kenso

KENSO RESEARCH · METHODOLOGY

AE team first? 69.2% of first partner hires had zero AEs

The data, the methods, every number and every limitation behind the study.

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ABOUT THE DATA

This study uses Kenso internal data: the company, people and web records Kenso uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study.

Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

Figures 1 to 2 are the study page's charts, drawn from the same numbers. The methodology after them keeps the full tables.

SUMMARY

AE team first? 69.2% of first partner hires had zero AEs

Usually not. Of the software and IT services companies founded 2010-2020 that made a partner hire, 69.2% had no Account Executive in the seat when their first partner, channel or alliances person joined.

69.2%

of software and IT services companies that made a partner hire had no AE in the seat when their first partner, channel or alliances person joined. Counting general sales titles, SDRs and account managers too, 41.9% had none of them.

59.5%

or more of first partner hires at companies under 35 people came with no AE in the seat. The median company made its first partner hire at 17 people.

12.5%

of first partner hires came with a team of 3 or more AEs.

55.6%

median headcount growth over the two years after the hire at companies with 3 or more AEs, against 33.3% with no AE in the seat, matched on size and year. In the year before the hire they had already grown 64.0%, against 38.5%.

Data and method

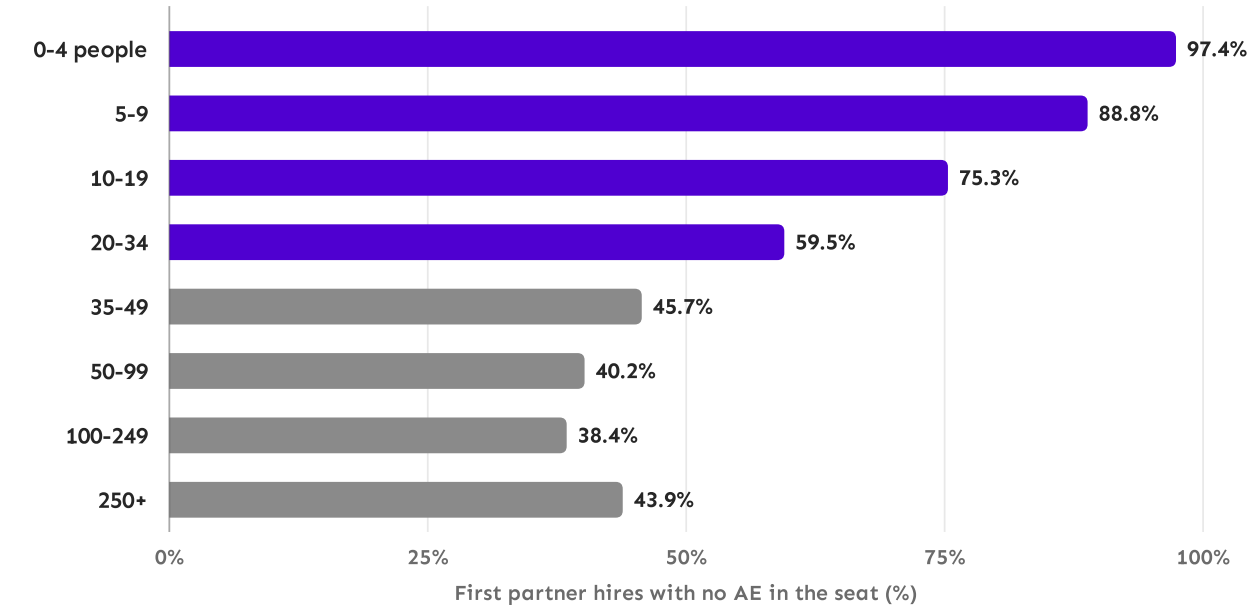
Data	Kenso internal data: the public work histories and company records Kenso uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study. Work histories cover people currently in six English-speaking countries.
Sample	26,001 software and IT services companies with 10 or more people at some point from 2015 to early 2026. 8,480 of them made a first partner, channel or alliances hire by March 2026.
Date range	Companies founded 2010 to 2020, followed from 2015 to March 2026.
Method	Pre-registered study. AEs in the seat counted at the start month of the first partner hire, and growth compared for early and late hirers matched on size and year, with bootstrap 95% intervals and a check of growth before the hire. A separate analysis recomputed 89 values: 86 matched exactly and 3 interval bounds differed only by random noise.
Excluded	• Plain business development titles, professional-services and HR partner titles, and brand or influencer partnerships • Founders and interns • Companies whose rebuilt headcount never reached 10 people
Privacy	Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

