



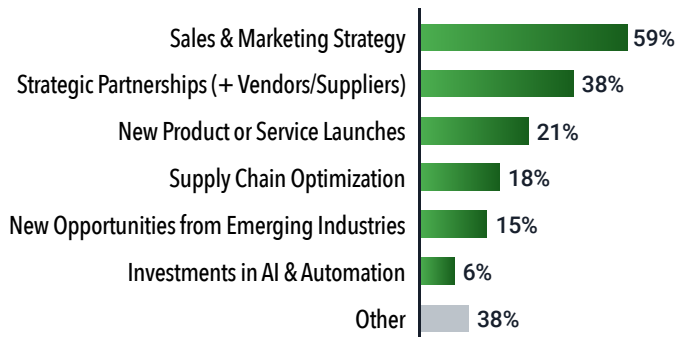
Let's start with the good news.

44% of survey respondents said they did meet business expectations, while 10% exceeded expectations— both aligning with GDP growth. To understand the cause, we followed up by asking about the contributing factors to this success.

Of those who met or exceeded expectations, 59% cited sales and marketing as the top factor. What does this mean? **The broader economic environment was stable enough to achieve targets, highlighting sales and marketing's critical role in driving performance and growth during uncertain times.**

OuterBox Client Research

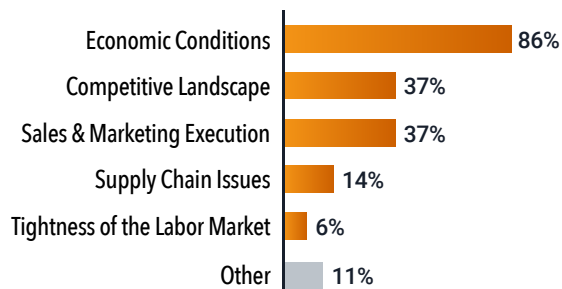
If 2024 business performance met or exceeded expectations, what were the contributing factors?



However, 46% of respondents did **not** meet their 2024 expectations, and when asked about the contributing factors, 86% cited economic conditions. When you look at a more granular level, purchasing and investment caution may have hampered their ability to capitalize on growth opportunities.

OuterBox Client Research

If 2024 business performance did not meet expectations, what were the contributing factors?



These results foreshadow the survey responses of business outlook in 2025, with external economic factors as the predominant challenge. While there may be a reluctance to take risks in uncertain times, those that met expectations last year prove the **need for businesses to adopt more resilient strategies for market volatility that focus on sales and marketing.**

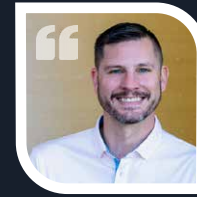
Optimism in Overall Business Outlook

Despite economic challenges weighing heavily on companies, the OuterBox clients surveyed were optimistic when asked about their overall business outlook for 2025. 39% said they expected growth, and 45% were cautiously optimistic. Only 1% of respondents said they were expecting a slowdown.

Businesses might be cautiously optimistic due to a mix of opportunities and uncertainties shaping the economy. On the upside, factors like potential tax incentives, deregulation, and pro-business policies—especially under a Republican administration—could fuel corporate growth, investment, and hiring. On the downside, market volatility will continue, at least in the short-term, and in the face of sweeping new tariffs.

Additionally, AI and other technological advancements present new opportunities for efficiency gains. Thanks to rapidly evolving capabilities, the last couple years have been historic. What was once a tool exclusive to big tech is now used by businesses of every size. The cautious optimism in the business outlook responses could come from slow adoption or hiccups due to employee skill levels or data privacy issues. While some industries quickly thrive with technological advancement, others face major disruptions before they feel improvement.

With a consensus of guarded optimism, we looked to identify and detail why clients are approaching the year with caution.



