NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SALES ENGINEERS

SALES ENGINEERING SIGNALS 2025

Structure, Impact, and Emerging Trends

Insights from the NAASE Sales Engineering Survey
(N = 42 | December 2025 – January 2026)

A practitioner-led mini report on how SE teams are staffed, measured, and evolving - the first in a series.

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Introduction

Sales engineering roles vary widely across industries, company sizes, and sales motions. How are SE teams being measured? How are they staffed? Where do practitioners believe they add the most value? Sales Engineering Signals 2025 is NAASE's practitioner-led mini report: a short survey paired with expert commentary to explore these questions and highlight emerging patterns. It is the first edition in a series.

Responses were collected December 16, 2025–January 5, 2026 (N = 42). The survey is voluntary and self-selected, so results are directional; treat them as signals for comparison and conversation, not as industry-wide benchmarks.

Figures 1 and 2 describe who responded and serve as context for interpreting the results that follow. Figure 1 shows an experienced sample: 52% report 10+ years in sales engineering, with the remainder across 0–2 years (19%), 3–5 years (12%), and 6–9 years (17%). Because tenure often correlates with scope and influence, some later figures segment results by experience to highlight where early-career and senior SEs diverge.

FIG 1. SALES ENGINEERING EXPERIENCE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

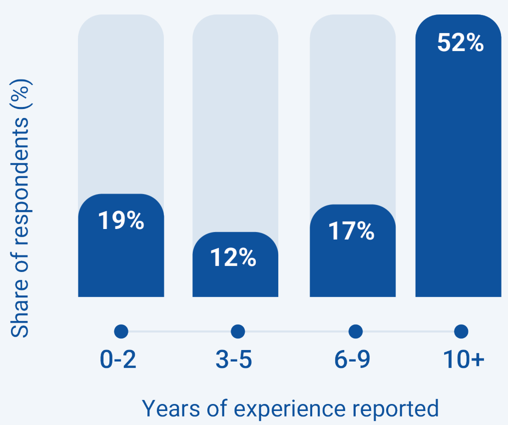
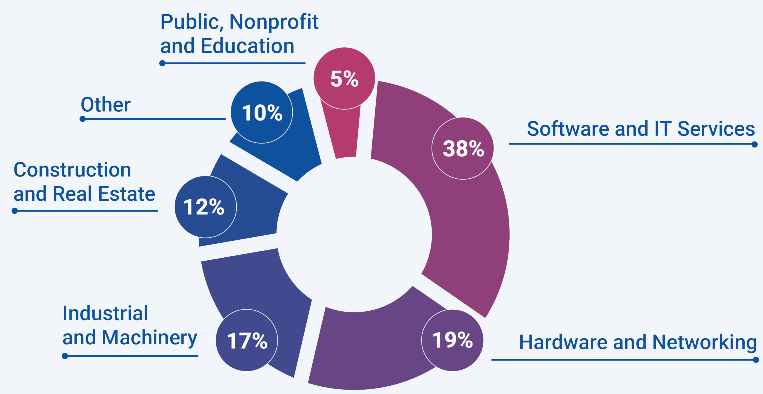


FIG 2. PRIMARY INDUSTRY OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



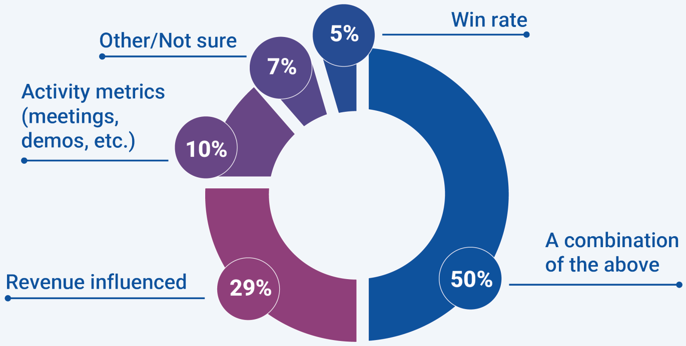
* Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Figure 2 shows a mix of industries: Software and IT Services (38%) and Hardware and Networking (19%) lead, alongside Industrial and Machinery (17%) and Construction and Real Estate (12%), plus Public, Nonprofit, and Education (5%) and other industries (10%). This mix helps distinguish themes that travel across markets from those shaped by product complexity, cycle length, and governance constraints.

The report covers evaluation and compensation signals, AE coverage models, role scope across the revenue cycle, measurable value, operational challenges, and AI adoption and guidance. Most figures include an expert lens to translate the data into practical implications. NAASE will build on this mini report with broader, data-backed research in future editions and use these signals to prioritize playbooks, learning, and community in 2026.