FIGURES

The study's charts

FIGURE 1

Under 35 people, 59.5% or more of first partner hires came with no AE in the seat

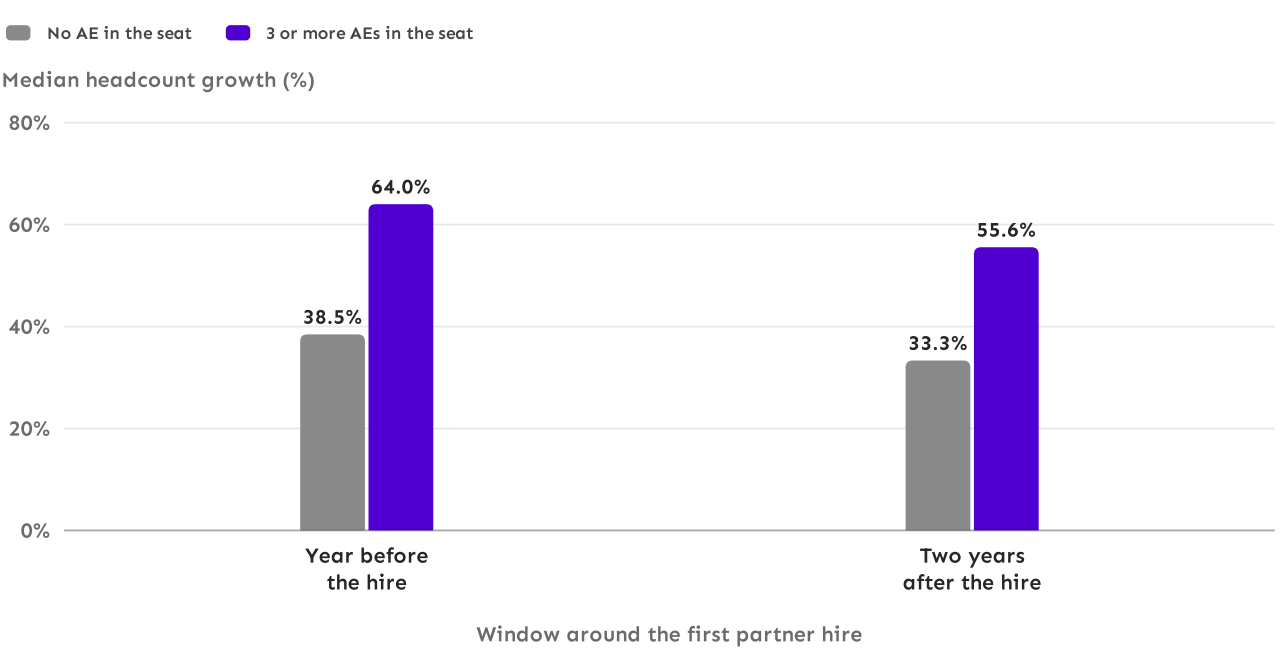


Share of first partner, channel or alliances hires with no AE in the seat, by people at the company just before the first partner hire. Companies under 35 people in purple. 7,871 first partner hires from April 2015 on, when the headcount history starts.

Source: Kenso internal data (company and career records Kenso uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 2

Companies with 3 or more AEs at the hire were already growing faster before it



Median headcount growth in the year before the first partner hire and over the two years after it, for companies with no AE in the seat at the hire and those with 3 or more, matched on size and calendar year at the hire. Two years after: 3,389 companies with no AE and 841 with 3 or more. Year before: 3,224 and 801 with a headcount a year earlier.

Source: Kenso internal data (company and career records Kenso uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FULL METHODOLOGY

The data, the methods and every number

This document lists the data, sample, every method and rule, every reported number, the limitations and the sources. Every number is computed by the study's code and stored in an aggregate table, and the tables below are generated from those tables.

1. Question and pre-registered hypotheses

When do B2B software companies hire their first Partner, Channel or Alliances person, measured against the number of Account Executives (AEs) in the seat and against company age? And how does headcount grow afterwards for early versus late partner hires, at the same size?

