

From Usage to Revenue 2026

The Year Trust Broke



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Foreword

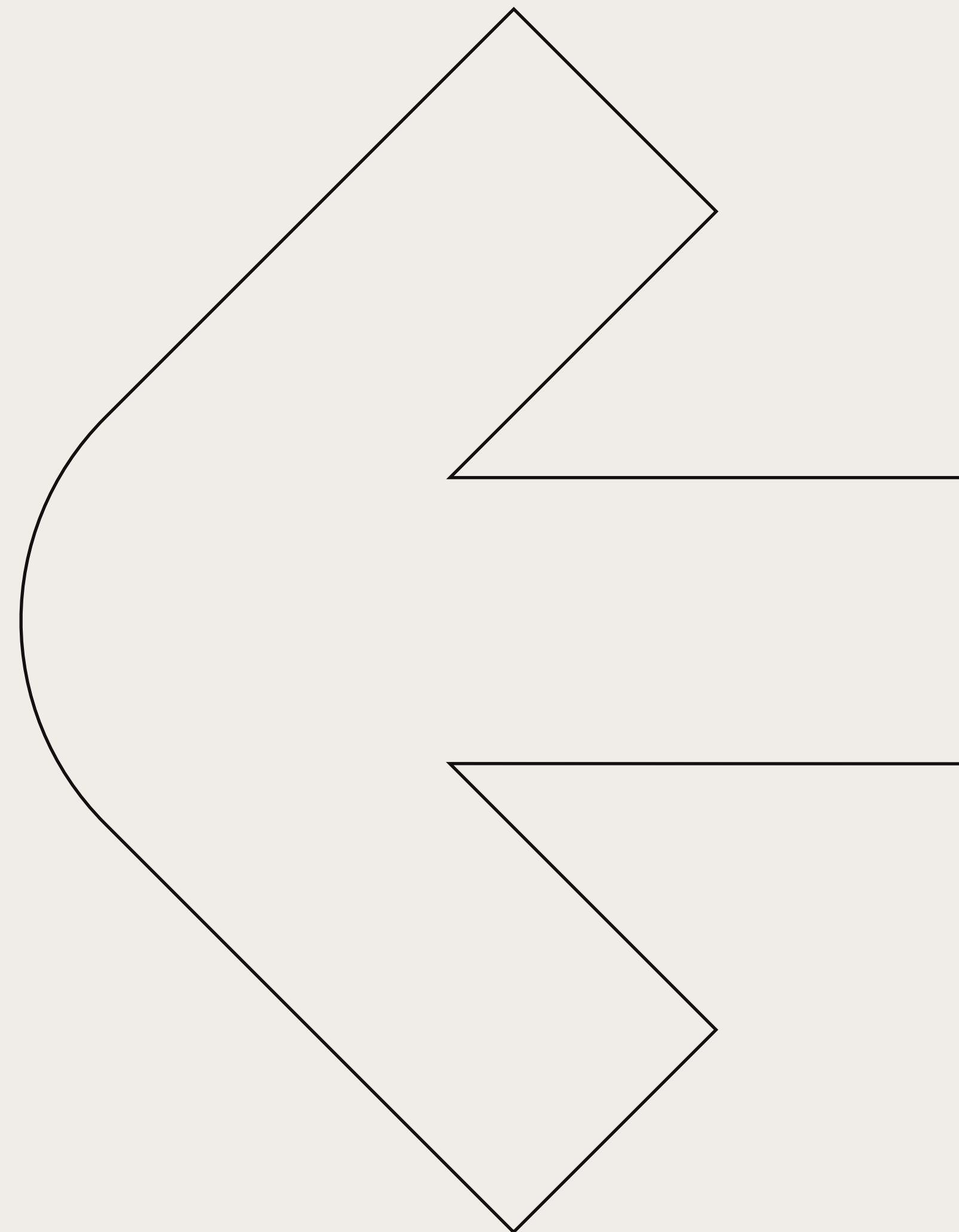
Usage monetization is no longer an experiment. It is already inside the commercial model, the revenue process and the operating reality of many modern digital businesses.

