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Professional Association Research & Insights



Table of Contents

Intro	3
Participants	4
Takeaway & Opportunities	6
Go-To-Market Motions	8
Go-To-Market Motions Key Insights	15
Technology Stack	17
Technology Stack Key Insights	29
Biggest Challenges	30
Biggest Challenges Key Insights	41



About Aptitude 8

Aptitude 8 is a technical consulting firm specializing in revenue operations (RevOps), CRM architecture, and advanced marketing automation. As an Elite HubSpot Solutions Partner and the #2 Global Partner of the Year in 2024, we help organizations implement, integrate, and optimize HubSpot to meet complex business needs.

Unlike traditional marketing agencies, Aptitude 8 focuses on technical execution—delivering scalable, strategic solutions that turn business processes and systems into a competitive advantage.

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Intro

Professional associations need to continue to improve member experiences even as their technology ecosystems become more fragmented. To better understand these challenges, we surveyed 253 decision-makers across associations of all sizes and industries.

This report shares key findings around technology use, member engagement priorities, and where associations feel stuck, offering a clearer picture of the opportunities ahead.

Survey and interview decision makers of professional and trade associations to improve sales and marketing opportunities for both inbound and partner referrals within the category.

This research provides a deeper understanding of the needs of this segment and along with specific insights around their GTM approach, technology stacks, and challenges with growing their membership base and overall revenue.



Participants

N = 253

- US Geo: All regions
- Business Type: Professional Associations
- Industry: All
- Roles: Leadership & Decision makers

Segments Analyzed

- Overall responses
- Large: Associations with 1,000–10,000+ members (n = 101)
- Strategy: Participants in Management or Strategy roles (n = 102)

Marketing: Participants in Marketing and Brand or Sale and Business Development roles (n = 29)



Top-Line Takeaways



Takeaways & Opportunities

Primary focus is on member-centric value: With both KPIs and GTM challenges, areas of member satisfaction, acquisition, retention and engagement rank above or equally with revenue growth. While AMS platforms focus on these areas, there's no dominant solution in the space and it's the top point of frustration across all tech stack platforms.

- The point on engagement was echoed across the interviews where member churn is often attributed to lack of use of association services.
- 3 out of 5 interview participants cited switching to a new AMS system in part to improve engagement and gain better visibility on engagement metrics.

Tech stacks are fragmented and frustrating: Instead of AMS solutions that should serve as the centerpiece across needs, associations utilize and are frustrated by the large collections of platforms they use (38%) and limitations with integration capabilities (36%). Manual pain points around data transfer (46%), member engagement reporting (41%) and financial reporting (40%) all highlight these issues.

- Interviews supported this fragmented behavior. 3 out of 5 participants noted they were seeking replacement of their AMS and/or in process of migrating.

Associations trust and use market leading tech: While tech stacks are fragmented overall, there are still strong preferences for market leader brands like Salesforce, Microsoft, Zoom, Google, PayPal – and Hubspot. This preference increases with large associations with over 1000 members.

- Interviews added support to this with the view that changes happen slowly and infrequently with these associations so the need for trusted, long-term solutions that can grow and evolve with organizations is critical.

High costs and complexity may be barriers: In addition to concerns around expense (45%), associations also perceive blockers with data extraction (47%), legacy dependencies (42%) and misalignment within the leadership team (45%).

- All 5 interviews called out cost as a top concern for platform changes and cite different combinations of underuse of platform functionality, leadership resistance, along with concerns around timing of changes to fit within busy schedules and ongoing events.

Holistic visibility on key metrics is limited: Interviews revealed that while core metrics around membership numbers is fairly strong, there were gaps around areas of content engagement, education and training, email, and social media. This presents challenges for teams in terms of knowing what's working and how to best keep members engaged.

Need consistent ways to provide value outside of events and conferences: There was a theme across the interviews that associations have strong participation for key events but then lose connection during periods in between. In one case (Association for Jewish Studies) members would only join in preparation for their annual conference and then cancel afterwards.



Go-To-Markets Motions



QUOTES

Go-To-Markets Motions

“We have fairly high churn and have to deal with members only applying to attend our conference.”

– Warren Hoffman (Association for Jewish Studies)

“We deal with strict limitations on what we can access from our membership database which is 13+ years old.”

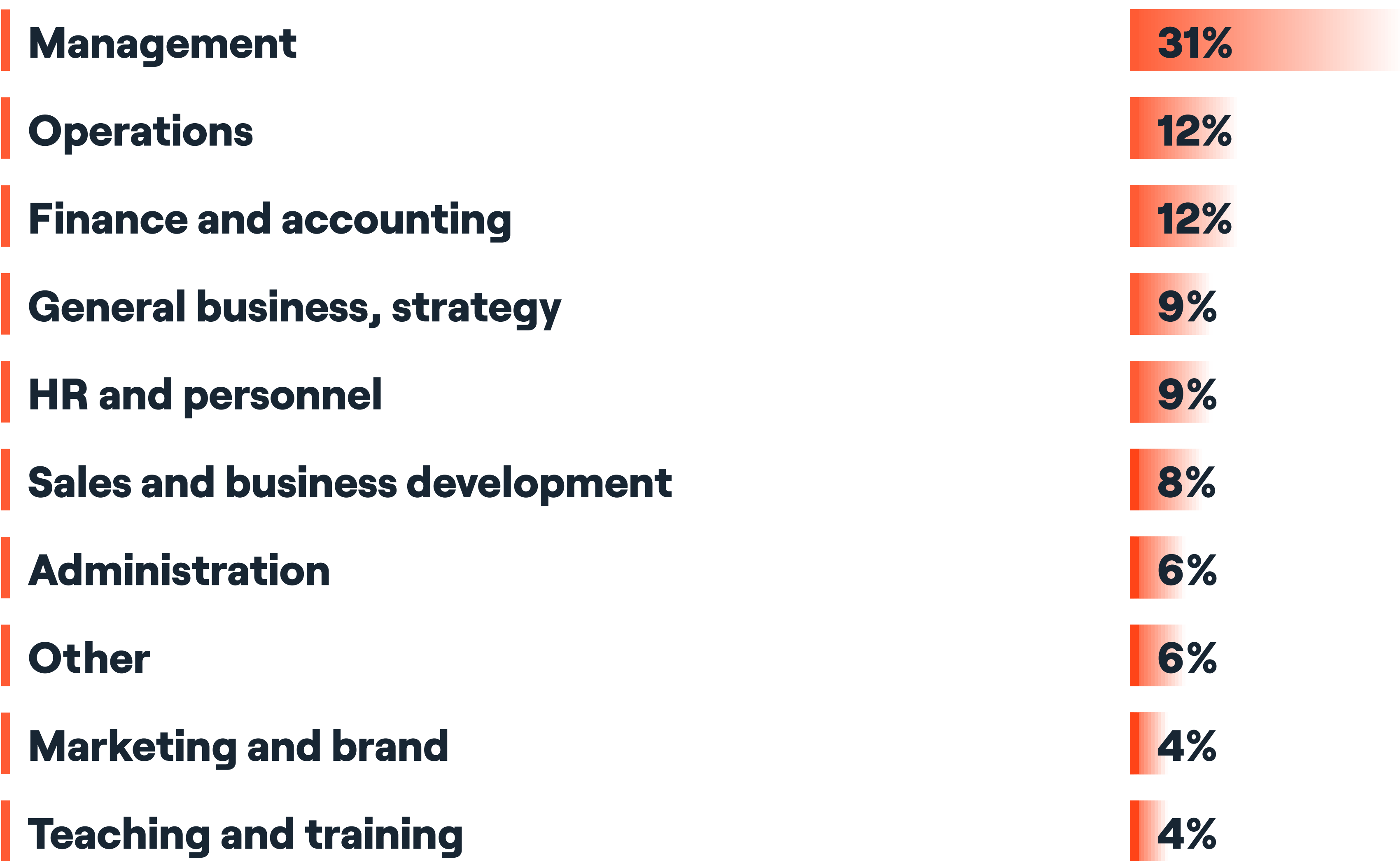
– Sharon Karina (Illinois Council of Health-System Pharmacists)

“Our marketing is mainly on LinkedIn and through the use of highly targeted emails so that we can customize messages per segment.”

– Anthony Rollo (Money Management Institute)

Which of these functions most aligns with your role and responsibilities within your association?

Almost all of the “Other” selections are IT / Information Technology.



Large: Business Strategy 51%, Sales and biz dev 46%

Approximately how many members does your professional or trade association have in total?

Overall responses were 60% at 1000 members and under, and 40% over 1000 members.

Note: we were able to screen out responses from associations with under 100 members as that was noted to be outside the optimal target range.



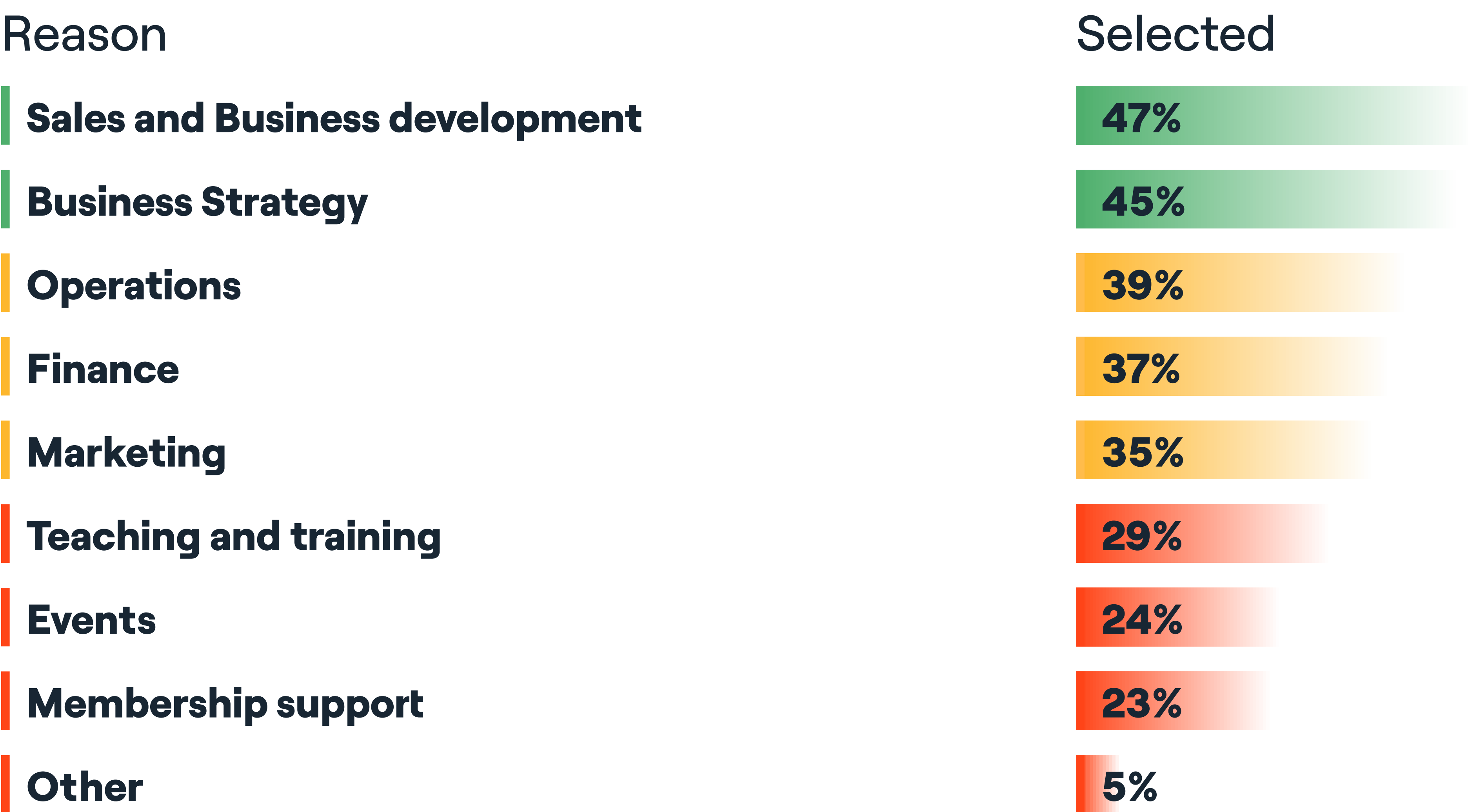
Strategy: 1001-5000 30%, 501-1000 24%, 101-250 13%