The hypotheses and the full plan were pre-registered on 2026-10-19, before any data was read. They tested the "last resort" view: build a direct AE team first, then add partners.

- **H1.** At the first partner hire the median company has 2 or more AEs in the seat, and fewer than 30% hire with no AE. *Not supported.*
- **H2.** The first partner hire comes a median of 12 or more months after the first AE (interval excluding 0); median company age 48-84 months. *Not supported* (8 months; age 52 months is in the expected range).
- **H3.** At least half of companies never hire a partner role, and the never-hired share among companies that stayed under 100 people is at least twice the share among those that passed 100. *Supported.*
- **H4.** Matched on headcount and calendar year at the hire, companies that hired with 3+ AEs grow at least 5 points more over 8 quarters than those that hired with none. *Supported as written, but the pre-trend check fails* (section 7).

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2. Data

All data is Kenso internal data: Kenso's dataset of public professional profiles, work histories and company records. No new data was collected for this study; it reuses two extracts built for earlier Kenso Research studies.

- **Role histories.** Every role spell of every person with at least one sales or marketing title: normalized title, a rule-based function and level, company, start and end month. The extract was built for the Kenso Research study *Who are GTM engineers, and where do they come from?*, and 136,156,211 spells were scanned.
- **Company headcount history.** Quarterly headcount per company from 2015 Q1 to 2026 Q1, rebuilt by counting the people whose roles at the company cover each quarter end, plus company records (industry, founding year, headquarters country). Built for the Kenso Research study *Did AI kill the SDR role?* Its all-profile role table (555,053,752 spells, all functions) was used only for the coverage check in section 4.
- Data snapshot: profiles refreshed between 2025-11 and 2026-04; the last complete quarter is 2026 Q1.

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3. Sample

The same frame as the Kenso Research studies *When should you hire your first salesperson?* and *When do startups hire customer success? Alongside the first AE*, so the studies line up: company records in ten software and IT industry labels (software development; IT services and IT consulting; technology, information and internet; computer and network security; data infrastructure and analytics; IT system custom software development; embedded, mobile and desktop computing software products; business intelligence platforms), founded 2010-2020, with a rebuilt headcount of at least 10 in some quarter from 2015 Q1 to 2026 Q1. Every company is at least five years old by 2026 Q1. Companies are grouped by outcome: **passed 100** (rebuilt headcount reached 100 in some quarter) or **stayed smaller**.

Step	Companies
software-set records founded 2010-2020	238,190
with any rebuilt headcount 2015 Q1-2026 Q1	145,117
rebuilt headcount reached 10 (sample)	26,001
passed 100	2,037
stayed smaller	23,964

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4. The Partner/Channel/Alliances title map

The shared role taxonomy files Partner, Channel, Alliances and business development titles together. This study splits out a tight map from the normalized titles (lower-case, punctuation replaced by spaces). A title is a partner title when it matches one of these rules, in this order, after excluding founder and intern levels and founder, student and recruiting functions:

- **Channel:** "channel(s)" followed by sales, manager, management, partner(s), partnership(s), account(s), lead, leader, director, executive, development, program(s), marketing, alliance(s), business, representative, rep or specialist; or "head / VP / director / chief (of) ... channel(s)". Not when the title also says omni, multi, digital, social, youtube, ecommerce, retail, online, marketplace, amazon, content, media, tv or broadcast.
- **Alliances:** "alliance(s)".

- **Partner:** "partner(s)" followed by manager, management, development, sales, success, enablement, marketing, program(s), operations/ops, account(s), alliance(s), relations, relationship, lead, director, executive, ecosystem, channel or strategy; or "head / VP / director (of) ... partners". Professional-services and HR senses (client, business, talent, people, HR, managing, equity, general, venture, operating, founding partner) are removed before this rule runs.
- **Partnerships:** "partnership(s)", except brand, influencer, creator, affiliate, media, content, university, academic, school, community, sponsorship, fundraising, donor or talent partnerships.
- **Reseller:** "reseller(s)".