That is why this report does not begin by explaining why usage-based or outcome-based pricing matters. Usage adopters do not need that lesson. They are already running metered usage, hybrid contracts, outcome-linked charges, overages, negotiated exceptions, customer-specific terms or high-volume usage signals that influence value, cost and revenue. Often many of those models concurrently. The strategic decision has largely been made. But adoption is not the same as monetization. Many organizations now describe themselves as usage-based because a usage metric appears in a contract, a pricing page or a hybrid model,

while the revenue underneath still runs on subscription mechanics, manual reconciliation and assumptions that were never built for variable consumption. The harder question is whether the operating model is strong enough to carry what has already been sold.

Usage does not just change the price list. It changes the nature of revenue. A fixed subscription model asks whether the customer has access. A usage or outcome-based model asks what happened, how often it happened, who it belonged to, which rules apply, what it cost to deliver, what should be charged, whether the customer will understand it and whether finance can trust the number.

That question brings product telemetry, across multiple products, usage data from concurrent activity, billing logic, rating rules, customer transparency, revenue recognition and financial control into one shared revenue system. The market has moved faster than many of the systems beneath it. Commercial teams have embraced the language of value alignment, flexibility and growth. Customers increasingly expect pricing to reflect consumption or outcomes. Providers face delivery costs that are more variable and more closely tied to activity. But billing, finance, data governance and order-to-cash infrastructure have not always moved at the same speed. As the usage layer grows, complexity outruns the tracking.



Accuracy, real-time visibility and reconciliation start to break under volumes the underlying systems were never built to support — and the larger the usage footprint becomes, the more visible those cracks are to the customer, to finance and to the audit trail.

That gap is the subject of this report. Usage monetization has crossed the adoption threshold, but revenue trust has not yet caught up. Usage data is becoming financially material before many organizations have full confidence that it is accurate, complete, auditable and ready for revenue. Billing and finance systems are being asked to support variable, high-volume and customer-specific charging models they were not always designed to handle. Manual work remains common. Disputes remain frequent. Customer trust now depends on transparency, explainability, guardrails and timely visibility. This is the year that gap became impossible to ignore.

Not because the model failed — the market has not retreated — but because the distance between what has been sold as usage pricing and what is actually being measured, billed and defended has become too wide for finance to absorb quietly. That is the break this report documents, and the test the next phase will be judged on.

For usage adopters, this is the new standard. The next phase will not be defined by which companies find the most elegant pricing metric. It will be defined by which companies can turn usage into revenue that customers accept, operators can scale and finance can defend. The market has moved. The debate is over. Readiness is now the test.

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Introduction

Advanced businesses are not considering usage monetization. They are living with it. And living with it is not the same as having mastered it.



They may be running a fully metered usage model, a hybrid subscription-plus-usage model, an outcome-linked commercial structure, or a subscription model increasingly shaped by usage signals. They may not describe every part of it as usage monetization, and some describe more of it that way than the underlying mechanics actually support. But when consumption patterns, automation, data volume, API traffic, customer behavior, outcomes, or activity across interconnected products and services influence what customers pay, what the business earns, what it costs to serve them, or how value is communicated, then usage has already become part of the revenue architecture — whether or not the systems beneath it have caught up.

The research shows that the adoption threshold has already been crossed. 83.4% of organizations are at least exploring usage or outcome-based pricing, and 49.1% are already live in some form or optimizing.

Only 13.8% say they are not considering the shift, and just 1.7% have paused or rolled back after starting.

Those figures change the conversation. Usage monetization is no longer a specialist edge case. It is now part of the mainstream commercial environment. The question for usage adopters is therefore not whether the model has momentum. It does. The question is whether the revenue system beneath it is ready for the operational demands the model introduces.

That readiness is uneven. Usage and outcome-based models can bring price closer to value, support revenue growth, reduce barriers to acquisition, and create a more flexible relationship with customers. But the same models also make revenue more variable, granular, and exposed. They increase dependence on product data, place greater pressure on billing logic, create more work for finance teams, and raise expectations for invoices customers can actually understand.

What that exposes is the link between what has been sold as usage pricing and what can actually be measured, billed and defended. When that link holds, usage looks like a better commercial model. When it does not, the same model produces disputes, manual work and revenue that finance is reluctant to recognize.

