



Chief Executive Officer Growth Forum

SBI’s **Chief Executive Officer** Growth Forum brings together industry leaders to shape the future of B2B go-to-market strategies and discover new ways to drive unforgettable growth. This dynamic, roundtable-style session with market-leading Chief Executive Officers yields highly valuable peer to peer benchmarks and advice.

Meeting Insights – May 2023

SBI recently hosted market-leading CEOs by invitation only for a closed group roundtable discussion on leading through market uncertainty and finding new ways to create value and drive growth in 2023. This quarter, SBI was joined by Eric Walczykowski, CEO of Bespoke Partners, the leading executive search and leadership advisory firm for software and SaaS companies.

The Demand Environment in 2023 So Far

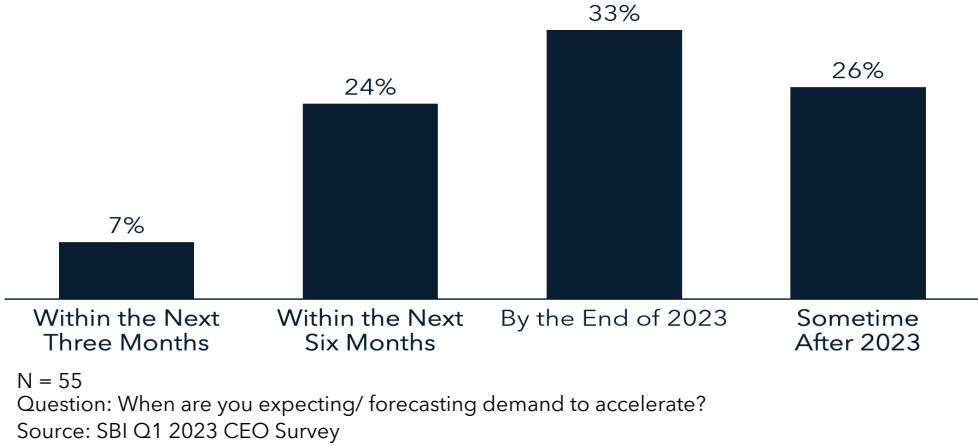
The softness of demand late last year and into Q1 may have seemed tolerable for some, but many organizations faced layoffs, furloughs, and headcount reallocation in order to course correct. While pipelines are showing to be as strong as they’ve ever been, business is taking much longer to close. As a result, many CEOs have had to revise their growth goals and level-set expectations for the remainder of the year.

While the sentiment varies by industry when faced with the question of when demand will return, nearly all CEOs in attendance were managing expenses cautiously. Their primary approach has been to slow backfills, and align the organization, and board, around worst case projections.

In slow markets, the existing customer base has traditionally been a company’s best bet for driving and sustaining revenue. However, in today’s market, many companies are seeing an uncharacteristic increase in new logo activity.

CEOs sentiment toward M&A was tepid during the conversation. Some are actively pursuing deals, but for most it’s at best a sourcing exercise currently. Valuation expectations remain dislocated for now, and it’s hard to find something that’s the right size and clearly value-adding.

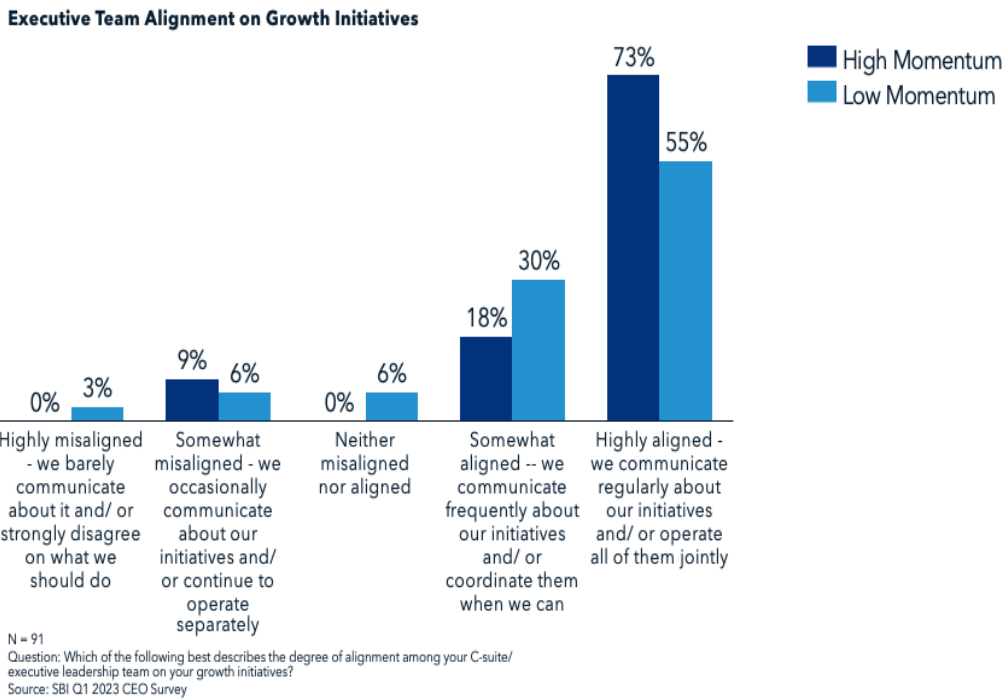
Expected Timing of Demand Acceleration
Among CEOs who report demand as flat or slowing



Aligning Go-To-Market Leadership Teams

The search for top leadership talent has become a deeper focus for CEOs, given both luke-warm enthusiasm for the ability of their go-to-market leaders to drive growth, and strategic shifts driving a need for new kinds of leaders in seat.

One common challenge in this pursuit is that the profile many CEOs are searching for – ability to lead large teams and multiple commercial operations, ability to manage transformations – has the qualities that will lead them down a CEO path. And they carry the price tag to match (or even at times exceed CEO compensation). Executive teams are willing to pay a premium for C-suite A-players who are ready to “get their hands dirty.” But they are recognizing that bringing in A-players means bringing in individuals seeking a broader remit than current roles often present.



CEOs expressed significant challenges managing the tensions among their C-level go-to-market leaders. Some are approaching this tension by combining them into a single role. Having someone over both Sales and Marketing where Marketing’s focus is solely on driving demand, top of funnel (versus more of a brand focus) has worked well for some

Ultimately the CEO’s role is to create alignment and reduce friction between sales and marketing. SBI’s research finds that companies with high momentum today have notably higher executive team alignment than others. As one CEO mentioned, “I pick people in roles that can actually work together. They understand the other person’s job. That’s easier to find versus others that are more of a unicorn that can do both.”

With alignment being the end goal, CEOs mentioned the value of individual assessments, such as a Hogan assessment, to identify any friction points or conflicting behaviors not suited to company culture.

While the demand for Sales and Marketing leaders has increased, Bespoke Partners is also seeing an uncharacteristic spike in demand for accomplished Chief Customer Officers and Chief People Officers.