Plain business development (business development manager, BD, bizdev, with no partner, channel or alliance word) is out of the main definition, because it usually means new-logo selling, SDR-like work or corporate development. It enters only sensitivity (d). Channel and partner account roles that the shared taxonomy files under account management or AE (channel account manager, partner account manager, channel account executive) are in the map and are not counted as AEs.

The map was written before any data was read and checked on a fixed set of test titles. The independent recomputation (section 8a) found that the first implementation was wider than this wording in two places (leader phrases with an extra word, such as "VP global channels", and client or business partner removed only from the partner rule). The code was fixed to the wording above; the fix moved the first partner hire for 35 companies and headline shares by at most 0.5 points. The published map lists every title held by at least 50 people at at least 50 sample companies.

Titles in the map (top 25 by people):

Title	Shared taxonomy function	Map category	People	Companies
partnerships manager	partnerships_bd	partnerships	921	631
partner manager	partnerships_bd	partner	682	261
head of partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	642	593
director of partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	558	491
partner success manager	partnerships_bd	partner	468	226
channel account manager	account_mgmt	channel	453	226
director of strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	437	388
strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	391	294
channel sales manager	partnerships_bd	channel	300	191
partner marketing manager	marketing	partner	285	229
partner account manager	account_mgmt	partner	280	143
partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	277	186
strategic partnerships manager	partnerships_bd	partnerships	211	162
channel manager	partnerships_bd	channel	205	140
manager strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	188	153
senior partnerships manager	partnerships_bd	partnerships	169	131
head of strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	168	157
partner development manager	partnerships_bd	partner	162	103
senior partner manager	partnerships_bd	partner	160	67
vice president strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	149	144
partnerships lead	partnerships_bd	partnerships	144	114
channel account executive	account_exec	channel	141	62
strategic partner manager	partnerships_bd	partner	135	71
partnership manager	partnerships_bd	partnerships	131	112
director strategic partnerships	partnerships_bd	partnerships	127	108

Titles out of the map (top 20 by people):

Title	Shared taxonomy function	Reason out	People	Companies
business development manager	partnerships_bd	plain business development	10,481	5,033
business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	4,081	2,524
business development executive	partnerships_bd	plain business development	3,871	1,643
director of business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	2,813	2,156
business development specialist	partnerships_bd	plain business development	2,182	1,238
business development intern	partnerships_bd	plain business development	2,039	1,207
senior business development manager	partnerships_bd	plain business development	1,210	745

Title	Shared taxonomy function	Reason out	People	Companies
vice president of business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	914	812
head of business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	909	840
business development consultant	partnerships_bd	plain business development	813	573
enterprise business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	695	341
client partner	account_mgmt	professional-services or HR partner	565	228
director business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	550	466
sales business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	529	454
business development director	partnerships_bd	plain business development	464	352
business development lead	partnerships_bd	plain business development	440	381
partner	other	partner/channel word, no role	422	292
manager business development	partnerships_bd	plain business development	415	307
senior business development executive	partnerships_bd	plain business development	401	252
business development team lead	partnerships_bd	plain business development	389	278

Coverage check. The role-history extract only holds people with at least one sales or marketing title, and its search filter does not catch every partner title (for example "alliances manager" alone). Applying the same map to the all-profile role table adds or moves the first partner hire for a small share of companies. The pre-registered rule was to switch the main analysis to the combined source if that share passed 5%. It did not, so the main analysis uses the role-history extract and sensitivity (f) uses the combined source.

Item	Value
companies with a first partner hire, role-history spells	8,480
companies with a first partner hire, role-history plus all-profile spells	8,687
new first partner hire from all-profile spells	207
earlier first partner hire from all-profile spells	148
share of companies with a hire whose first-partner month changes	4.1%
rule: switch primary to the combined spells when share > 0.05	0.0%

5. Definitions

- **First partner hire:** the earliest start month of any role at the company whose title passes the map, not starting before 1 January of the founding year and not after March 2026. Ties in a month are broken by the lowest person id. **First AE:** the same rule on AE titles outside the partner map.
- **Company age** runs from 1 July of the founding year, since records give the year only.
- **Concurrent AE count:** distinct people, other than the partner hire, with an AE role at the company (not founder or intern level, not a partner-map title) that started on or before the hire month and ended in or after it, or is current. AE roles with no end date that are not current, and roles starting before the founding year, are dropped.
- **Direct sellers (exploratory):** the same count over AE, general sales, SDR/BDR and account management titles.
- **Headcount at the hire:** rebuilt headcount at the last quarter end before the hire month; defined for hires from April 2015 on.
- **Peak headcount and peak AE count:** the maximum over 2015 Q1-2026 Q1 quarter ends.