This report examines usage monetization as a system. It begins with product events and ends in the financial record. In organizations with broad product portfolios, that path becomes significantly harder to manage. Between those points sit data quality, mediation, rating, billing, contract terms, revenue recognition, customer controls, dispute handling, and cross-functional ownership. The findings reveal where that system is working, where it is under pressure, and where organizations may be more confident than their operational reality justifies.

Purpose of the report series

This report is part of a wider DigitalRoute series examining how monetization is changing as digital businesses move closer to usage, consumption and outcomes.

The series is built around a simple commercial reality: modern revenue increasingly depends on what customers actually do. Access still matters. Contracts still matter. Relationships still matter. But the strongest commercial signals are now found in product events, customer activity, data volumes, transactions, workflows, automations, consumption patterns and outcomes. These signals show where value is created. Increasingly, they also determine how value measured, charged, reported and defended. That chain is where the commercial promise of usage monetization is either kept or quietly lost.

The first level of the conversation is strategic. It asks how organizations decide what to charge for, how they align price to value, how they protect margins and how they respond when customer expectations shift. The second level is operational. It asks how organizations capture usage, validate it, convert it into billable measures, apply commercial rules, invoice it, recognize revenue and give customers the transparency they need.

The two levels were once treated as sequential. The findings in this report suggest they have come out of sequence, with strategic adoption running ahead of operational capacity, and with finance, billing and data teams asked to support models that were committed to before the underlying systems were ready.

This report focuses on the adoption side of that transition. It asks what happens once usage and outcome-based models, and what becomes visible when many organizations are usage-based in name and contract structure without yet being usage-monetized in the discipline of how revenue is captured, validated and defended. It looks at how far adoption has spread, how subscription structures are being rebuilt, why seat-based assumptions are weakening, where customer trust becomes a constraint and why the hard work begins when usage has to become revenue.

The purpose is to help senior leaders see the gap between usage adoption and usage readiness. It is written for executives, product leaders, finance teams, billing teams, RevOps teams, order-to-cash leaders, pricing teams and customer-facing functions that need a shared language for the work still to be done. The report does not ask whether usage monetization is coming. It asks whether organizations can make it accurate, auditable, automated, transparent and connected enough to support the financial weight it now carries.





Who are the usage adopters?

A usage adopter, in this report, is any organization whose revenue increasingly depends on what its customers actually do, whether or not that dependency is yet visible on a pricing page. The phrase can be read too narrowly if it is taken only to mean companies that have already put a usage-based price in front of the customer. The reality is broader and more operationally complex, and it is what the rest of this report describes.

A modern usage adopter is any organization whose commercial model, revenue process or operating model now depends on usage signals. Some are already charging directly by consumption. Some are blending subscription and usage. Some are experimenting with outcome-based charges. Some still monetize primarily through fixed contracts but use usage data to manage entitlements, expansion, value realization, delivery cost, customer success or commercial governance. The common feature is not one pricing model. The common feature is that usage has become part of the revenue calculation, whether or not it appears on the invoice.

Who are the usage adopters?

This distinction matters because the usage transition did not begin with pricing. It began with the rise of digital businesses where value could be observed in more granular ways. Product behavior became measurable. API consumption became visible. Data processing could be tracked. Customer activity could be captured. Licensing and entitlement could be enforced through signals rather than static records. Partner and channel activity could be monitored. Product usage across multiple SKUs could be understood in much more detail than before.

Telecommunications provides the original version of this economy. Telcos were usage-based long before usage-based became part of the software vocabulary. Their models showed that usage monetization depends on much more than a rate card. It requires metering, mediation, rating, billing, reconciliation, customer communication, dispute management and financial control. The wider market is now discovering, in software terms, what telecommunications learned over decades: that the rate card is the easy part, and the discipline beneath it is what makes the revenue defensible.

Today’s digital businesses face the same challenge with different usage events and faster data flows. Cloud, data, developer, API, infrastructure, AI-native and hybrid SaaS organizations all confront versions of the same issue: usage is no longer just an operational signal. It is increasingly a revenue signal. In each case, the organization must convert usage into trusted commercial outcomes, whether that means a direct charge, an overage, an entitlement decision, a renewal conversation, a margin analysis or a customer success intervention.