Marketing: 501-1000 30%, 251-500 21%, 1001-5000 21%

What teams in your organization are involved in your Go-To-Market efforts?

(i.e. driving membership or revenue growth)? (select all that apply)

Almost all of the “Other” selections are IT / Information Technology.



Large: Business Strategy 51%, Sales and biz dev 46%

Strategy: Business Strategy 63%, Sales and biz dev 53%

Marketing: Sales and biz dev 72%, Marketing 41%

What metrics or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) or metrics are used most to assess the health and success of the organization?

(select up to 5)

Outside of revenue growth (51%) the dominant focus for associations is around keeping members satisfied (43%) and retained (36%).



Large: Revenue Growth 53%, Membership satisfaction 44%, DEI 38%

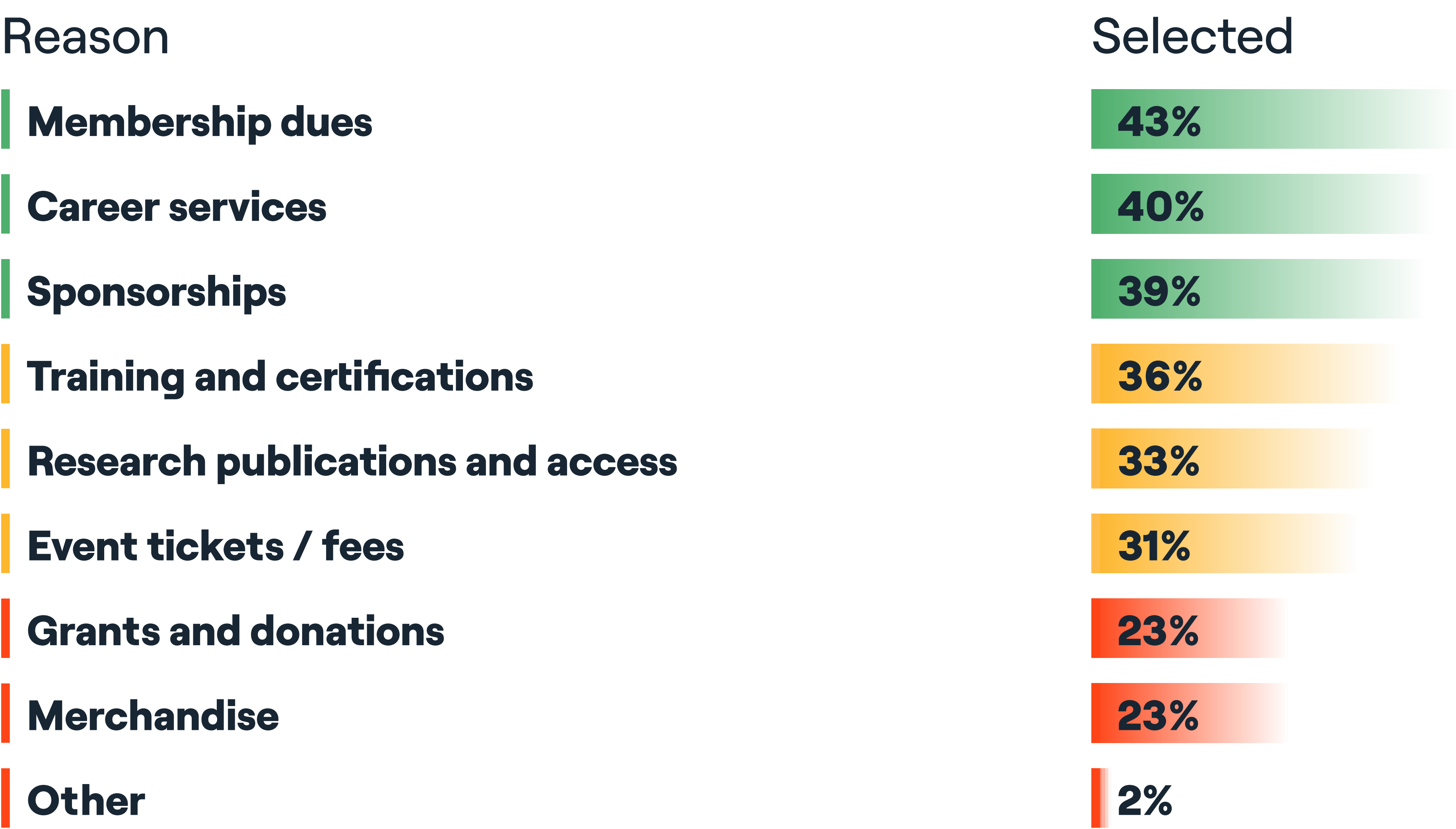
Strategy: Revenue Growth 58%, Membership satisfaction 50%, Retention 38%

Marketing: Website and portal engagement 45%, Revenue growth 42%

What are the primary sources of revenue for the organization?

(select up to 3)

“Other” responses mention paid services and products offered by the association.



Large: Sponsorships 45%, Career services 42%, Dues 41%

Strategy: Dues 46%, Career services 45%, Sponsorships 40%

Marketing: Dues 41%, Merchandise 38%, Sponsorships 31%

What marketing channels or sales motions are used most to reach your target audience segments?

(select up to 3)

Overall, digital marketing with social (57%), email (38%), and ads (32%) are much more dominant than direct sales (23%).



Large: Social media 57%, Email 40%, Organic / SEO 30%

Strategy: Social media 61%, Email 39%, Online ads 27%

Marketing: Social media 52%, Online ads 41%, Email 34%



GO-TO-MARKETS MOTIONS

Key Insights

With business strategy and sales roles being the most common parts of GTM functions for associations (45–51%), and in turn driving decision making, it will be key to make sure they're represented in any sales discussions.

Outside of revenue growth, member focused KPIs of satisfaction (43%) and retention (36%) are top priorities and should be highlighted in terms of support in marketing and sales materials. For Large associations, DEI (38%) support also ranks in the top 3.

While membership dues are the primary revenue source overall (43%) and for sub-1000 member associations, Sponsorships (45%) are at the top for Large associations.

Social media (57%) and email (38%) are the primary channels for GTM efforts. Support for their management will resonate with most association GTM teams. Large teams also include Organic / SEO / Content (30%) in their top 3.



Technology Stack



QUOTES

Technology Stack

“We use a mix of PayPal and cash payments, but it’s manual and not tied into our AMS.”

– **Evan Mullins (Southwest Virginia Contractor’s Alliance)**

“Our email communication is within our AMS. It allows us to filter by member type.”

– **Mark Gaeckle (American Association for Post Acute Care)**

“We’ve tried to engage members in our AMS feed (YourMembership) but our members prefer to just use Google Groups.”

– **Warren Hoffman (Association for Jewish Studies)**

What AMS (Association Management Software) does your organization use?

Very segmented space overall but notable that 8% don't use an AMS and 7% have built their own.

Reason	Selected
GrowthZone	10%
MemberSuite	10%
Higher Logic	9%
Fonteva	8%
MemberClicks	8%
We don't use an AMS	8%
We built our own in-house solution	7%
YourMembership	6%
iMIS	6%
Causeway	5%
WildApricot	5%
NimbleAMS	4%
ThreeSixty	4%
Aptify	4%
Hivebrite	3%
NOVI	2%
Glue Up	1%
Other	0%

Large: Higher Logic 13%, MemberSuite 12%

Strategy: Fonteva 13%, GrowthZone 13%

Marketing: We don't use an AMS 17%, In-house solution 17%, Higher Logic 10%

What CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platform does your organization use?

CRM is a consolidated space with 63% using either Salesforce (34%) or Microsoft (29%). Only 8% are currently using Hubspot.