“Businesses are smart enough to recognize

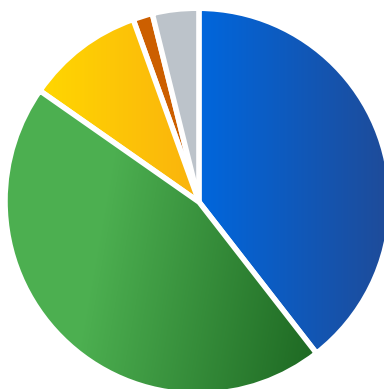
shifts in the macroeconomic environment and reassess their operations to remain healthy. But some get stuck in a “wait and see” posture, and that’s dangerous as agile competitors find ways to thrive.

This is where we have an advantage, working with hundreds of businesses daily. We can bring new perspectives to fuel go-forward strategies focused on getting relevant products and services to the right audience in the most cost-effective way possible”

– Nathan Ende, OuterBox COO

OuterBox Client Research

Outlook for 2025



- Cautiously Optimistic: **44%**
- Expecting Growth: **39%**
- Neutral: **10%**
- Unsure: **4%**
- Expecting a Slow Down: **1%**

Anticipated Business Challenges

What's the biggest concern for businesses this year?

Simply put: The economy.

Breaking it down: "Trade and Regulation Policies/Tariffs" led with 49% surveyed citing as their top concern, followed by "Market Volatility/Economic Uncertainty" at 45%.

Within the first 100 days of the new administration, various new tariffs and trade policies have come in and out of play. Also related to the economy, "Inventory and Supply Chain Issues" was the fourth-highest concern at 28%. We look closer at these concerns in the next section.

The above factors warrant concern, given that they're outside your control. You can't do much to prevent these challenges. However, it could also point to the optimistic outlook—what else can we do but work with it?

How you respond will dictate your growth.

Growth comes to companies that closely monitor the market and respond to policy changes by adjusting and diversifying quickly.

Agility is the word of the year. Staying agile in pricing, market positioning, and operational efficiency will be key.

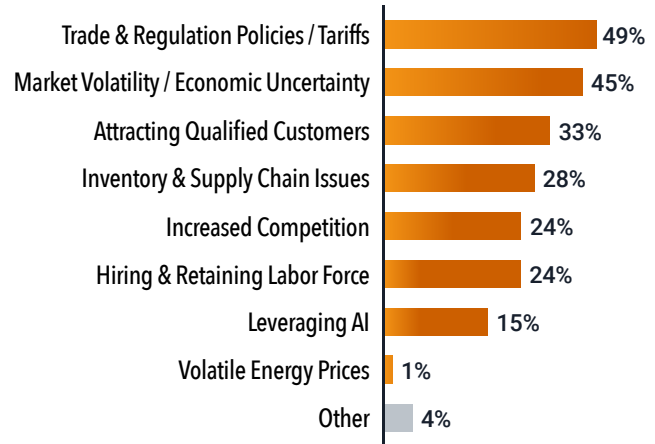
Surprisingly, only 15% of respondents were concerned about leveraging AI. This could mean the larger pool of respondents are either early adopters and already leveraging AI, or they lack awareness of the possible benefits.

Our next question circles back to the economy, specifically on tariffs, one of the most turbulent policy items of the first quarter.

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Outlook for 2025

What's your biggest concern for your business in 2025?



"It's important to stay close to your customers, and potential customers, in rapidly changing times like these. You'll spot their intuition and optimism faster in conversations than you'll see orders, so you can use what you hear to anticipate changing demand."

– Jeff Allen, OuterBox CEO

The Impact of New Tariffs

We anticipated economic policy concerns among respondents. To examine these fully, we asked all respondents how they anticipate tariffs will affect business.

58% of respondents said tariffs will increase costs. Due to cost increases in materials and production and to avoid lost profits, consumers will foot the bill. Businesses have a balancing act—finding the sweet spot on pricing with partners and end buyers. Our clients also commented that inconsistencies and confusion around tariffs have caused stagnation. 27% of clients answered “Supply Chain Volatility,” relating to increased costs.

On the flip side, we also saw optimism. 23% of clients expect minimal to no impact, while 21% see an opportunity to win back business lost overseas. The new tariffs will likely increase reshoring efforts, boosting demand for US-based manufacturing and locally sourced goods. Clients noted that companies looked for domestic suppliers of materials like aluminum in Q1 and are stocking up, raising the inventory value on hand. This buyer behavior will taper off as the panic subsides.