That is why this report uses usage adopters in a deliberately broad sense. It refers to organizations already living with usage as part of the commercial system, even if they are not all at the same stage of monetization maturity. Some are piloting. Some are live. Some are optimizing. Some are rebuilding subscription models around usage. Some are discovering that their product analytics data is not yet ready to become billable data. For all of them, the next question is the same: can the organization trust usage enough to build revenue on it?



An aerial night photograph of a city, likely Dubai, showing a dense grid of lights from buildings and streets. A prominent light trail from a vehicle or train curves through the city. The image is framed by white geometric lines on the left side.

Executive Summary

Table 1. The usage monetization transition at a glance

Metric	Average result	What it shows
Organizations at least exploring usage or outcome-based pricing	83.4%	The transition has crossed the adoption threshold.
Piloting, live or optimizing	62.1%	Usage is already moving through operating models.
Live in some form or already optimizing	49.1%	Almost half the market is already living with the operational consequences.
Not considering	13.8%	The group outside the transition is now a minority.
Paused or rolled back after starting	1.7%	The market is working through complexity rather than retreating.

Usage monetization has entered the mainstream. The market has moved beyond the point where usage-based and outcome-based pricing can be described as specialist, experimental or peripheral. 83.4% of organizations are at least exploring usage or outcome-based pricing, and 49.1% are already live in some form or optimizing. Only 13.8% say they are not considering the move, and just 1.7% have paused or rolled back after starting. This is a completed market transition in commercial terms. The

unresolved question is operational readiness, and it is the point at which the linkbetween what has been sold as usage pricing and what can actually be measured, charged, reported and defended begins to strain.

The central conclusion is that adoption has moved faster than readiness. Organizations are changing how they charge, but the data, billing, finance and governance

foundations beneath those models have not consistently kept pace. Usage monetization is therefore becoming a revenue trust, data quality and financial control challenge. It is no longer enough to choose a pricing metric that feels aligned to value. Organizations must prove that usage can be measured accurately, charged correctly, reported with confidence and defended on inspection — to customers, to auditors and to their own finance teams.

The market is not simply abandoning subscriptions. It is rebuilding them. Usage-based metered pricing is now the most commonly selected pricing approach at 49.1%. Hybrid subscription plus usage or outcome models are used by 32.2%. Tiered subscription pricing remains present at 28.4%, outcome-based metered pricing stands at 24.6%, and flat subscription pricing sits at 23.0%. The subscription is becoming a platform for monetization rather than the whole model.

The seat-based assumption is weakening because value is becoming harder to capture through access alone. 41.2% cite competitive pressure or shifting market norms as a prompt for exploring usage or outcome-based pricing. 39.8% cite the need to better align price to value delivered, while 37.7% cite rising delivery costs or margin pressure, including compute, data and AI costs. Revenue growth is the leading expected benefit at 52.3%, followed by customer acquisition at 31.5%.

Executive Summary

Customer trust is the adoption constraint, but the issue is not broad rejection. 25.7% say customer acceptance or pushback is the single biggest constraint on scaling usage or outcome-based pricing. Yet only 1.9% say customer response is mostly negative. 41.2% describe customer response as mixed, and 20.9% say customers are cautious and need guardrails or education. The market is asking for predictability, transparency and control. That is why 48.5% use or plan to use budget alerts or threshold notifications, 44.5% use or plan to use invoice previews or real-time cost dashboards, and 34.9% use or plan to use usage tiers or volume discounts. Guardrails are becoming part of the trust layer around usage revenue.

The hardest work begins when usage has to become revenue. 35.7% cite revenue recognition, accruals or reporting as a breaking point. 32.0% cite dispute handling and adjustments. 31.5% cite capturing concurrent usage events reliably. 29.8% cite translating usage into billable line items, and 28.4% cite validating or cleansing usage data. These are not back-office details. They are the mechanics that determine whether usage monetization can scale.

Billing and finance systems are now commercial scaling constraints. 33.4% say complex rating rules are hard to implement. 26.0% cite weak integration between multiple products usage data and billing or ERP. 23.5% say revenue recognition or reporting is difficult. 23.0% say customer-specific pricing or contract terms are hard to support. Only 18.7% say they have no major stack limitations.