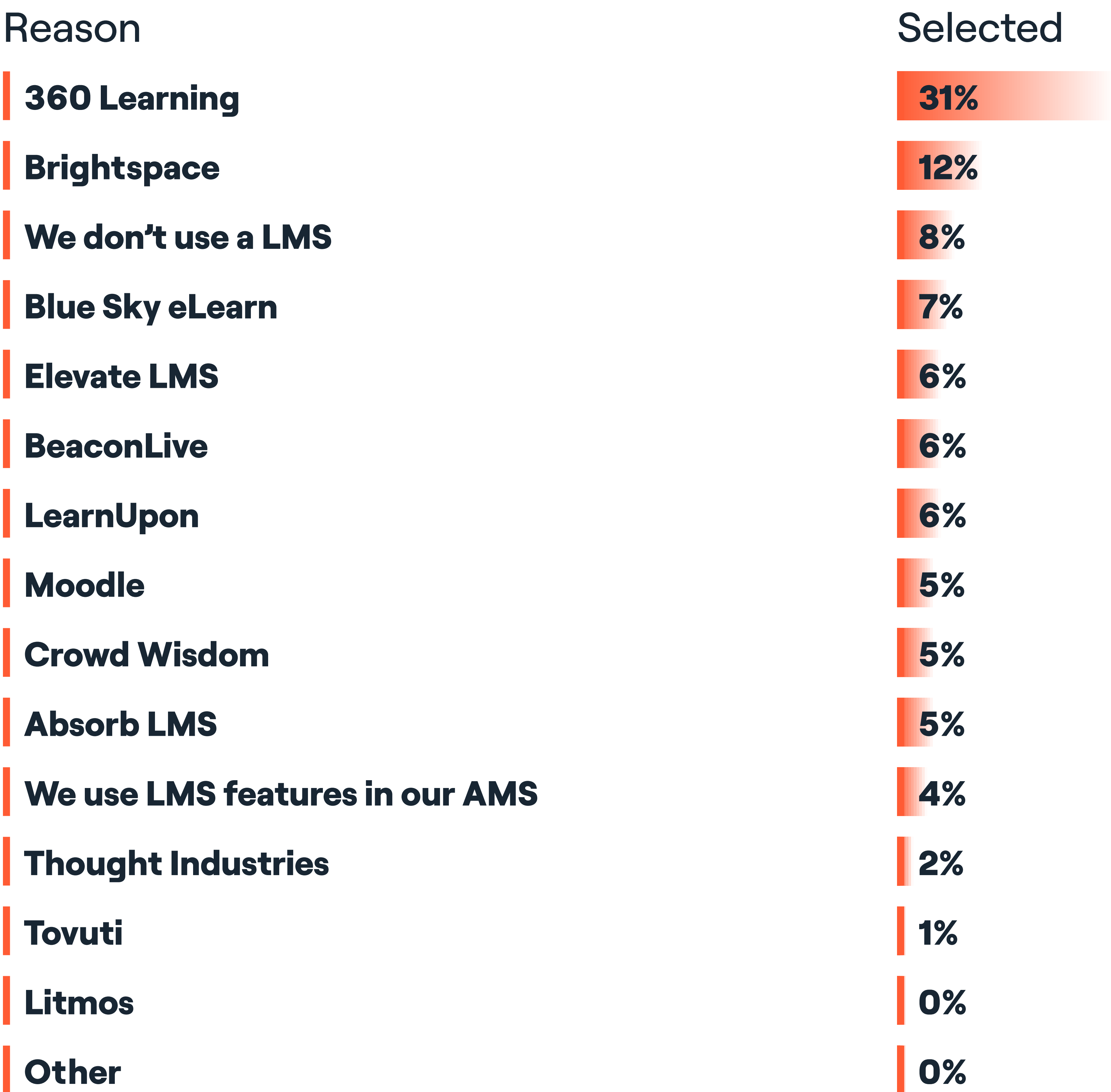
Large: Salesforce 36%, Microsoft 33%

Strategy: Salesforce 36%, Microsoft 29%

Marketing: Salesforce 38%, Microsoft 21%

What LMS (Learning Management System) does your organization use?

360 Learning (31%) is the only option with a notable share of associations.



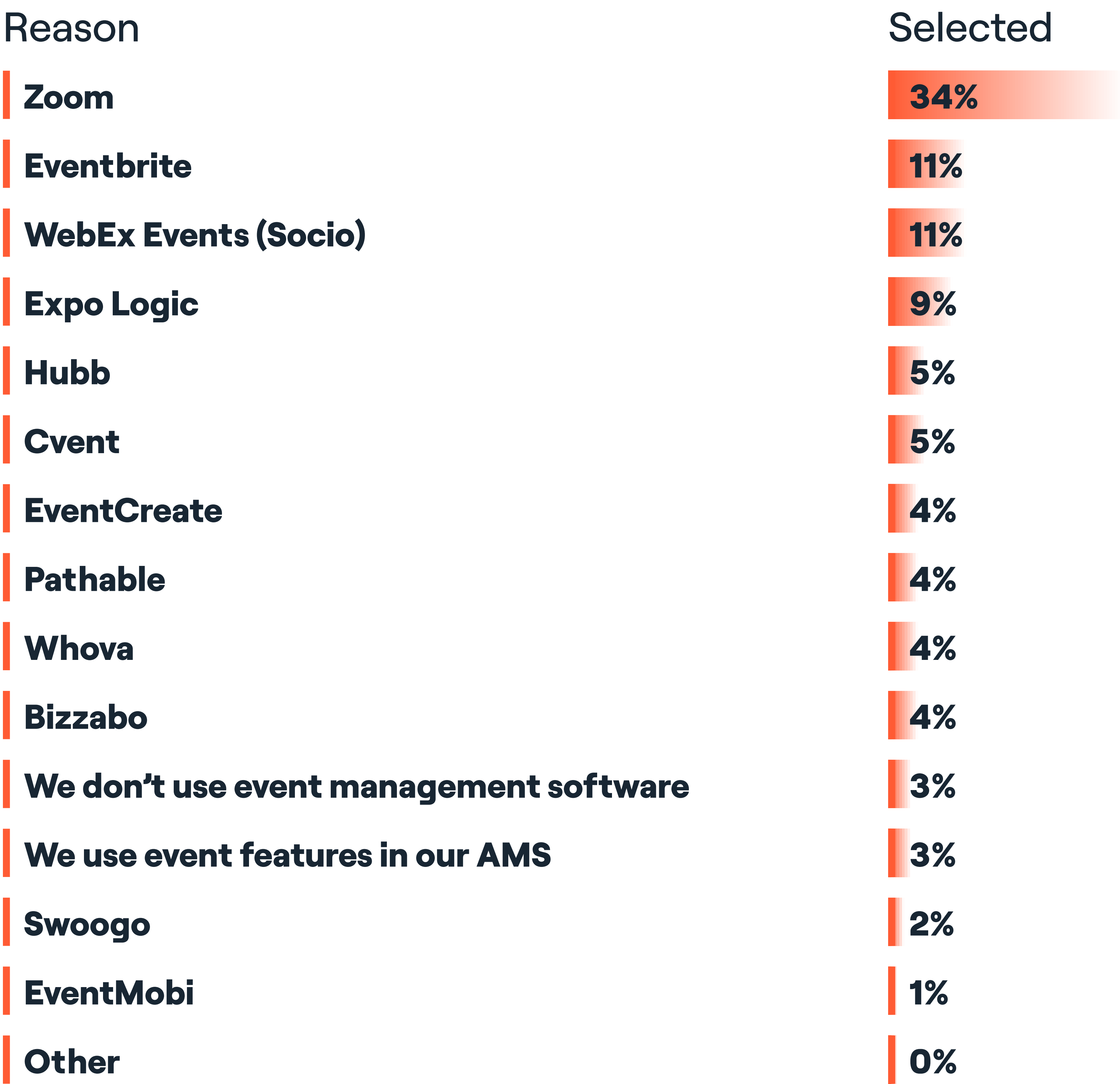
Large: 360 Learning 34%, Brightspace 14%

Strategy: 360 Learning 42%, Brightspace 14%

Marketing: 360 Learning 21%, We don't use a LMS 17%

What event management software does your organization use?

Zoom (34%) is the only option with a notable share of associations.



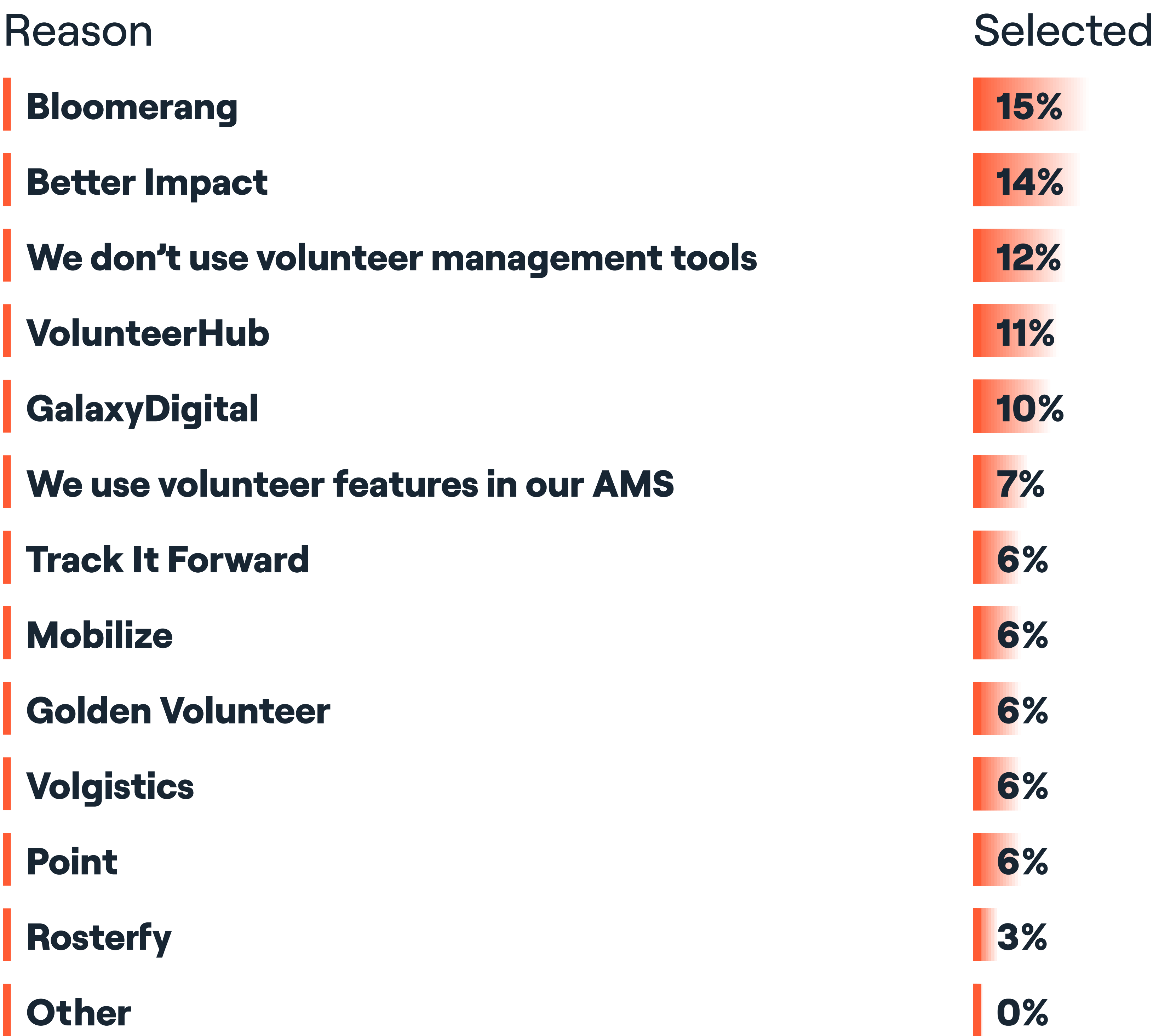
Large: Zoom 36%, Eventbrite 14%

Strategy: Zoom 36%, Eventbrite 11%

Marketing: Zoom 24%, Eventbrite 14%

What volunteer management tools does your organization use?