How Sales Engineers Are Evaluated

FIG 3. PRIMARY FACTOR AFFECTING PERFORMANCE REVIEWS OR COMPENSATION REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS



* Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

In this practitioner sample, half of the respondents say performance reviews or compensation turn on a combination of metrics; 29% point to revenue influence; 10% to activity measures; 5% to win rate; and 7% to other or "not sure." In other words, most teams treat evaluation as a portfolio of signals rather than a single scoreboard.

The distribution signals that most teams avoid single-number judgments. The reason is attribution: sales engineers can materially shape deals, yet revenue and win rate lag, and shared outcomes are often swayed by territory quality, product fit, and AE execution. But pure activity measures can reward motion without validating deal progress or customer impact. In complex sales cycles, SE impact may show up through earlier technical alignment, fewer late-stage surprises, or cleaner handoffs to delivery, benefits that are real but hard to isolate in one KPI. Hybrid scorecards are the pragmatic middle path, pairing outcomes with leading indicators and structured qualitative assessment, consistent with the logic of balanced scorecards [1].

For managers, rigor comes from design and communication: define what counts as "influenced" revenue, document expected behaviors (discovery quality, demo readiness, technical deal strategy), and calibrate ratings across leaders to protect fairness. Practical systems also use simple rubrics and examples so "good" looks consistent across regions and segments. Publish the weights up front and revisit them mid-year as roles and territories shift. On compensation, align pay mix to measurability. When individual impact cannot be cleanly instrumented, a more base-weighted plan with a smaller, team-aligned variable component can reduce noise and maintain credible incentives.

Expert Perspective

> ***Performance reviews are leaning toward a combination of elements, including win rates, activity metrics, and heavy revenue influence. Because few companies have clean instrumentation on sales engineer impact, team-level targets remain more common than individual ones.***

Diana Diaco Cervantes
Regional Sales Director
NAASE PRESIDENT

AE Coverage Models and Capacity Signals

FIG 4. NUMBER OF ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES CONCURRENTLY SUPPORTED BY ONE SALES ENGINEER

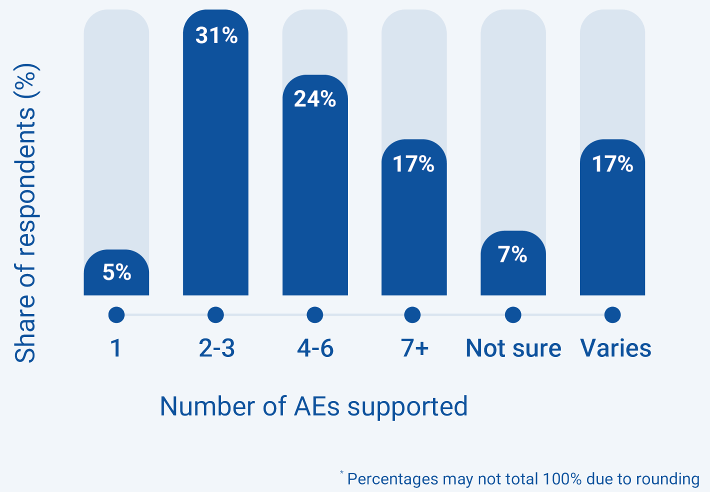


Figure 4 suggests that no single AE-to-SE ratio defines a “healthy” model. The most common configuration is 2–3 account executives per sales engineer (31%), followed by 4–6 (24%). Another 17% report supporting 7+ AEs, and 17% say the ratio varies, pointing to pooled or pod-based structures. Only 5% support a single AE.

The distribution reflects two distinct operating environments. Lower ratios are more typical in complex enterprise motions, where SEs must lead deep discovery, manage technical validation, and navigate multi-stakeholder alignment. Higher ratios are more common in SMB or higher-volume segments, where sales cycles are shorter and technical motions are more standardized. Industry research consistently shows that coverage design must align with deal complexity and expected seller productivity, rather than follow a universal benchmark.

Importantly, the variation in ratios suggests that AE coverage is a structural choice, not a fixed benchmark. Organizations appear to configure SE capacity differently depending on sales motion, team design, and resource constraints.

Rather than signaling a single “right” model, the data reflects diversity in how companies balance technical depth and scale.