Usage data has become revenue data. 48.0% say they have high or very high confidence that billable usage data is accurate, complete and auditable, while 44.7% have moderate confidence. Yet only 26.0% have mostly automated validation with an audit trail. 46.0% rely on automated checks plus manual review, and 19.5% rely mostly on manual checks. That gap suggests many organizations may be confident in product visibility, but not yet operating with financial-grade usage data confidence.

Manual work and disputes reveal the hidden cost of immature usage monetization. 67.0% say more than 5% of usage or outcome invoices require manual work before being sent. 43.1% say more than 10% require manual work. 75.4% say customers dispute usage or outcome charges at least occasionally, and 31.4% say disputes happen regularly or frequently. Those figures challenge any simplistic reading of usage data confidence. If customers regularly question the charge, the issue is not only operational efficiency. It is revenue trust, and it is the specific point at which the subtitle of this report stops being rhetorical and starts being measurable.

“Usage data has become revenue data.”



Executive Summary

Accountability is moving toward finance, billing and order-to-cash. Usage-based pricing may begin as a product or commercial strategy, but responsibility increasingly lands with the teams that must make revenue real. 39.0% say finance or revenue accounting owns end-to-end accountability, and 27.1% say billing, RevOps or order-to-cash owns it. Combined, finance and billing-related teams own accountability in 66.1% of organizations. Yet only 21.7% rate billing, RevOps or O2C as very ready, compared with 44.4% for product and 36.1% for sales or customer success. The ownership shift is happening faster than readiness.

The next phase belongs to organizations that can make usage trustworthy. Better usage data quality, validation and auditability is the top improvement needed to scale confidently, cited by 52.1%. More automated rating and invoicing follows at 37.2%, stronger guardrails for predictability at 36.1%, better customer transparency at 34.2% and stronger integration from multiple product usage to billing to ERP at 32.0%. These priorities show where the market now needs to move. The next advantage will come from making usage accurate, auditable, automated, explainable and connected to finance.



Chapter one:

Usage-based pricing has entered the mainstream





Usage monetization has arrived. That is the clearest conclusion of this report. Usage-based and outcome-based pricing have moved beyond the edge of the market and into the commercial mainstream. 83.4% of organizations are at least exploring these models, and 49.1% are already live in some form or optimizing. The market has crossed the adoption threshold.

The evidence is decisive. 83.4% of organizations are at least exploring usage or outcome-based pricing, and 49.1% are already live in some form or optimizing. Only 13.8% say they are not considering usage or outcome-based pricing, and just 1.7% have paused or rolled back after starting.

For usage adopters, the scale of adoption is important because it changes competitive expectations. A model that once differentiated a small number of companies is now becoming part of the commercial norm. Customers are more used to value-linked and consumption-linked pricing. Competitors are more likely to experiment with hybrid structures. Investors and leadership teams are more likely to ask whether revenue can expand with customer activity rather than remain fixed around access alone.

But adoption alone does not prove maturity. A company can put usage pricing into market before it has a dependable usage revenue engine. It can measure activity without validating that activity to a financial standard. It can bill by usage while still relying on manual checks, offline review, fragile integrations or unclear invoice explanations. It can tell customers pricing is fair while giving them invoices that are hard to understand.

In each case the same thing happens: what has been sold as usage pricing stops matching what can actually be measured, billed and defended.

If nearly half of organizations are live or already optimizing, then the next point of differentiation cannot simply be whether a company has usage in the model. It must be whether the company can run usage with more trust, less friction and more financial control than competitors.

The low rollback figure is significant. Only 1.7% have paused or rolled back after starting. Organizations are not broadly retreating from usage and outcome-based models, even when they encounter operational pressure. They are working through the complexity rather than abandoning the direction. That strengthens the conclusion that usage monetization is not a temporary pricing fashion. It is a durable commercial transition.

Usage-based pricing has entered the mainstream. That proves the market has moved. It also exposes the readiness gap that the rest of this report examines, beginning with what the mainstreaming of usage has done to the subscription itself.