Almost 20% either don't use volunteer software (12%) or use features in their AMS (7%)



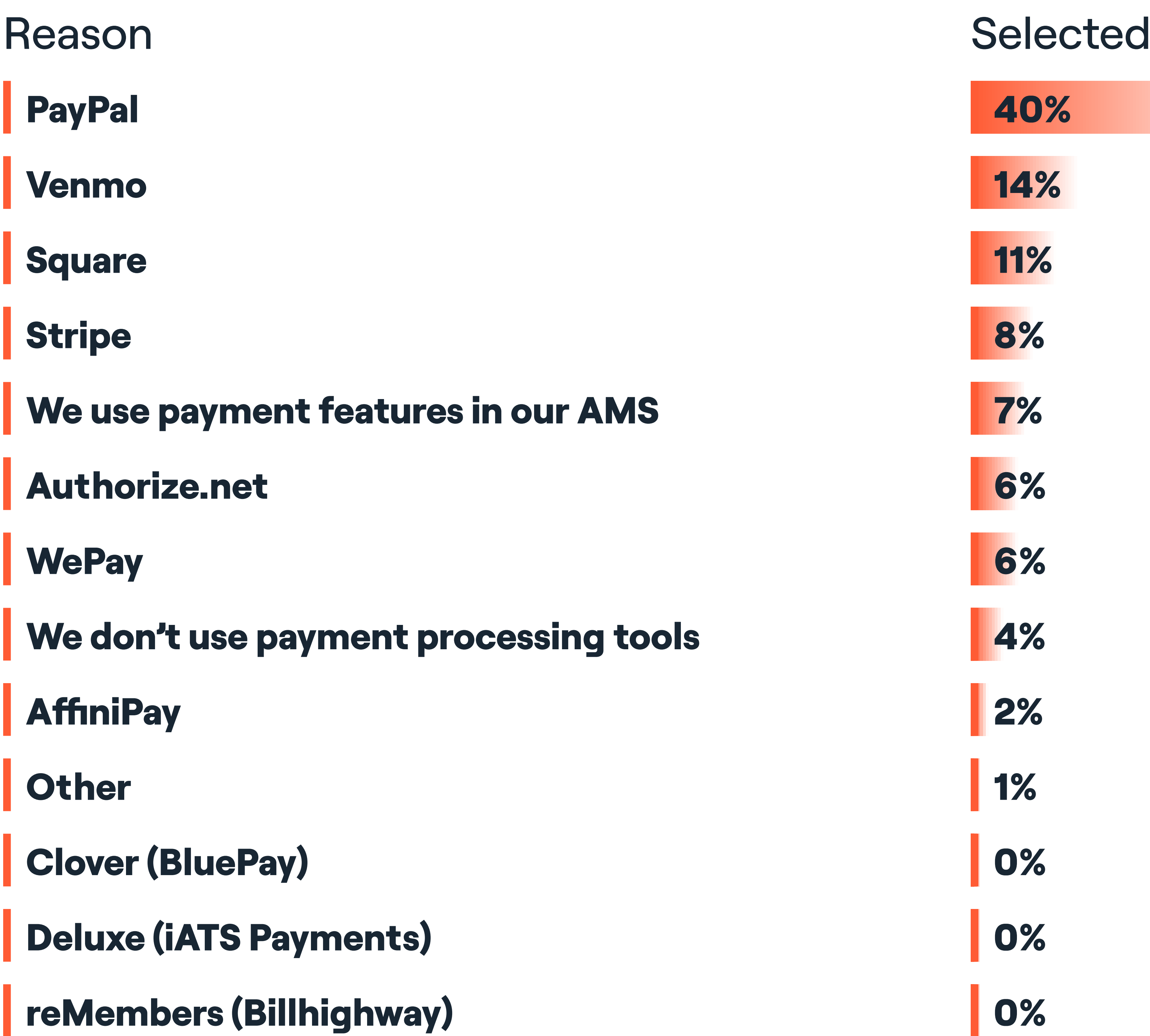
Large: Better Impact 17%, VolunteerHub 13%

Strategy: Better Impact 17%, Bloomerang 17%

Marketing: We don't use Volunteer management tools 21%, Volgistics 17%

What payment processing tools does your organization use?

Softer integration payment options: PayPal (40%), Venmo (14%), and Square (11%) are all stronger than options that typically involve backend integrations like Stripe (8%).



Large: PayPal 44%, Venmo 16%

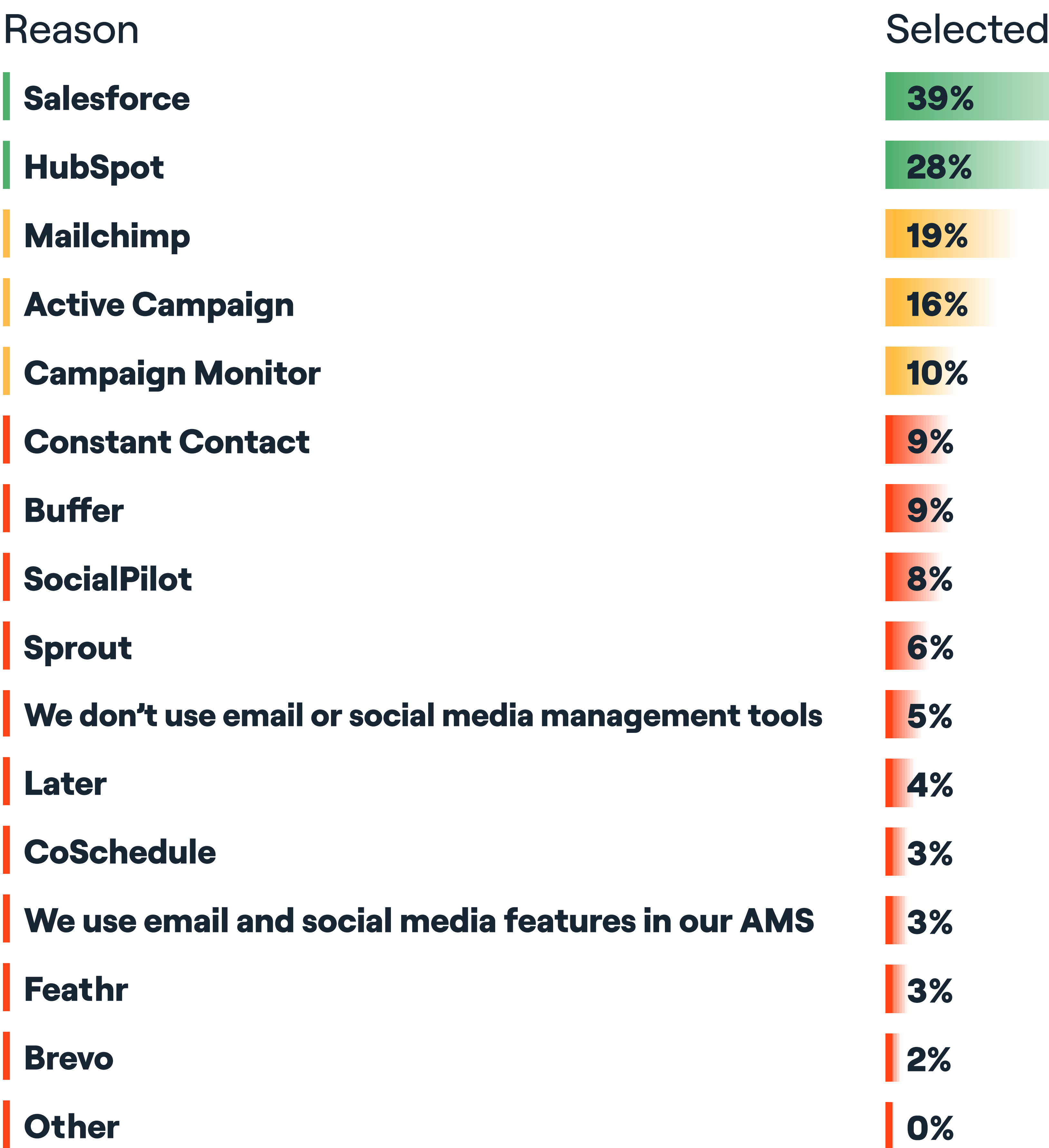
Strategy: PayPal 46%, Venmo 15%

Marketing: PayPal 28%, Square 21%

What email marketing and social media management tools does your organization use?

(select up to 2)

Integrated solutions like Salesforce (39%) and Hubspot (28%) are preferred over email-specific tools like Mailchimp (19%) and Active Campaign (16%)