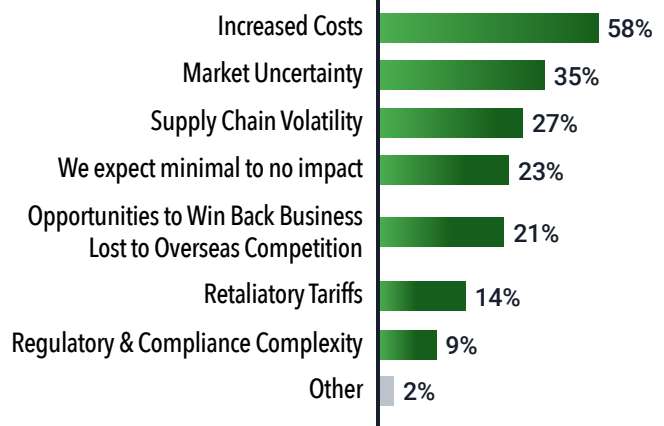
While tariff outcomes remain uncertain, waiting isn't a good strategy. Businesses must be proactive, anticipating needs and delivering value beyond production. If you aren't the most cost-effective option, how are you marketing yourself as the **best** option?

Consistently market your expertise by positioning yourself as a problem-solver and highlighting differentiators like customizations or innovations. Share proven results through testimonials and case studies, then create an emotional impact with strong branding and values. It's beyond showing up in searches or ads; position your business as the problem-solver customers trust, leaving competitors behind.

Next up, operational priorities—another area where you can set yourself apart.

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How do you anticipate potential tariffs affecting your business?



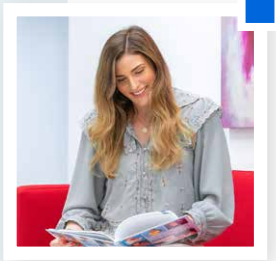
“Uncertainty creates opportunity. Companies that adapt, stay agile, and clearly showcase their value will thrive. Your customers are just as concerned about managing changes in cost.

Explore creative ways to help them navigate those business impacts: pricing transparency, forecasting, sourcing, design changes, material alternatives, inventory management, etc.). Building loyalty now will pay off later.

If you're not the cheapest option, be the best one.”

– Josh Blankenship
OuterBox Director of Business Development

Responding with Operational Priorities



To understand how OuterBox customers planned to tackle concerns, we followed up with a question on operational priorities. 27% of respondents said scaling marketing and sales was their biggest focus. As companies look to grow in the face of market volatility, increased competition, and market saturation, how they market themselves is the answer to staying competitive. As customers look to pivot to meet new market conditions, **businesses that maintain a strong marketing presence during downturns will be the first to capture opportunities when the market rebounds.**

Additionally, the value of your existing clientele—an asset you’ve already invested in—requires nurturing through marketing to preserve strong relationships. This is the most effective strategy for sustaining revenue, especially during times of uncertainty.



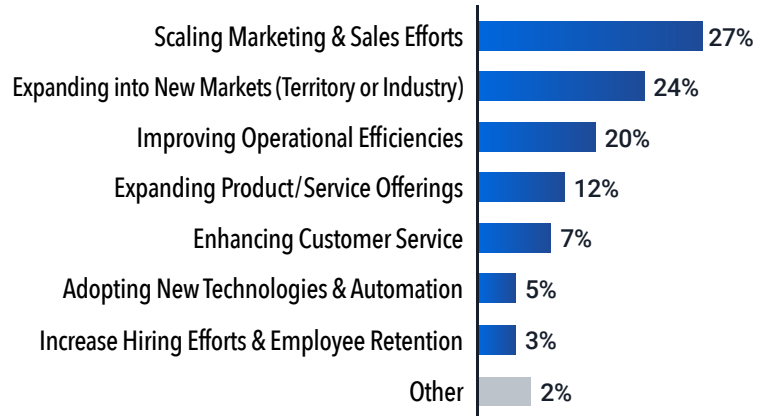
“The constant is change, and with competing priorities, it can be hard to focus on specific areas of the business. Each year brings new challenges, and today we are seeing operational efficiencies provided by AI, as well as having information that helps us to better understand the needs and behaviors of our customers. Taking this information to round out our business strategies will be time well spent.