Expert Perspective

> *2–3 AEs per SE being the largest group doesn’t surprise me. The 4–6 range typically reflects less complex, higher-volume sales cycles, such as SMB compared to enterprise. The ‘varies’ segment also highlights how differently teams are configured across companies.*

Sachin Wadhawan
Global Solutions Leader
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

> *This ratio feels healthy based on my experience. When an AE has constant access to an SE, over-dependence can creep in.*

Mary Carter
VP of Technology
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

SE Responsibilities Across the Revenue Cycle

FIG 5. CURRENT RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE SALES ENGINEER ROLE OF RESPONDENTS

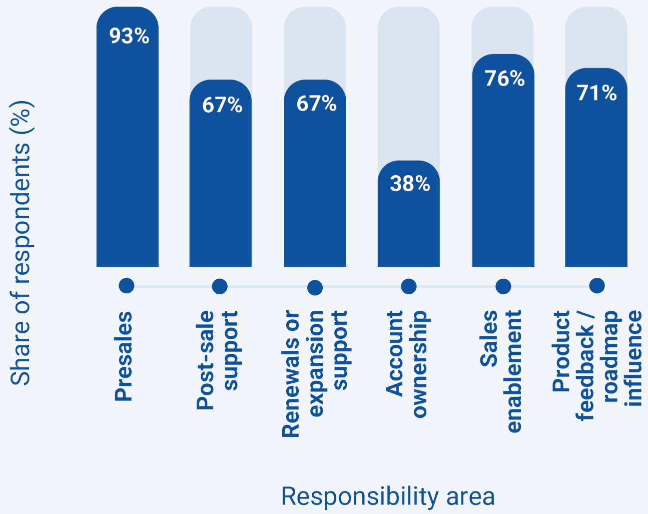


Figure 5 confirms what many practitioners already feel: the sales engineer role has expanded well beyond traditional presales. While 93% of respondents report presales responsibilities, substantial shares are also engaged in post-sale support (67%), renewals or expansion (67%), sales enablement (76%), and product feedback or roadmap influence (71%). More than a third (38%) report some level of account ownership.

This breadth signals strategic value, but also structural ambiguity. SEs are increasingly positioned as cross-functional connectors, bridging sales, customer success, and product. Industry research shows that high-performing revenue teams clarify technical selling responsibilities and formalize handoffs to protect focus and scalability [2]. When role boundaries blur, reactive post-sale work and "pseudo-CS" tasks can crowd out high-impact discovery, solution design, and deal shaping.

The data suggests that many SEs operate as generalists rather than specialized technical advisors. That model can work in smaller organizations, but at scale it risks diluting impact. Leaders may need to revisit which responsibilities are core to technical selling, which are shared, and which belong elsewhere. Clear operating models and escalation paths allow SEs to contribute strategically across the customer lifecycle without losing depth where it matters most: shaping complex, high-value deals before they close.

Expert Perspective

> *Looking at this scope, SEs are still positioned as generalists. If they are doing everything, nothing is prioritized. Leaders need to define what is core to technical selling and push non-core work back to product, CS, or enablement.*

Diana Diaco Cervantes
Regional Sales Director
NAASE PRESIDENT

> *This chart makes it clear SEs do much more than presales. Many teams also carry post-sale support, even though SEs typically don't own the account; they partner with an account manager or rep. NAASE recognizes this broader scope.*

Ken Lambert
Director of Structures
NAASE VICE-PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

How SEs Create Measurable Value

FIG 6. AREAS WHERE RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THEY DELIVER THE MOST MEASURABLE VALUE

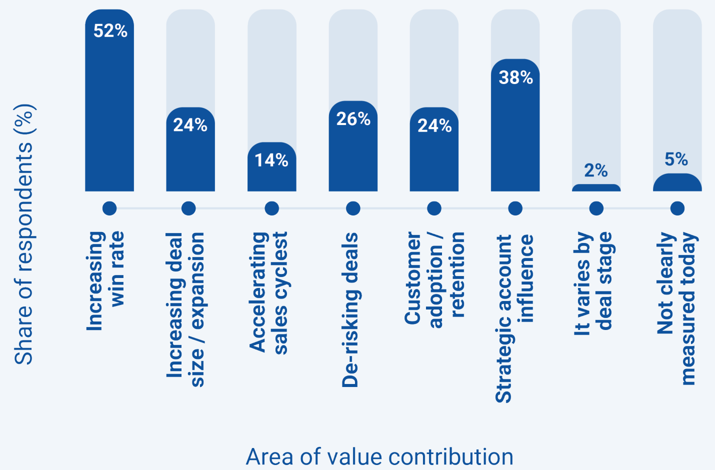


Figure 6 highlights how sales engineers define measurable impact. A majority of respondents (52%) point to increasing win rate as their clearest value contribution, followed by strategic account influence (38%). De-risking deals through security, compliance, and technical validation ranks next (26%), while expansion (24%) and adoption/retention (24%) reflect downstream impact. Only 14% cite accelerating the sales cycle as the most measurable value, and just 5% say value is not clearly measured today.