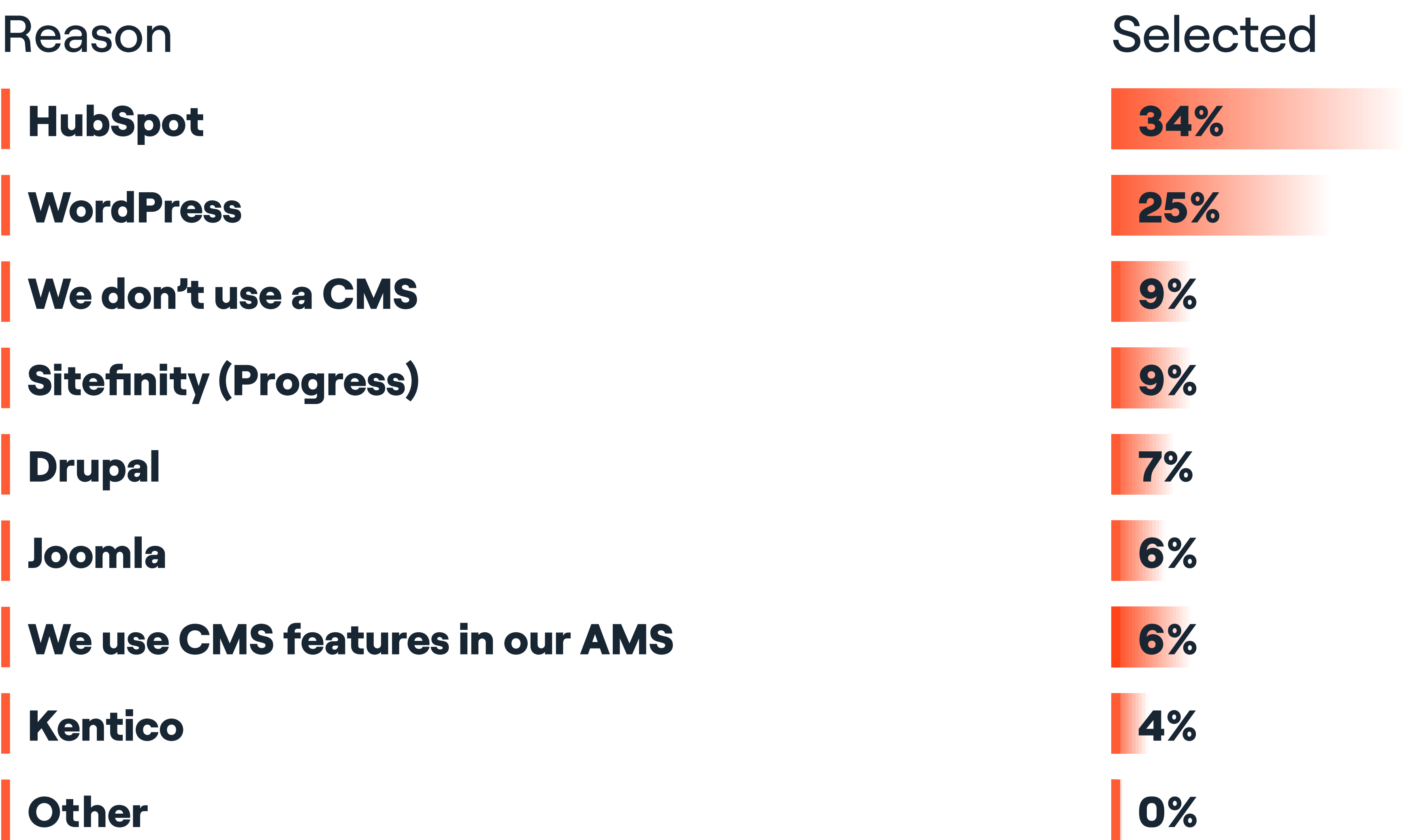
Large: Salesforce 39%, HubSpot 30%

Strategy: Salesforce 45%, HubSpot 33%

Marketing: Salesforce 41%, Buffer 31%, Hubspot 28%

What CMS (Content Management System) does your organization use?

Almost 60% use either Hubspot (34%) or WordPress (25%) for CMS.



Large: HubSpot 35%, WordPress 25%

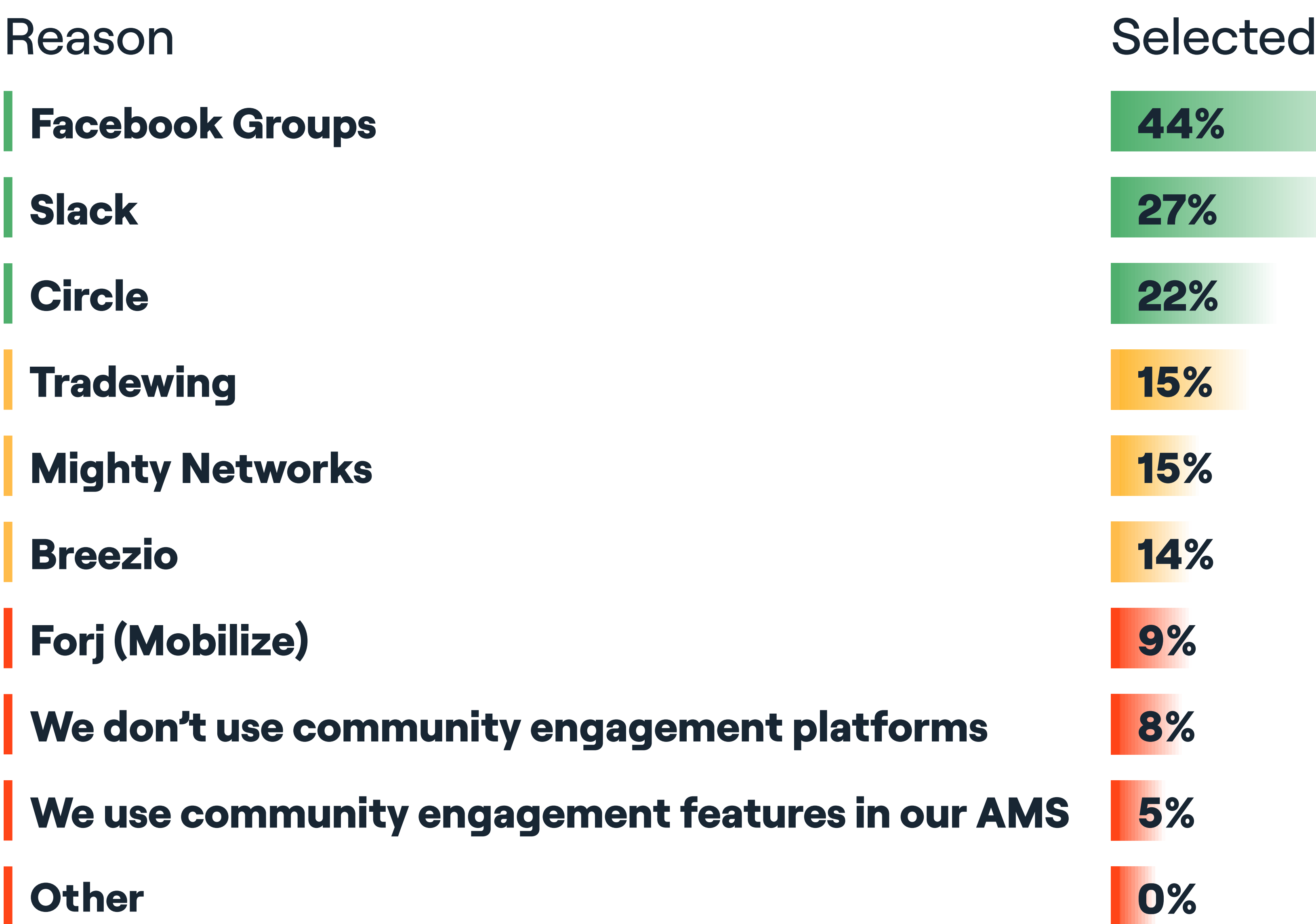
Strategy: HubSpot 35%, WordPress 27%

Marketing: HubSpot 24%, WordPress 17%

What community engagement platforms does your organization use?

(select up to 2)

Facebook (44%) and Slack (27%) are the most preferred options for community engagement, with Circle (22%) being the strongest community-specific solution.



Large: Facebook Groups 50%, Slack 32%

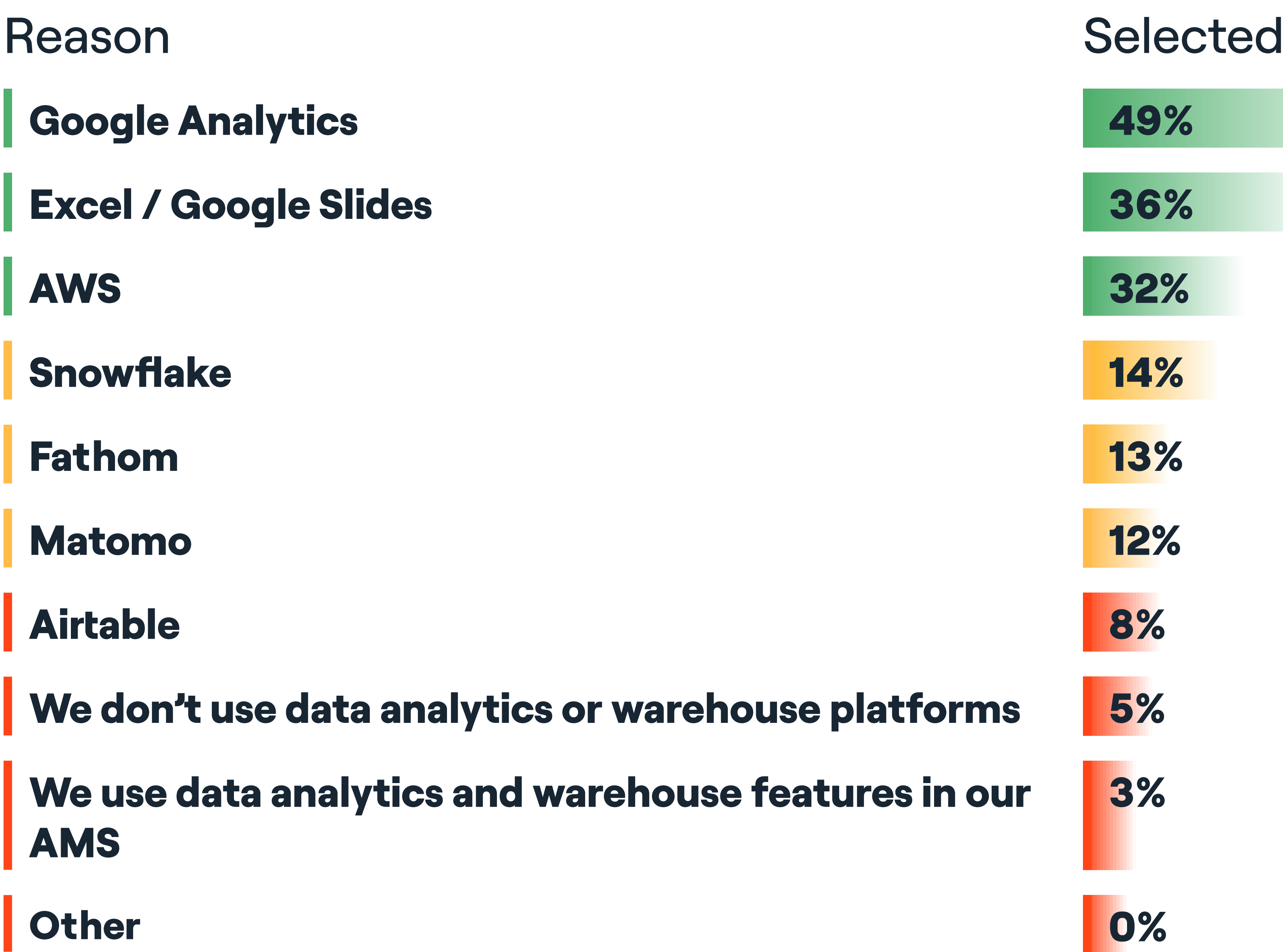
Strategy: Facebook Groups 43%, Slack 35%

Marketing: Facebook Groups 52%, Slack 17%

What data analytics and data warehouse platforms does your organization use?

(select up to 2)

Google Analytics (49%) is the dominant option for associations, while Google Sheets (36%) is a strong 2nd for DIY options.



Large: Google analytics 53%, Excel / Sheets 40%

Strategy: Google analytics 58%, AWS 39%

Marketing: Google analytics 45%, Excel / Sheets 34%, AWS 34%



TECHNOLOGY STACK

Key Insights

Despite being positioned as all-in-one tools, AMS solutions are not generally used across all key tech stack functions. They do focus on some key KPIs like member engagement and retention however this is largely connected to online community spaces, email campaigns, and analytics.

- There are strong opportunities to show how AMS solutions fall short in terms of providing a unified tech stack experience.