Whether in manufacturing, retail, or professional services, we are all serving people, and having a focus on making their lives easier will help differentiate your business.”

– **Anita Valdez**
OuterBox Chief Client Officer

OuterBox Client Research

What is your biggest operational priority for 2025?



20% of survey takers said they looked to improve operational efficiency, while only 5% answered “Adopting New Technologies and Automation.” The lack of respondents choosing to adopt new tech and automation may be due to the large response to “Improving Operational Efficiency.” It may be safe to assume companies are using technology as part of that improvement effort. There’s no reason to hold back on investing in software, automation, or AI solutions that drive productivity. While markets fluctuate, tools like AI evolve consistently.

Finally, 24% of customers said expanding into new markets (territories or industries) was an important operational priority. We dug into this in more detail in a follow-up question to cite growth opportunities.



Opportunities for Growth: Industry Targeting

When asked what industries participating businesses want to grow into in 2025, oil and gas came in at 43%. Energy is always an industry of growth in some shape or form. 20% of respondents are looking into solar, wind, and renewable power; another 20% cited electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. Even as the current administration deprioritizes clean energy and focuses on coal and natural gas, demand for efficient energy solutions is growing globally.

33% of survey takers said aerospace and defense was an industry of interest, aligning with an increase in private sector space exploration and continuing global conflicts. 28% said automation and robotics are tremendous opportunities as industries seek cost-effective productivity.

These answers tell us that OuterBox clients are tracking markets and looking at current capabilities to see what industries make sense to pursue or invest in further. It also aligns with the optimism in earlier responses and a desire for growth. Regardless of economic conditions, it's always important to diversify to bolster your business against market volatility.



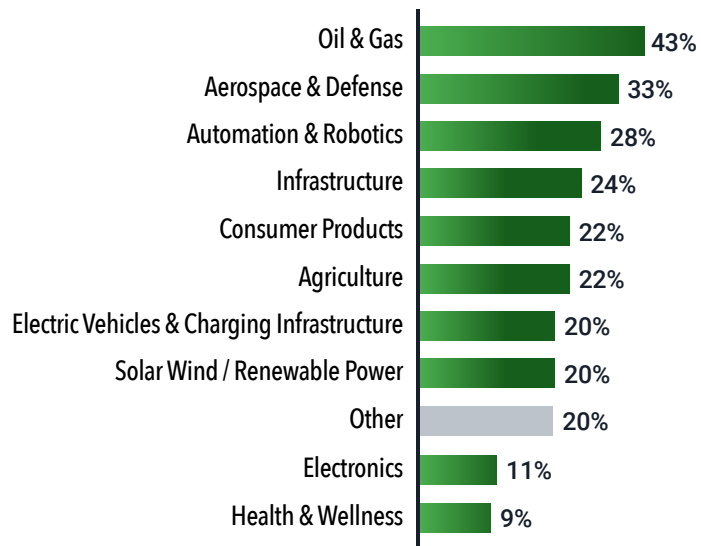
"In times of market volatility,

diversifying your customer base is a strategic imperative. Relying too heavily on one industry, geography, or customer segment leaves businesses vulnerable to external shocks— be it economic downturns, regulatory shifts, or supply chain disruptions. Customer diversification acts as a buffer—allowing businesses to remain agile and responsive, even when broader market conditions are unpredictable. It's a proactive defense that also drives new growth."

— Jeff Hirz, OuterBox EVP

OuterBox Client Research

Which, if any, of the following industries would you like to enter or grow in 2025?



Opportunities for Growth: Marketing

In an earlier question about operational priorities, 27% of OuterBox clients cited scaling marketing and sales efforts as their top 2025 priority. We followed up with all respondents to get a deeper dive into marketing needs, asking about their biggest priority within their website and/or digital business for the year. 50% of companies said increased traffic was their top priority.