These results reinforce a measurement reality: win rate is the earliest, most visible signal that technical selling is working. Technical credibility, proof, and risk reduction translate directly into buyer confidence, making technical wins easier to link to outcomes than longer-term effects such as adoption, expansion, or executive influence. External research reaches a similar conclusion, describing presales as an underappreciated growth lever and reporting that strong presales capabilities are associated with higher win rates and faster movement through the sales process [3]. From a KPI lens, win rate behaves like a leading indicator, while expansion and strategic influence compound over time as trust and architectural ownership deepen. Cycle time, meanwhile, is often constrained by procurement and internal approvals, where SE impact can be real but indirect.

Expert Perspective

"The most important areas are win rate and strategic account influence. Having an SE in your corner for a big client adds a technical expert. But it usually doesn't shorten the sales cycle; there are too many hurdles."

Ken Lambert
Director of Structures
NAASE VICE-PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

"Win rate is the clearest proxy for SE impact because it sits at the intersection of technical credibility, buyer confidence, and decision risk reduction. Acceleration and expansion are lagging outcomes that compound as organizations mature in how they measure, instrument, and operationalize Sales Engineering's influence across the revenue lifecycle."

Ryan Bivinetto
Sales Engineer Manager (Global)
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

Experience Shifts How SEs Add Value

FIG 7. INCREASING DEAL SIZE OR EXPANSION AS A KEY VALUE AREA BY EXPERIENCE LEVEL

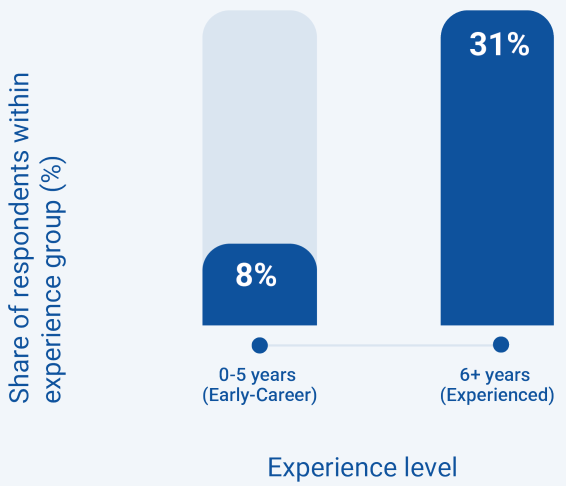
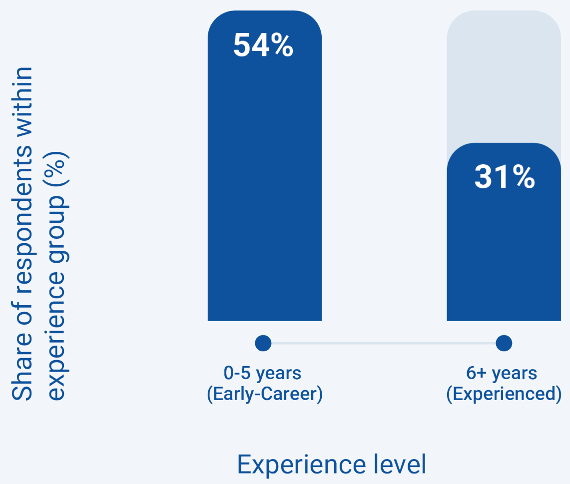


FIG 8. STRATEGIC ACCOUNT INFLUENCE AS A KEY VALUE AREA BY EXPERIENCE LEVEL



Figures 7 and 8 suggest that the way sales engineers describe their impact changes with tenure. Only 8% of early-career respondents (0-5 years) cite increasing deal size or expansion as a key value area, versus 31% among respondents with 6+ years. The pattern reverses for strategic account influence: 54% of early-career respondents select it, compared with 31% of experienced SEs.

One explanation is how expertise develops. Early-career SEs often focus on proving solution fit for a defined problem and supporting day-to-day deal execution. More experienced SEs operate at a higher altitude, recognizing patterns across accounts, reframing problems, and positioning the product as a platform, which can unlock larger deals or expansion.

The “inversion” on strategic influence may also reflect measurement and self-reporting. Senior SEs frequently influence indirectly through architecture, roadmap alignment, and executive trust, which is real impact but harder to name as a single metric. Leaders can use this insight to sharpen career paths, mentoring, and KPIs that capture both early, visible wins and longer-horizon account outcomes.