Overall, large, market leader tech brands like Salesforce, Microsoft, Zoom, Google are leaders for associations – and more specifically are used even more with Large associations. This helps paint a clear picture of associations generally playing it safe with known, trusted brands.

- Showing ease of integration with these solutions will be key from a marketing and sales perspective.

With CRM, Salesforce (34%) and Microsoft (29%) are the top choices for associations – only 8% listed Hubspot – which creates a strong opening for presenting Hubspot as an easier, more robust option.

Hubspot is one of the top options in email marketing (28%) and CMS (34%) so there may also be opportunities to take existing users and expand with more custom functionality.



Biggest Challenges



QUOTES

Biggest Challenges

“We need better access to data to help guide our strategy.”

– Sharon Karina (Illinois Council of Health-System Pharmacists)

“There’s a struggle around lack of participation especially due to generation gaps with older members.”

– Evan Mullins (Southwest Virginia Contractor’s Alliance)

“Bloomerang doesn’t sync with our AMS so we have to rely on Zapier to create our own process.”

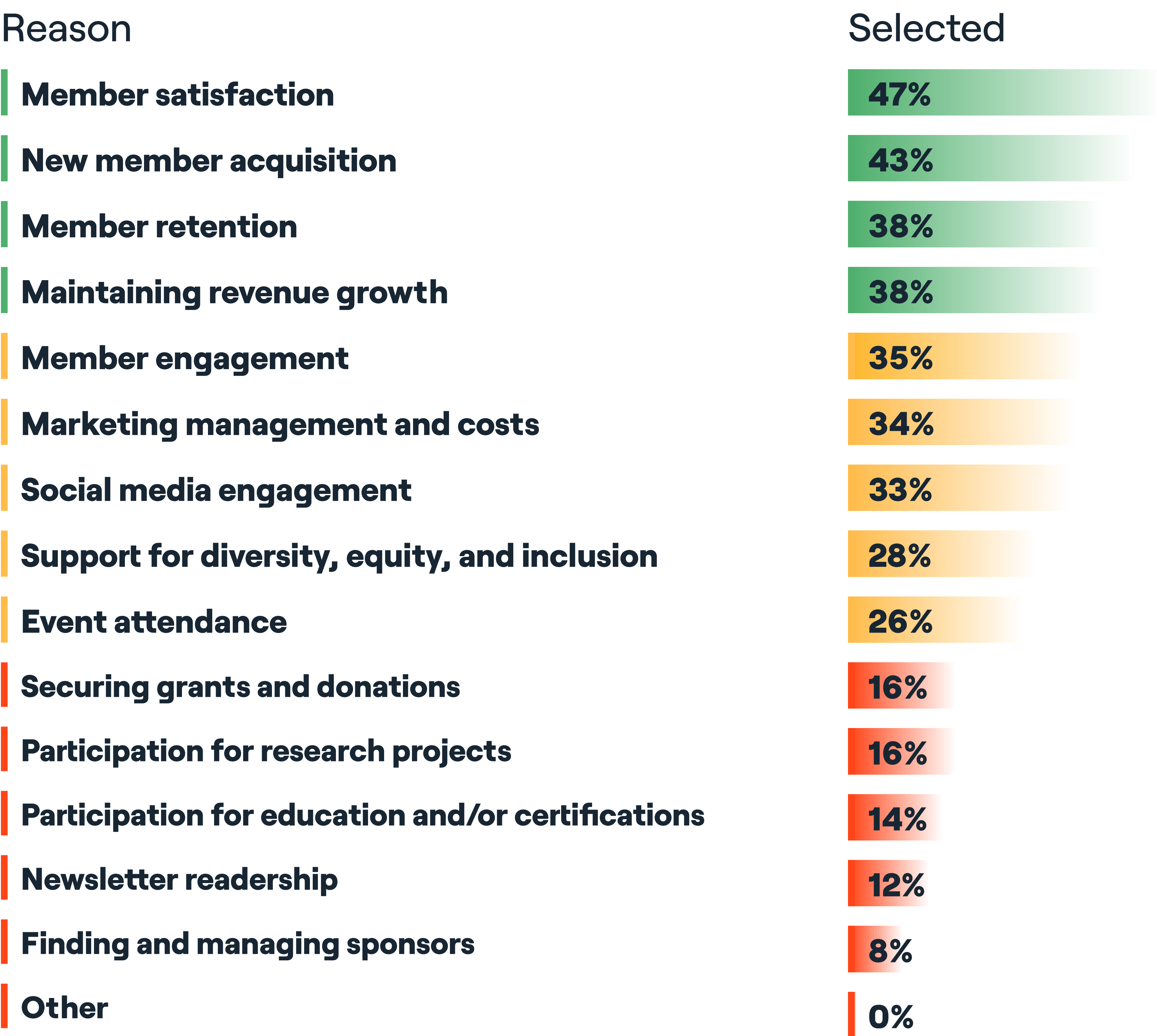
– Warren Hoffman (Association for Jewish Studies)

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What are the biggest Go-To-Market (i.e. driving membership and revenue growth) challenges for your organization?

(select up to 5)

Similar to the most common KPIs, outside of revenue (38%) the biggest GTM challenges center on member satisfaction (47%), acquisition (43%) and retention (38%)



Large: New member acquisition 49%, Satisfaction 49%, Engagement 41%

Strategy: Satisfaction 52%, New member acquisition 46%, Revenue growth 45%

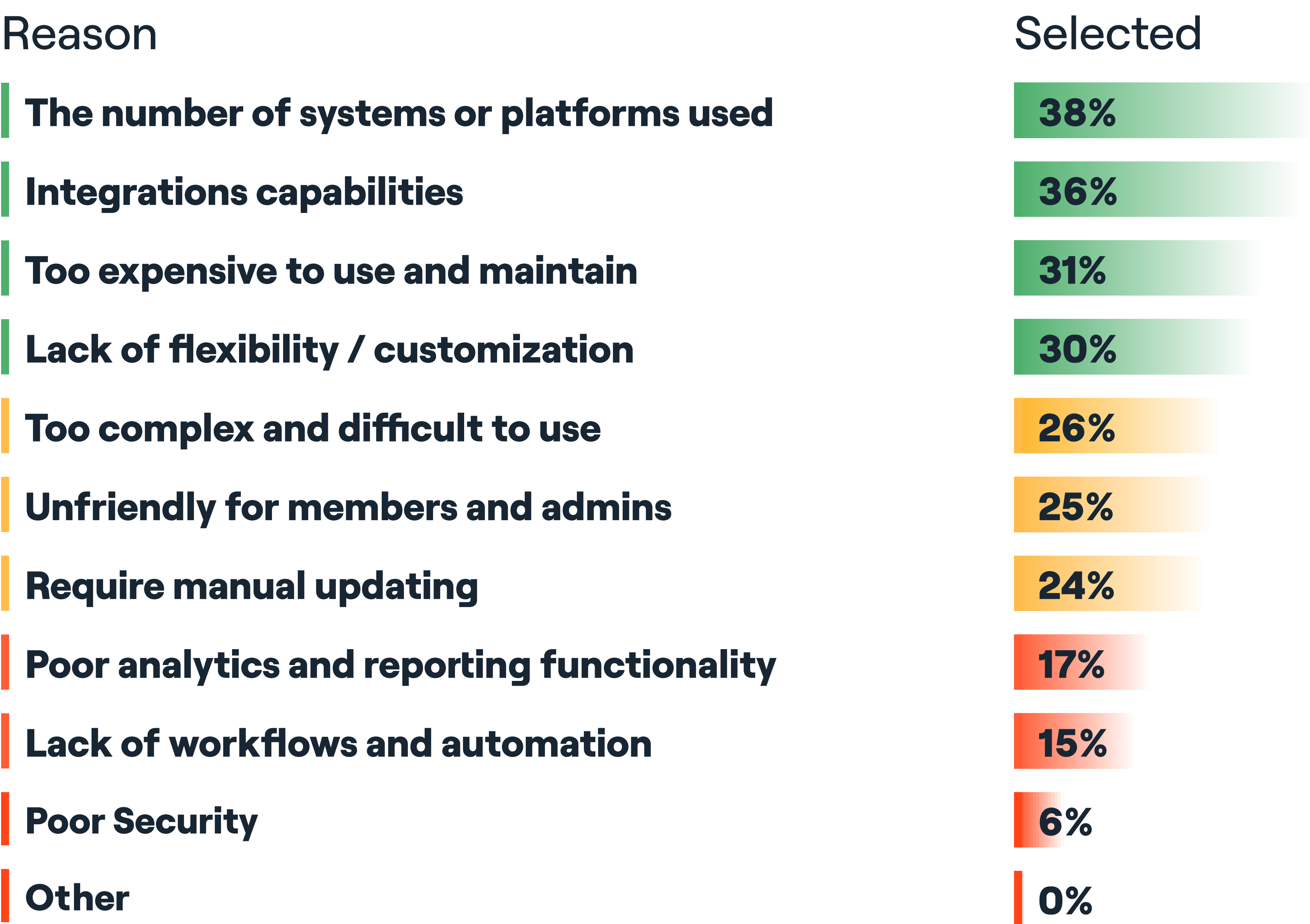
Marketing: Social media management 41%, Revenue growth 38%, New member acquisition 38%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What are the biggest weaknesses or limitations of the systems and platforms you use to manage your organization?

(select up to 3)

The related issues of having too many systems (38%) and integrating them (36%) are the biggest weaknesses of association tech stacks.