6. Results: timing

Main results by outcome group (n = companies; ages in months; AE and seller counts are people in the seat at the first partner hire):

Group	n	Hired	Never hired	AEs median	AEs p25	AEs p75	No AE	No AE, among cos. with an AE ever	Sellers median	No seller	Age median	Age p25	Age p75	Headcount median	Months after first AE	n with both	Partner before AE	Hired, never had an AE
All	26,001	8,480	67.4%	0	0	1	69.2%	48.6%	1	41.9%	52	28	81	17	8	5,084	37.6%	3,396
Passed 100	2,037	1,660	18.5%	1	0	4	48.6%	39.5%	4	21.7%	49	27	73	57	11	1,409	33.7%	251
Stayed smaller	23,964	6,820	71.5%	0	0	1	74.2%	52.2%	1	46.8%	53	29	82	14	7	3,675	39.1%	3,145

Share of first partner hires by AEs in the seat:

Group	0 AEs	1-2 AEs	3-5 AEs	6-10 AEs	11+ AEs
All	69.2%	18.3%	7.6%	3.2%	1.6%
Passed 100	48.6%	19.5%	14.7%	9.8%	7.4%
Stayed smaller	74.2%	18.0%	5.9%	1.6%	<50

AEs in the seat by headcount just before the hire:

Headcount at hire	Companies	AEs median	AEs p25	AEs p75	No AE
0-4	687	0	0	0	97.4%
5-9	1,468	0	0	0	88.8%
10-19	2,196	0	0	0	75.3%
20-34	1,565	0	0	1	59.5%
35-49	744	1	0	3	45.7%
50-99	834	1	0	5	40.2%
100-249	320	2	0	8	38.4%
250+	57	1	0	11	43.9%

What the first partner hire is (category and level):

Category	Companies	Share
alliances	938	11.1%
channel	1,064	12.5%
partner	1,005	11.9%
partnerships	5,454	64.3%
reseller	<50	<50

Level (from title)	Companies	Share
c_level	59	0.7%
director	3,183	37.5%
ic	2,509	29.6%
manager	1,333	15.7%
senior_ic	163	1.9%
vp	1,233	14.5%

Months from the first AE to the first partner hire, among companies with both: median 8, 95% bootstrap interval 7 to 9 (2,000 company resamples, seed 221).

Never hired. Companies with no partner hire by 2026 Q1, by peak headcount and peak AE count:

By	Band	Companies	Never hired	Share never
peak_headcount	10-19	12,847	10,656	82.9%
peak_headcount	20-49	8,339	5,370	64.4%
peak_headcount	50-99	2,778	1,118	40.2%
peak_headcount	100-249	1,456	319	21.9%
peak_headcount	250-999	506	55	10.9%
peak_headcount	1000+	75	<50	<50
peak_ae_count	0	16,239	12,816	78.9%
peak_ae_count	1-2	5,660	3,421	60.4%
peak_ae_count	3-5	2,196	981	44.7%
peak_ae_count	6-10	994	234	23.5%
peak_ae_count	11+	912	69	7.6%

Kaplan-Meier share of companies with a first partner hire by months since founding (companies without a hire are censored at 2026 Q1; hires before 1 July of the founding year count at month 0; months with fewer than 50 companies at risk are not published):

Group	Month	At risk	Share hired
All	36	23,302	11.0%

Group	Month	At risk	Share hired
All	60	21,152	19.1%
All	96	13,850	28.2%
Passed 100	36	1,486	28.8%
Passed 100	60	1,019	51.5%
Passed 100	96	510	71.8%
Stayed smaller	36	21,816	9.5%
Stayed smaller	60	20,133	16.4%
Stayed smaller	96	13,340	24.5%

Sensitivities (all companies): (a) founded 2015-2020; (b) headquarters in the six countries Kenso internal data covers; (c) without IT services and consulting; (d) wide map including plain business development; (e) first partner hire at manager level or above; (f) role-history plus all-profile spells; plus the 2010-2014 founding cohort and the first AE for reference.