Expert Perspective

“*The gap largely reflects how Sales Engineers evolve in their thinking. Early in their careers, SEs focus on validating solutions fit against a defined problem. As they gain experience, they operate at a higher altitude recognizing patterns across accounts, reframing customer challenges, and positioning the technology as a platform rather than a point solution. Expansion is often a byproduct of that shift, not a discrete selling motion. A similar evolution occurs with influence. Early-career SEs tend to equate influence with proximity and day-to-day activity, while experienced SEs influence structurally through architectural direction, roadmap alignment, and executive trust. That form of impact is real, but often underreported because it is indirect and harder to quantify in traditional metrics or survey data.*”

Ryan Bivinetto
Sales Engineer Manager (Global)
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

Top Challenges for Sales Engineers

FIG 9. BIGGEST CHALLENGES SALES ENGINEERS REPORT FACING TODAY

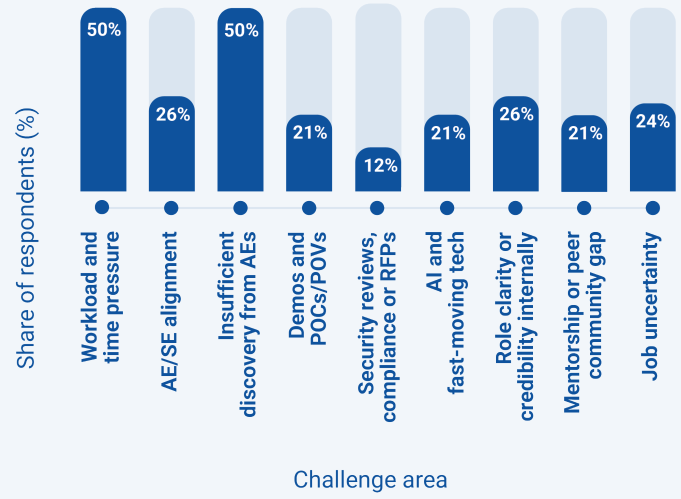


Figure 9 points to a consistent pattern: the biggest pain points are less about product complexity and more about capacity and process. Half of respondents cite workload and time pressure, and the same share cite insufficient discovery or qualification from AEs. These two issues reinforce each other. When early-stage discovery is thin, SEs get pulled into late-stage rescue work, creating extra demos, rework, and constant context switching.

Beyond the top two, challenges spread across the operating model. AE/SE alignment (26%) and role clarity or internal credibility (26%) suggest ongoing ambiguity about ownership and expectations.

Demos and POCs/POVs (21%), AI and fast-moving tech (21%), and mentorship or peer community gaps (21%) show the role is under pressure to scale and keep up. Job uncertainty (24%) adds a macro layer.

Notably, security reviews, compliance, or RFPs rank lower (12%), hinting that tooling and standardization may be reducing some historical burden. Even so, when teams are stretched and qualification discipline slips, discovery quality suffers. In that environment, SEs are pulled into reactive technical rescue work unless organizations tighten qualification criteria and define clear rules of engagement between AEs and SEs.

Expert Perspective

> *The top two categories don't surprise me, but it's interesting how evenly distributed the challenges are. I'm excited to see RFPs on the lower end, likely due to better RFP tools and the use of AI.*

Sachin Wadhawan
Global Solutions Leader
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

> *Heavy workloads and insufficient AE discovery are closely tied to role definition and process maturity. Too often the SE becomes a technical firefighter, running unnecessary demos. Tighten qualification, clarify AE discovery responsibilities, and enable high-level technical discovery.*

Luis Armando Vasquez Ruiz
Technical Sales and Business Marketing
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

Why Lower AE-to-SE Ratios Can Drive Misalignment

FIG 10. AE/SE ALIGNMENT AS A TOP CHALLENGE BY AE SUPPORT RATIO

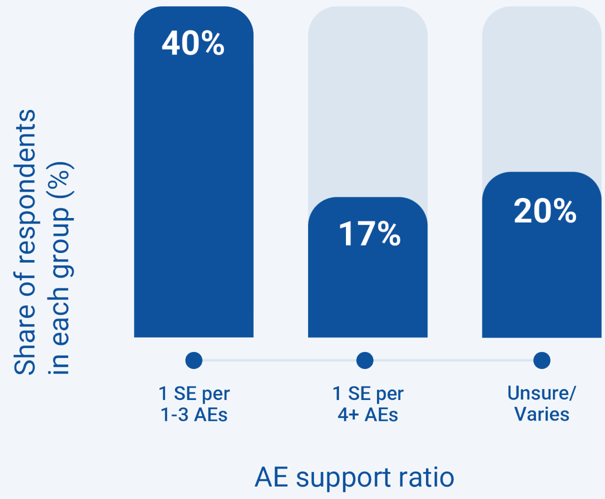


Figure 10 offers a counterintuitive signal: AE/SE alignment is most often cited as a top challenge when an SE supports fewer AEs. In the 1 SE per 1–3 AEs group, 40% report alignment as a leading issue, compared with 17% for teams supporting 4+ AEs (20% for teams where the ratio varies or is unclear).

One explanation is that lower ratios often correspond to more complex, enterprise motions. Those deals require tighter coordination, deeper technical ownership, and more shared decision-making, so gaps in expectations show up faster. A second factor is dependency.