Large: Number of systems used 43%, Lack of flexibility 38%

Strategy: Number of systems used 45%, Integrations 41%

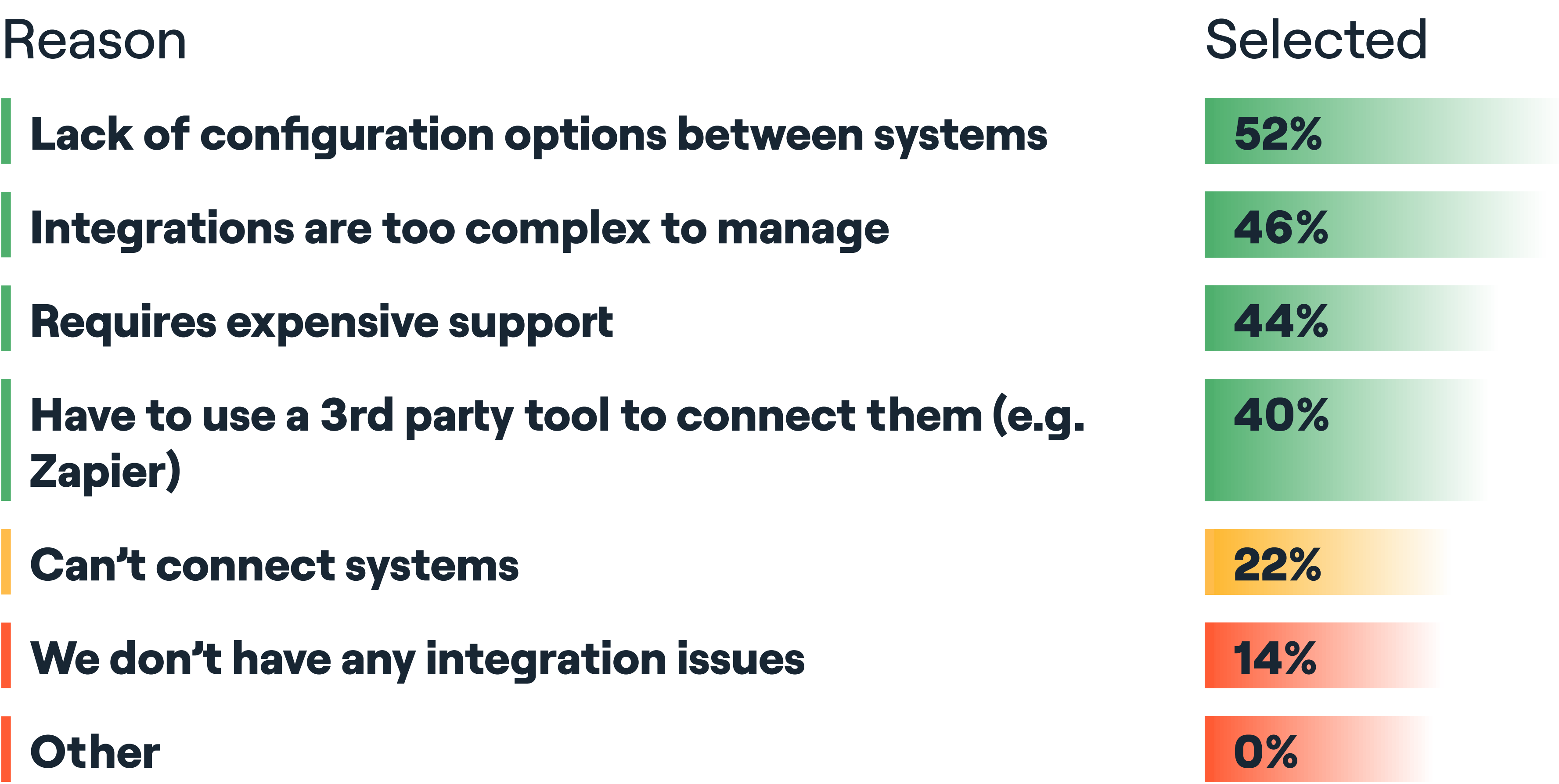
Marketing: Number of systems used 48%, Lack of flexibility 34%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What are the biggest weaknesses you have when integrating the systems and platforms you use to manage your organization?

(select up to 3)

The related issues of having too many systems (38%) and integrating them (36%) are the biggest weaknesses of association tech stacks.



Large: Lack of configuration options 52%, Integrations too complex 51%

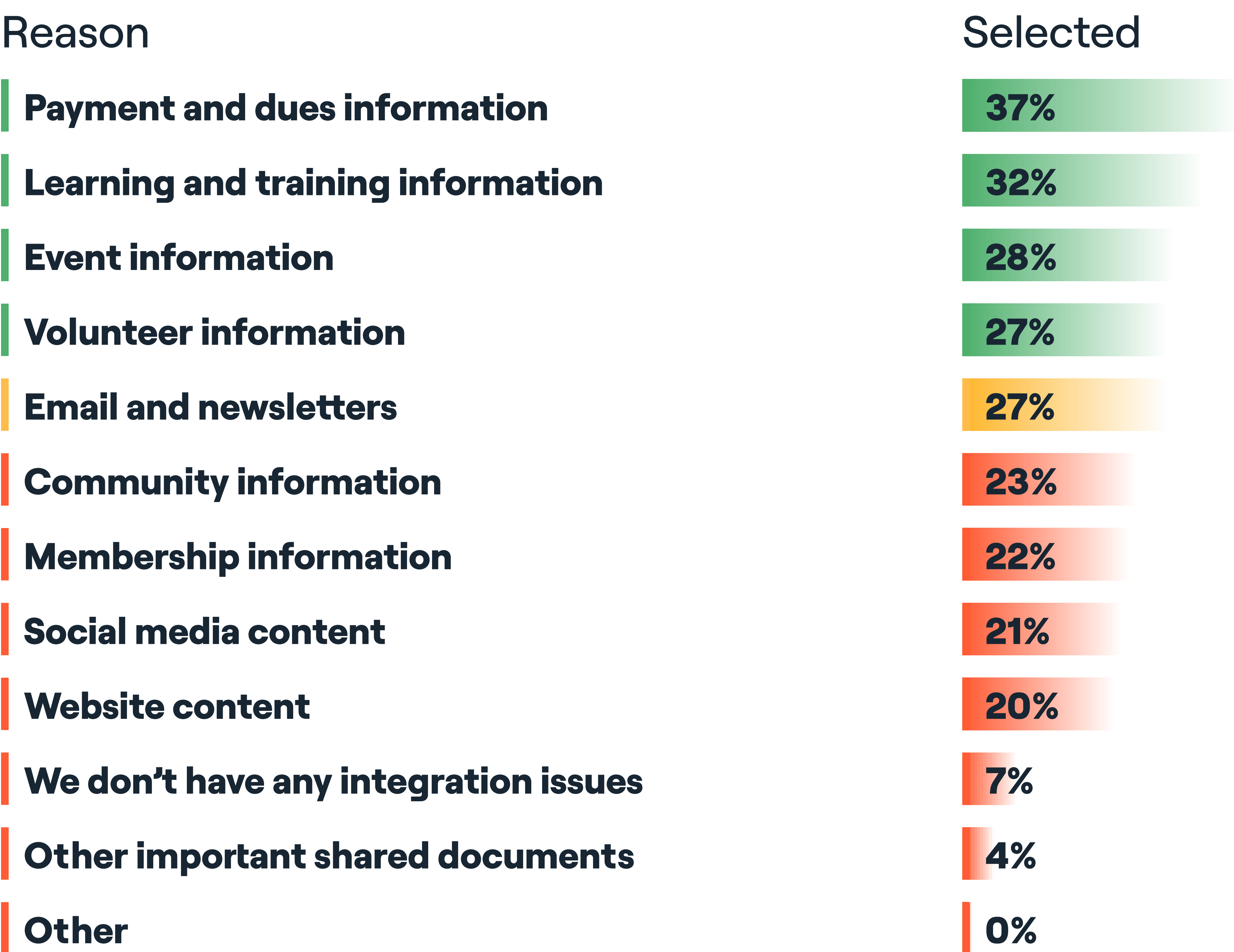
Strategy: Lack of configuration options 62%, Expensive support 49%

Marketing: Integrations too complex 48%, Expensive support 41%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What areas of your organization’s systems and platforms have the biggest integration issues?

(select up to 3)



Large: Learning and training 36%, Payment and dues 34%

Strategy: Payment and dues 39%, Learning and training 35%

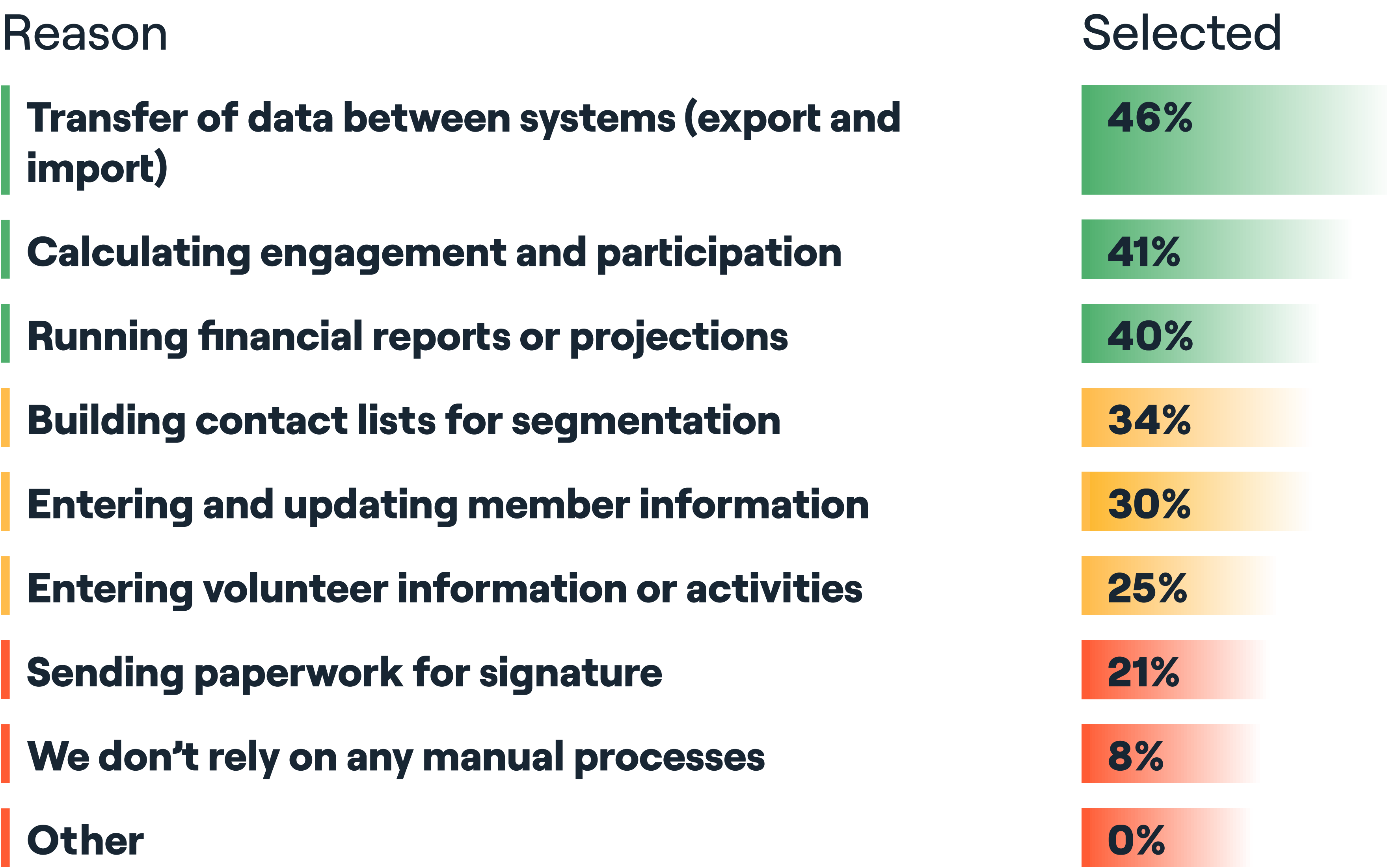
Marketing: Payment and dues 34%, Event information 31%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What types of manual processes are required as a result of your systems or platforms not integrating properly?