Analysis	Hire	n	Hired	Never hired	AEs median	No AE	Age median	Headcount median	Months after first AE	Before AE
a_founded_2015_2020	partner	15,287	4,900	67.9%	0	70.2%	43	15	7	38.6%
b_hq_six_countries	partner	25,952	8,462	67.4%	0	69.2%	52	17	8	37.6%
c_without_it_services	partner	16,588	6,492	60.9%	0	66.1%	50	18	9	36.7%
d_wide_map_with_plain_bd	partner_wide	26,001	16,215	37.6%	0	84.0%	38	10	-7	58.8%
e_partner_manager_or_above	partner_leader	26,001	7,008	73.0%	0	66.2%	55	19	12	34.2%
f_with_all_profile_spells	partner_alt	26,001	8,687	66.6%	0	69.8%	52	17	8	38.3%
cohort_2010_2014	partner	10,714	3,580	66.6%	0	67.8%	70	21	12	36.4%
ref_first_ae	ae	26,001	9,851	62.1%	-	-	48	13	-	-

"-" marks a value that does not apply (AE fields for the first-AE reference row) or rests on fewer than 50 companies.

7. Results: growth after the first partner hire

Companies with a first partner hire whose hire quarter q0 (the last quarter end before the hire month) falls between 2015 Q1 and 2024 Q1, so that q0+8 is observed, and with at least 5 people at q0. Growth = headcount(q0+k) / headcount(q0) - 1. Early = no AE in the seat at the hire; late = 3 or more; middle = 1-2. Coarsened exact matching on headcount band at q0 (5-9, 10-19, 20-34, 35-49, 50-99, 100-249, 250+) and calendar year of q0: strata without both groups are dropped, and late companies are reweighted to the early group's mix. Reported: the early median, the reweighted late median and the difference (late minus early), with a stratified bootstrap 95% interval (2,000 resamples, seed 221) for the 8-quarter growth, the pre-trend, the reach-100 share and the change in growth. The pre-trend is growth from q0-4 to q0 (needs a headcount above 0 at q0-4). Reach-100 is the share of companies under 100 at q0 that reach 100 people in any quarter from q0+1 to q0+8 (a share, not a median). The change in growth (exploratory, not pre-registered; needs q0-4 to be observed) is `ln((hc8+1)/(hc0+1))/2 - ln((hc0+1)/(hcm4+1))` : annual log growth after the hire minus the year before.

Companies in each timing group before matching:

Analysis	Timing group	Companies
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	2,527
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	late_3plus_ae	448
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	738
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	1,871
by_company_age	late_age_gt72m	1,799
by_company_age	middle_age	2,568
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	3,058
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	late_3plus_ae	761
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	1,044
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	8,180
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	late_3plus_ae	587
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	1,458
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	4,247
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	late_3plus_ae	842
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	1,278
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	4,123

Analysis	Timing group	Companies
primary_by_ae_bench	late_3plus_ae	849
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	1,266

Matched comparisons:

Analysis	Early	Late	Metric	Early n	Late n	Strata	Early value	Late value (reweighted)	Late minus early	CI low	CI high
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	3,389	841	57	33.3	55.6	22.2	11.1	32.2
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	3,389	841	57	27.3	43.8	16.5	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	3,036	737	51	36.4	78.9	42.6	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	3,224	801	53	38.5	64.0	25.5	19.6	36.9
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	3,274	709	43	6.0	11.8	5.8	3.7	8.2
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	3,268	803	53	-0.179	-0.216	-0.037	-0.126	0.019
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	g8	4,106	1,263	62	38.0	50.0	12.0	4.4	17.1
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	g4	4,106	1,263	62	30.0	38.4	8.4	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	g12	3,656	1,112	56	42.9	53.8	11.0	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	pre4	3,820	1,198	56	38.5	42.1	3.6	-1.9	10.0
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	reach100_8	4,005	1,206	50	5.0	5.8	0.8	-0.2	2.0
primary_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	middle_1_2_ae	dlog	3,904	1,209	56	-0.171	-0.142	0.029	-0.004	0.060
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	1,180	832	55	34.9	53.3	18.3	9.1	28.8
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	1,180	832	55	28.1	39.3	11.2	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	1,039	731	49	38.5	77.8	39.3	-	-
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	1,126	788	50	41.9	63.6	21.7	15.0	30.5
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	1,122	709	43	9.3	15.2	5.9	3.3	8.8
primary_by_ae_bench	middle_1_2_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	1,132	790	50	-0.189	-0.236	-0.048	-0.116	0.016
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	g8	1,706	1,695	50	70.3	28.6	-41.7	-50.6	-33.9
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	g4	1,706	1,695	50	50.0	20.8	-29.2	-	-
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	g12	1,695	1,385	50	73.7	33.3	-40.4	-	-
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	pre4	1,612	1,695	50	83.3	24.0	-59.3	-68.4	-54.7
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	reach100_8	1,657	1,585	40	8.9	3.8	-5.1	-6.5	-3.8
by_company_age	early_age_le36m	late_age_gt72m	dlog	1,706	1,695	50	-0.330	-0.075	0.255	0.205	0.300
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	1,667	446	47	33.3	64.3	31.0	16.9	47.2
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	1,667	446	47	28.6	43.8	15.2	-	-
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	1,471	370	42	31.8	88.0	56.2	-	-
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	1,650	445	47	50.0	69.2	19.2	5.6	40.5
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	1,607	377	34	6.6	12.3	5.7	2.9	8.9
a_founded_2015_2020_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	1,667	446	47	-0.237	-0.174	0.063	-0.055	0.129
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	2,362	751	54	37.5	68.4	30.9	21.1	46.7
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	2,362	751	54	30.0	57.1	27.1	-	-
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	2,144	660	49	40.0	90.0	50.0	-	-
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	2,249	716	50	42.9	73.3	30.4	20.8	41.3
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	2,277	632	41	7.2	13.1	6.0	3.5	8.8
c_without_it_services_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	2,273	717	50	-0.190	-0.269	-0.079	-0.153	0.010
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	7,374	586	55	45.5	61.5	16.1	6.9	30.6
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	7,374	586	55	33.3	45.5	12.1	-	-
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	6,960	528	52	54.5	77.8	23.2	-	-
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	6,608	547	50	42.9	58.3	15.5	5.6	20.3
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	7,298	554	46	3.3	6.5	3.2	1.7	4.8
d_wide_map_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	6,815	549	50	-0.185	-0.172	0.013	-0.067	0.046
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g8	3,485	834	57	33.3	55.6	22.2	11.1	31.2
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g4	3,485	834	57	27.3	43.8	16.5	-	-

Analysis	Early	Late	Metric	Early n	Late n	Strata	Early value	Late value (reweighted)	Late minus early	CI low	CI high
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	g12	3,121	731	51	36.4	78.6	42.2	-	-
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	pre4	3,313	795	53	38.6	63.6	25.0	18.7	36.4
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	reach100_8	3,368	702	43	5.9	11.7	5.8	3.7	8.0
f_all_profile_spells_by_ae_bench	early_0_ae	late_3plus_ae	dlog	3,359	797	53	-0.177	-0.216	-0.039	-0.130	0.018

Values are % growth (medians) or % share (reach100_8), and differences are percentage points; dlog is in log points per year. Blank intervals were not bootstrapped (a logged decision).

Reading. Late partner hires (3+ AEs) are followed by faster growth than early ones (none): 22.2 points over two years at the same size and year. But the same companies grew 25.5 points faster in the year before the hire, and the change in their growth from before to after does not differ from the early group's (interval includes 0). The plan named the pre-trend as the check that the comparison is fair; it fails. The result is therefore "companies that are already growing faster hire partners later in their AE build-out", not "waiting for an AE bench pays off". The comparison by company age shows the same pattern reversed (young companies grow faster both before and after), so it says little about partner timing either.

8a. Independent verification

An independent re-analysis, written from the pre-registered plan, the logged decisions and the data alone, without seeing our code, recomputed all 89 headline values. After the map was brought in line with the plan wording (section 4) and two growth definitions were read as the plan states (reach-100 in any quarter up to q0+8; the change-in-growth metric needs only q0-4 to be observed), 86 values match exactly and the other 3 are bootstrap upper bounds that differ by at most 0.4 points between independent random streams. Sensitivities other than two wide-map values, and the title tables, were not recomputed.