When an AE has near-constant access to an SE, day-to-day problem solving can shift from the AE to the SE, increasing friction over what "belongs" to whom.

Organizational research supports this: role ambiguity is associated with lower job performance, with variation by job type and rating source [4]. For SE leaders, the implication is practical: alignment is an operating system, not a personality fit. Clear rules of engagement, documented handoffs, joint deal planning, and shared definitions of "good" discovery can reduce conflict while preserving the benefits of close partnership.

Expert Perspective

"*Alignment challenges reflect the complexity of the AE–SE co-dependency. Most AEs haven't been SEs, and most SEs haven't carried quota, so ownership can blur without trust, clear documentation, and agreed rules of engagement. Leaders must actively monitor and strengthen this alignment.*"

Sachin Wadhawan
Global Solutions Leader
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

"*When an AE has frequent access to an SE, dependence can grow. Instead of solving problems first, the AE offloads surface-level questions. SEs end up doing low-value work rather than higher-impact technical issues.*"

Mary Carter
VP of Technology
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

AI Tool Use Is Now Routine for SEs

FIG 11. FREQUENCY OF AI TOOL USAGE AMONG SALES ENGINEERS

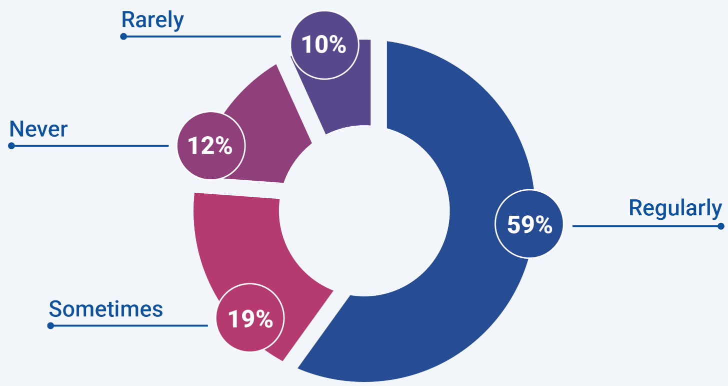


Figure 11 shows that AI is already embedded in sales engineering workflows. 59% of respondents report using AI tools regularly, and another 29% use them sometimes or rarely; only 12% never use AI. For a role built on rapid learning and problem solving, AI has become a practical assistant: drafting and refining technical emails, summarizing discovery notes, accelerating RFP or security questionnaire responses, and translating dense documentation into customer-ready explanations.

Many SEs also use AI to build first-draft demo scripts, create talk tracks tailored to personas, and generate checklists for technical validation, which can free time for higher-value discovery. To make this safe and scalable, teams can define approved use cases, classify what data can be shared, and provide templates for prompts and outputs (for example, redaction rules for logs, architectures, and customer identifiers). Over time, capturing and reusing validated prompts can turn ad hoc experimentation into repeatable playbooks.

The pattern suggests that AI adoption is being driven bottom-up by practitioners rather than formal policy. When tools meaningfully reduce repetitive work, usage tends to spread quickly regardless of official endorsement. For SE leaders, the implication is that usage will happen whether or not an organization has formal guidance. The risk is unmanaged "shadow AI" where proprietary content, architectures, or customer data is pasted into public tools without the guardrails of SSO, data masking, and audit logs. Organizations that pair access with policy, training, and approved workflows can capture productivity gains while protecting customer trust and IP. Leaders should also require human review and source checking before AI-generated content is shared externally.

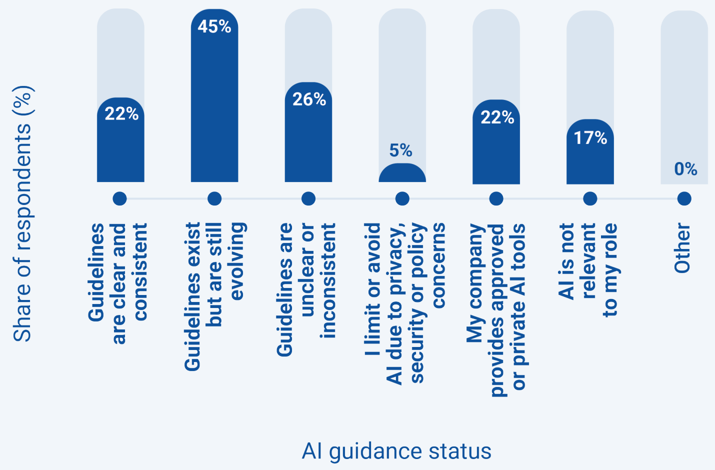
Expert Perspective

> *SEs are problem-solvers. When faced with repetitive RFP work or complex technical documentation, they'll use tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Perplexity to reduce tedious tasks. AI becomes a practical productivity multiplier embedded in daily workflow.*

Sandra Rogoza
Director, Sales and Channel Management
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

AI Policies: Clear for Some, Gray for Many

FIG 12. HOW SALES ENGINEERS DESCRIBE THEIR COMPANY'S AI GUIDANCE AND TOOLING



Sales engineers are moving fast on AI, but organizational guardrails are uneven. In this survey, 45% say their company has AI guidelines that exist but are still evolving, and 26% describe guidance as unclear or inconsistent. Only 22% report clear, consistent guidance. Tooling shows a similar split: 22% say their company provides approved or private AI tools, while 5% limit or avoid AI due to privacy, security, or policy concerns. Another 17% say AI is not yet relevant to their role.