While readers would expect a digital marketing agency to rejoice, it's important to note that more traffic doesn't mean more revenue. To give customers the oxygen they need to grow, OuterBox doesn't promise more traffic through SEO and paid media, but the right traffic that drives revenue. With so much concern about the economy, you want digital marketing dollars spent on the audience most likely to convert.

Looking back at responses for the biggest operational priority in 2025, gaining quality traffic is essential to the success of industry expansion (24%) or adding product

or service offerings (12%). Pursuing these areas would mean little unless the right audience is responding. 14% of respondents are looking to improve digital media ROI and can count on strategies focused on user intent and lead quality as solutions.

While AI wasn't an option here, it can power results for increased quality traffic, better data and insights (2%), and enhanced personalization and targeting (10%). It's also worth noting that digital channel expansion (7%) is a strategic response to AI in the search landscape. As more consumers look for solutions on AI platforms and social media, this tactic will be critical to keep up. AI's role in content, strategy, and analysis can boost efficiency and targeting. However, AI enhances, not replaces, human expertise—meaning oversight is critical to maintain customer trust.



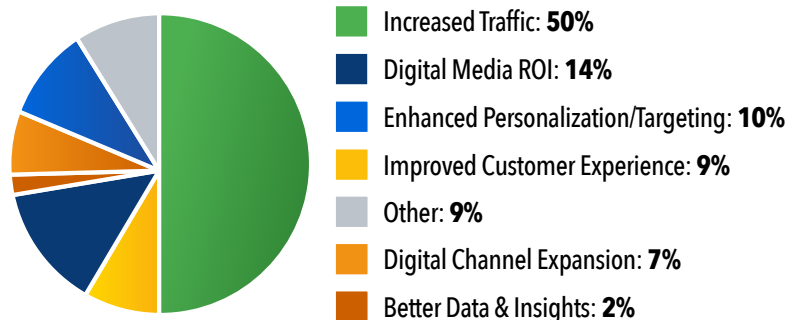
"With the emergence of AI overviews within search results, combined with increased consumer behavior of using large language models (ex. ChatGPT) for service and product discovery, the stakes have been raised for gaining new awareness.

It's more critical than ever for businesses to focus on building topical relevance for their target markets through increased and properly structured content and perpetually continuing that production to create a competitive advantage."

– Craig Smith
OuterBox Chief Strategy Officer

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What is the biggest priority within your website and/or digital business in 2025?



The key findings from our survey of our diverse customer base allowed us to analyze the business landscape of 2025, shaped by post-election policy changes, economic shifts, and technological advancements like AI. As businesses work through a transformative year, cautious optimism helps them weather uncertainties as they pursue growth.



"There has already been a lot of change, and while it may

be tempting to play "wait and see," you have to stay visible in search and social across your core products or you'll lose market share that will be tough to claw back as the economy accelerates."

– Jeff Allen, OuterBox CEO

Achieving Growth in 2025 and Beyond

The pathways to resilience? Agility, growth opportunities, and marketing focused on user intent.

Agility: Businesses must adapt and evolve to stay competitive, no matter what the economy does. Focus on the internal factors your business can control. Staying agile on operational priorities like pricing, market positioning, and operations will promote growth during economic uncertainty.

Growth Opportunities: Businesses are encouraged to look into industry sectors they may already be capable of serving or can serve with little investment. The same goes with AI as a tool for improving operational efficiency and customer targeting.

Marketing Focused on User Intent: Differentiating your business with expertise and problem-solving capabilities while maintaining a strong marketing presence will keep your company in buyer conversations despite economic conditions. Scaling marketing and bringing in big web traffic numbers sounds good, but you need to see conversions to see ROI. This is why a focus on user intent is crucial. Not forgetting current customers is essential, too. Follow up on past intent and note possible servicing or other upsell opportunities.

In conclusion, to see growth this year, you'll need to embrace agility, seize opportunities, and use digital marketing strategies focused on user intent and quality traffic. Growth is oxygen, and OuterBox provides the expertise and data-driven strategies that fuel business growth.

If you're ready to cultivate these insights into actionable business growth, contact OuterBox to get started.

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