(select up to 3)

Integration issue of transferring data between systems (46%) is the biggest manual challenge followed by member engagement metrics (41%) and financial reports (40%)



Large: Running financial reports 47%, Calculating engagement 47%, Transfer data 46%

Strategy: Transfer data 52%, Running financial reports 47%, Calculating engagement 42%

Marketing: Transfer data 52%, Building contact lists for segmentation 31%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

How confident are you overall in the accuracy and quality of your organization’s data (i.e. members, finances, events, etc.)?

Despite the challenges, 84% said that they were Extremely (43%) or Very (41%) confident in their data accuracy.



Large: Extremely confident 46%, Very confident 39%

Strategy: Very confident 44%, Extremely confident 43%

Marketing: Very confident 55%, Extremely confident 34%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What one technology tool, platform, or service causes the most frustration for your organization?

Reason	Selected
AMS (Association Management Software)	25%
Payment processing tool	13%
None of our technology causes frustration	11%
Volunteer management tool	9%
Email marketing and social media management tool	9%
LMS (Learning Management System)	8%
Event management software	8%
CMS (Content Management System)	8%
Data analytics and/or data warehouse solution	6%
Community engagement platform	3%
Other:	0%

Large: AMS 22%, Volunteer management 14%, Payment processing 12%

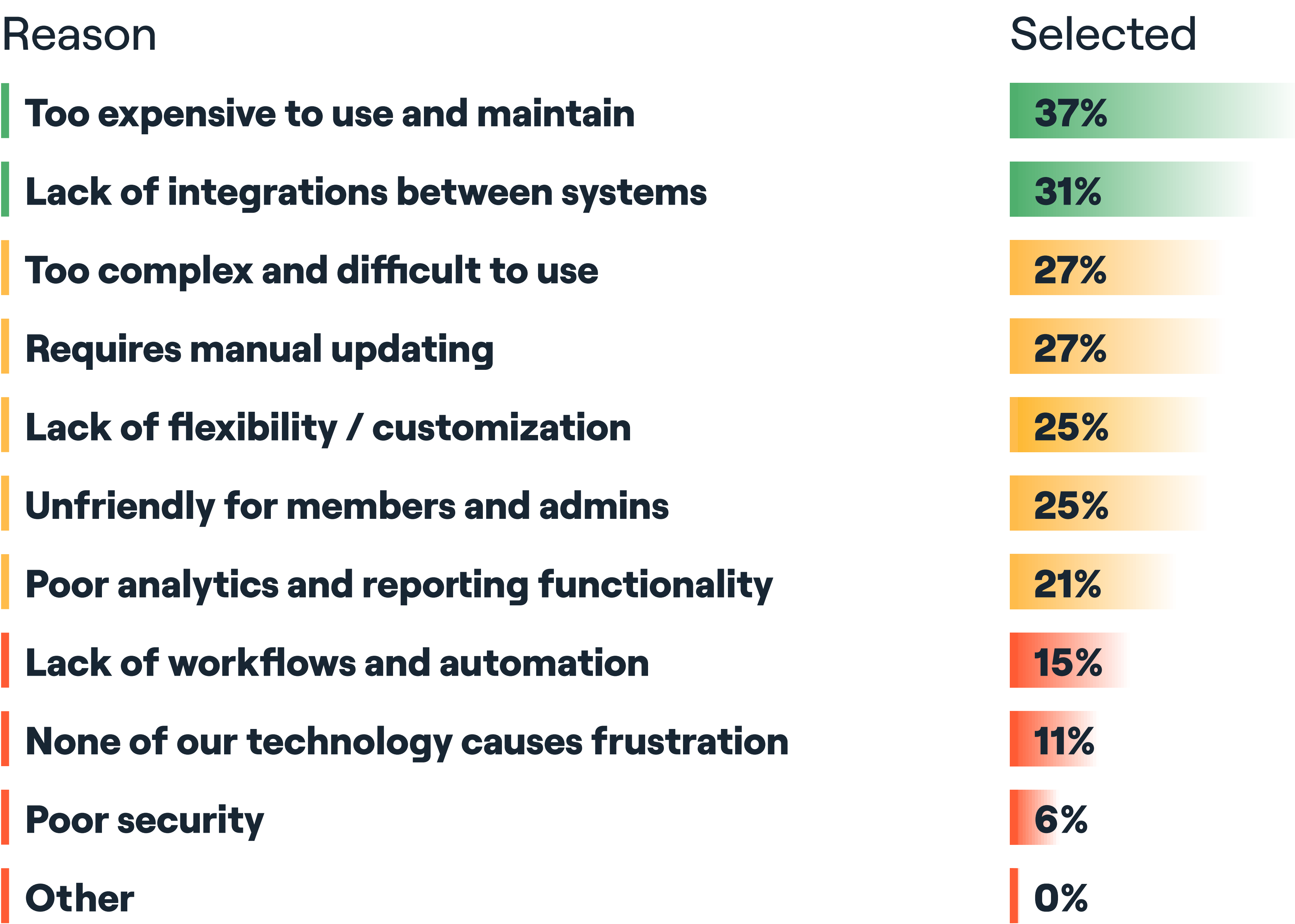
Strategy: AMS 30%, Payment processing 11%, LMS 10%

Marketing: Email marketing 21%, AMS 17%, Volunteer management 14%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What are the main factors causing frustration with that tool, platform, or service?

(select up to 3)



Large: Too expensive to use 41%, Lack of integrations 36%

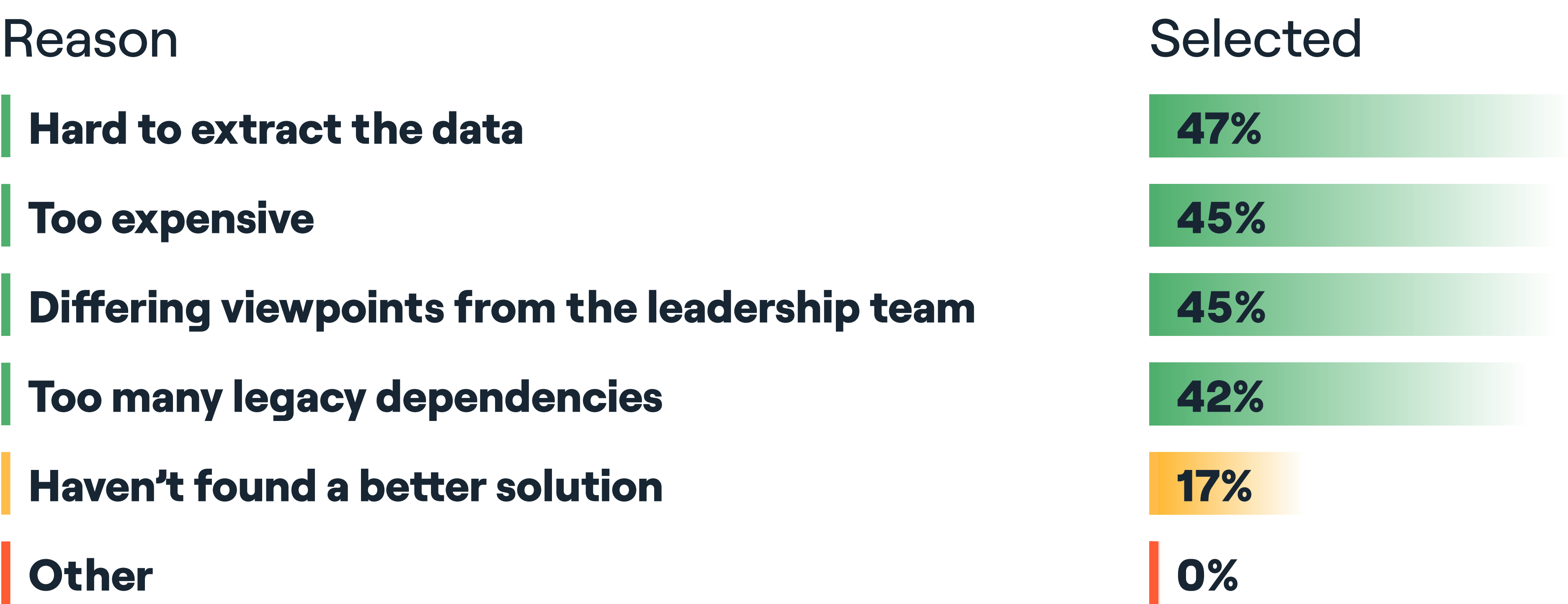
Strategy: Lack of integrations 43% Too expensive to use 35%

Marketing: Too complex 45%, Too expensive 38%

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What has prevented your organization from replacing the system that causes the most frustration?

(select up to 3)



Large: Hard to extract data 49%, Too many legacy dependencies 48%, Too expensive 48%, Differing viewpoints 48%

Strategy: Too many legacy dependencies 52%, Hard to extract data 51%, Differing viewpoints 50%, Too expensive 39%

Marketing: Too expensive 45%, Hard to extract data 45%, Differing viewpoints 28%, Haven't found a better solution 28%



BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Key Insights

Similar to the KPI focus, member-centric needs – satisfaction (47%), acquisition (43%) and retention (38%), and engagement (41%) for Large associations – are all noted as the biggest challenges for associations above or equal to revenue growth (38%).

- This creates a very strong framing for how services should be positioned – through a lens of growing, supporting, and retaining members.

Tech stacks are extremely fragmented for associations, and this leads to their biggest challenges around the number of platforms used (38%) and the difficulty with integrations (36%).

Integrations specifically fail around the inability for systems to communicate (52%) and the complexity of creating connections (46%). Custom solutions present an ideal option to help overcome this problem.

Offering ways to simplify the integration issue of collection of payments and dues (37%) and training information (32%) are top integration pain points to help address.



BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Key Insights

The biggest manual effort pain points include import/export of data (46%), calculating engagement (41%), and running financial reports (40%). However for Large associations financial reports jump up to 47%. These sort of consistent pain points would be excellent entry points in terms of marketing and sales efforts.

Despite all of their tech challenges, overall confidence in data accuracy is quite high with 84% saying they were either extremely (43%) or very confident (41%). So this specific angle may not play a big role compared to other pain points.

Frustration with platforms is quite segmented but AMS solutions lead the way at 25%.

- Expense (37%) and again integration challenges (31%) are the top issues.

Challenges preventing replacement are fairly evenly distributed across: extraction of data (47%), expense (45%), leadership opinions (45%), and legacy dependencies (42%).