This mix creates a practical "gray zone." When approved tools or clear rules are missing, teams tend to improvise—often using consumer accounts for drafting, research, or RFP support—which can increase data exposure risk and make it harder to standardize best practices. Mature programs treat AI adoption as an operating model: define permitted use cases, set data-handling rules by classification, provide secure tooling (SSO, logging, and retention controls), and train SEs on how to use AI without compromising customer or proprietary information. Frameworks like NIST's AI RMF make governance a cross-cutting function, emphasizing processes and procedures that inform how AI is used across the organization [5]. The goal isn't to slow AI use—it's to make safe, repeatable workflows the default.

Expert Perspective

> *There's a clear disconnect between high individual AI use and lagging corporate oversight. Without approved tools, policies, and guardrails, teams default to personal accounts. That creates unintentional data risk and exposes proprietary information without enterprise controls in place.*

Sandra Rogoza
Director, Sales and Channel Management
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

> *There's a clear gap between how fast SEs adopt AI for efficiency and the maturity of corporate policy. That misalignment creates a gray zone: productivity rises, but compliance and ethical risks rise too unless tools and frameworks are institutionalized.*

Luis Armando Vasquez Ruiz
Technical Sales and Business Marketing
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

AI Use vs AI Pressure by Industry

FIG 13. REGULAR USE OF AI TOOLS AMONG SALES ENGINEERS BY INDUSTRY

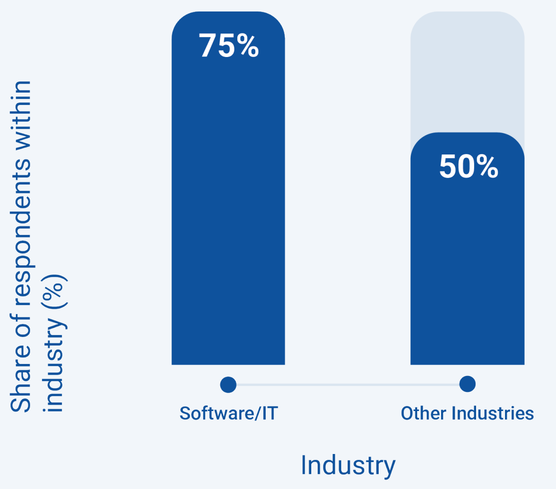
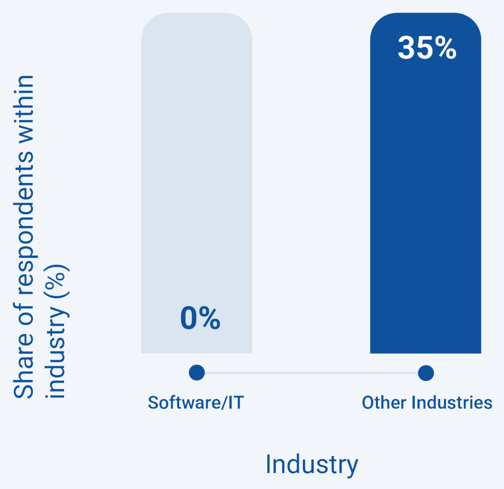


FIG 14. AI AND FAST-MOVING TECHNOLOGY AS A TOP CHALLENGE BY INDUSTRY



Figures 13 and 14 show a clear industry split in both adoption and perceived pressure. Regular AI use is higher among Software/IT sales engineers (75%) than among peers in other industries (50%). Yet none of the Software/IT respondents selected “AI and fast-moving technology” as a top challenge, compared with 35% in other industries. Put differently, the teams using AI most often are not the ones reporting the highest pressure from it.

One explanation is familiarity. In software environments, AI often feels like an upgrade to an already digital workflow: faster research, better drafting, quicker scripts, and improved summarization. Software teams also tend to have more digital tooling and peer support, so experimentation feels normal rather than disruptive. In other industries, AI can land as disruption. Teams may face legacy processes, tighter governance, and fewer internal examples of “safe” use, even while customers and competitors raise expectations. Where data sensitivity and compliance requirements are higher, the pace of AI change can feel riskier even before usage becomes routine. This mirrors broader adoption patterns: across OECD countries, ICT firms report the highest share of firms using AI [6].