8. Alternative explanations and how they are handled

1. **AE titles undercount sellers.** Many small companies sell through "sales manager" or founders. Counting every direct seller title still gives a median of one seller and 41.9% with none at the hire; 48.6% of hirers that ever had an AE hired the partner person first. Founder selling cannot be measured and remains a limitation.
2. **"Partnerships" titles are sometimes business development.** The map excludes plain BD; adding it (sensitivity d) makes the first "partner" hire earlier still, so the main finding does not depend on that line. Restricting to manager level or above (e) also leaves most hires with no AE in the seat.
3. **Missing profiles and late updates.** Kenso internal data holds only currently active profiles in six countries, so early and short roles are undercounted, more so in older years. This can hide early AEs as well as early partner hires. The founded-2015-2020 sensitivity, where the data is denser, gives the same picture.
4. **Coverage of partner titles.** The all-profile check changes the first-partner month for under 5% of companies with a hire, and sensitivity (f) leaves the results almost unchanged.
5. **Industry mix.** IT services and consulting firms rarely use AE titles; dropping them lowers the zero-AE share to 66.1% and keeps the growth pattern, pre-trend included.
6. **Selection by later growth.** The outcome groups (passed 100 or not) are defined by later growth, so group comparisons are descriptive only.
7. **Growth confounding.** The matched comparison controls for size and year only. The failed pre-trend shows that late hirers differ in growth momentum before the hire; anything else that differs (funding, market, product) is not controlled.
8. **Mechanical size effects.** Larger companies hold more roles of every kind, so the lower never-hired share at larger sizes is expected and is reported as a description, not as an effect of partner hiring.

9. Limitations

- Observational data and a matched comparison: results show links and timing, not cause.
- Kenso internal data rebuilds teams from public, self-reported profiles. People without a profile, deleted profiles and roles left off a profile are missing; profiles are updated late, so the latest quarters undercount.
- People are counted only when their current country is the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland or New Zealand, so staff elsewhere are missing from headcount and AE counts.
- Titles are self-reported, and the same title can mean different jobs. Non-English titles are mostly not matched.
- Some people edit an old title when promoted instead of adding a role, which can hide early titles.
- Company founding year is known only to the year; ages carry up to six months of error.
- Headcount at the hire is not defined for hires before April 2015.
- Growth is headcount growth, not revenue.
- Groups smaller than 50 companies or 50 people are not published.

10. Sources

- Kenso internal data: role histories (extract built for the GTM engineer study) and company headcount history (built for the SDR study).
- Sample frame from the first sales hire study and the first customer success hire study.

Numbers added with the article

The study's article was rewritten on 2026-11-22, after the study was finished, so the sections above stay as they were written. This section gives each number the article prints that they do not: what it measures and how it was derived. Every other number in the article is above: the companies studied in section 3, the title fix in section 4, the timing shares, company sizes and checks in section 6, the growth comparison in section 7 and the independent re-analysis in section 8a.

Article number	What it measures	How it was derived
12.5%	Share of the 8,480 first partner hires that came with 3 or more AEs in the seat	1,060 of 8,480 hires: 648 with 3-5 AEs, 273 with 6-10 and 139 with 11 or more. Section 6 prints these three groups separately, as 7.6%, 3.2% and 1.6%.
7,871	First partner hires with a known company size at the hire: hires from April 2015 on, when the quarterly headcount history starts. It is the base of the size chart, of the size breakdown and of the median of 17 people.	The sum of the companies in the eight size groups of the section 6 table "AEs in the seat by headcount just before the hire".
June 2024	The last hire month in the growth comparison	Section 7 takes hires whose last quarter end before the hire month falls between 2015 Q1 and 2024 Q1, which is hires from April 2015 to June 2024.

The article's two charts are drawn from the same tables as this document. The first shows the share of first partner hires with no AE in the seat at each company size just before the hire (the section 6 table "AEs in the seat by headcount just before the hire", at one decimal). The second shows median headcount growth in the matched comparison of companies with no AE in the seat against those with 3 or more, in the year before the hire and over the two years after it (section 7, at one decimal).