For SE leaders, the takeaway is that adoption rate alone does not equal readiness. Lower usage can coexist with higher anxiety when guidance, tooling, and enablement lag. In non-tech sectors, the pressure often shows up in customer conversations first, forcing SEs to translate AI promises into practical workflows, ROI, and risk controls. A practical response is to pair approved tools with clear policies, training, and repeatable talk tracks that help SEs explain both value and guardrails. Investing in these foundations helps convert fast-moving tech from a stressor into a repeatable advantage.

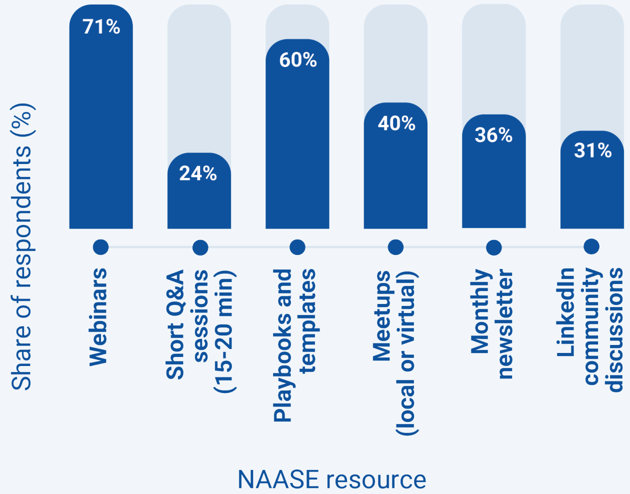
Expert Perspective

> *Software/IT SEs use AI more because it feels like an upgrade to the toolkit and fits an agile, digital workflow. In other industries, AI can feel like digital displacement. Even with lower use, fear of being left behind is higher.*

Sandra Rogoza
Director, Sales and Channel Management
NAASE BOARD MEMBER

What SEs Want From NAASE in 2026

FIG 15. NAASE RESOURCES SALES ENGINEERS ARE MOST INTERESTED IN



Respondents show a clear appetite for both live learning and practical, reusable assets. Webinars are the most requested NAASE resource (71%), followed closely by playbooks and templates (60%). A second tier—meetups (40%), a monthly newsletter (36%), and LinkedIn community discussions (31%)—suggests members also value ongoing peer connection, not just one-off events. Short 15–20 minute Q&A sessions rank lower (24%), but may be an underused format that fits the reality of fragmented SE calendars and makes it easier to participate.

The mix points to a simple mandate: deliver content that is immediately applicable, then reinforce it through community touchpoints. Traditional, time-intensive training formats are losing effectiveness as practitioners look for faster, more agile skill development that fits into fragmented calendars. That aligns with NAASE leadership priorities to publish operating-model archetypes (ratios, scope boundaries, AI/self-serve guardrails), expand skill and career infrastructure, and keep an explicit eye on role sustainability.

For 2026, the opportunity is to keep webinars—but differentiate them with sharper formats (live cases, teardown sessions, and Q&A) and pair every session with a downloadable playbook that helps teams implement what they learned.

Expert Perspective

"SE teams still need help defining the operating model—ratios, scope boundaries, and how AI/self-serve can protect SE time and data. A short playbook with a few archetypes and sample org charts would be hugely valuable."

Diana Diaco Cervantes
Regional Sales Director
NAASE PRESIDENT

"Playbooks and templates feel like the biggest opportunity. Everyone is doing webinars every day, so it's harder than ever to get people to log in. Practical assets that teams can reuse would stand out."

Ken Lambert
Director of Structures
NAASE VICE-PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

Conclusions

This mini report highlights a profession in transition. In this practitioner sample, sales engineering is measured with blended scorecards, staffed with varied AE coverage models, and pulled across more of the revenue cycle than presales alone. Respondents most often point to win rate and strategic account influence as their clearest impact, reinforcing that SE value is most visible when it reduces decision risk and increases buyer confidence.

The most common frictions are operational, not technical. Workload and time pressure, paired with weak discovery from AEs, create reactive workflows that drive unnecessary demos and rework. Clarity of ownership, rules of engagement, and disciplined qualification remain the fastest levers leaders can pull.

AI adds leverage and urgency. Individual usage is already routine, but guidance and approved tooling lag for many teams. The goal is not to slow adoption, but to make secure, repeatable workflows the default through policy, training, and approved tools.

Taken together, these signals point to a mandate for SE leaders: protect time for high-impact technical selling, define the operating model explicitly, and invest in skills and governance that keep pace with change. NAASE will use these findings to prioritize practical playbooks, learning, and community in 2026.

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