Usage/outcome pricing status
Weighted average across all respondents

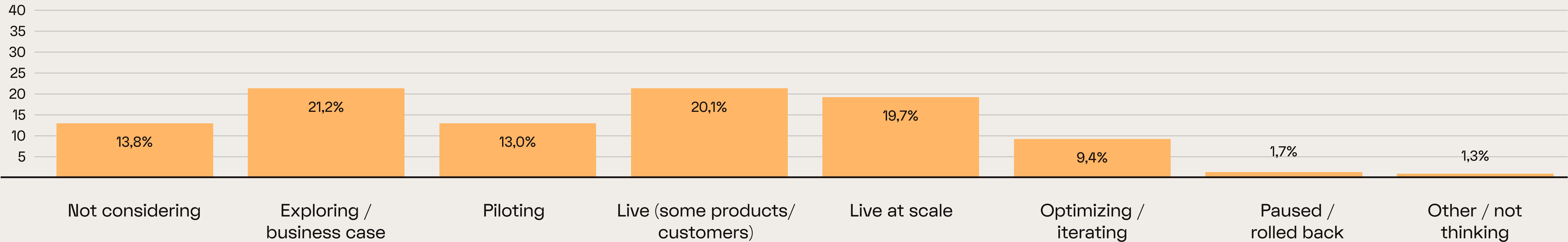


Figure 1. Usage and outcome-based pricing have moved beyond experimentation and into the operating model.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter two:

Subscriptions are not disappearing, but they are being rebuilt



The mainstreaming of usage has not displaced the subscription. It has changed what the subscription is asked to do. The more accurate reading is that subscriptions are being rebuilt.

Many organizations are retaining recurring subscription structures while adding usage or outcome-based components around them. Fixed recurring revenue still has value because it supports commitment, predictability and commercial simplicity. But it is increasingly being combined with

variable elements that reflect consumption, activity or results.

The pricing mix shows this clearly. Usage-based metered pricing is now the most commonly selected pricing approach, used by 49.1% of organizations. Hybrid subscription plus usage or outcome models are used by 32.2%. Tiered subscription pricing remains in use at 28.4%. Outcome-based metered pricing stands at 24.6%, while flat subscription pricing is used by 23.0%

This does not signal the death of subscription. It signals the decline of subscription as a complete answer. A customer may still buy a base plan, but the full commercial relationship may also include thresholds, overages, allowances, usage-based add-ons, outcome-linked charges, minimum commitments, volume discounts or customer-specific entitlements.

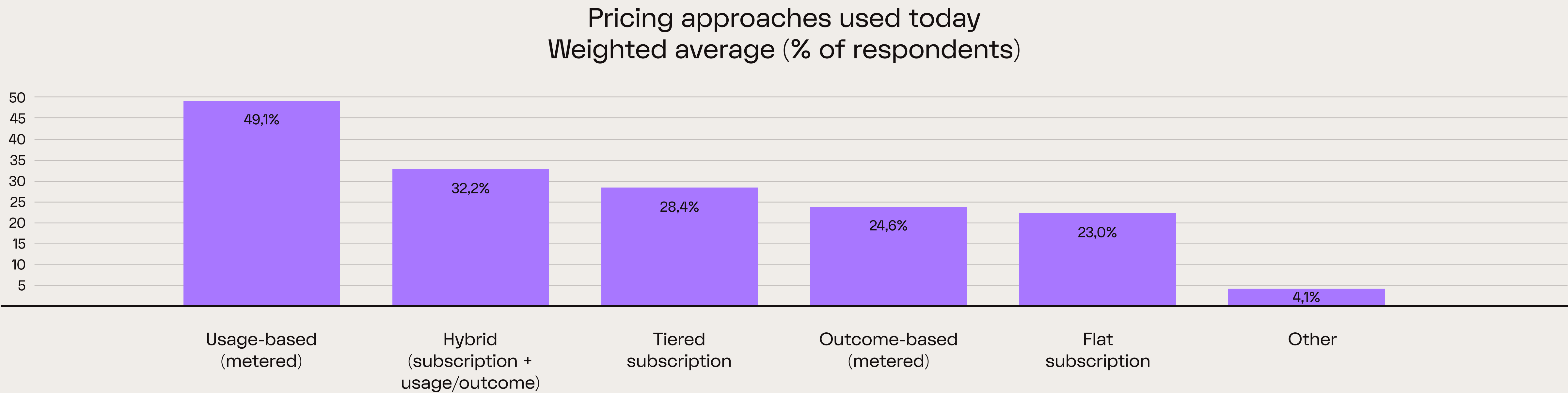


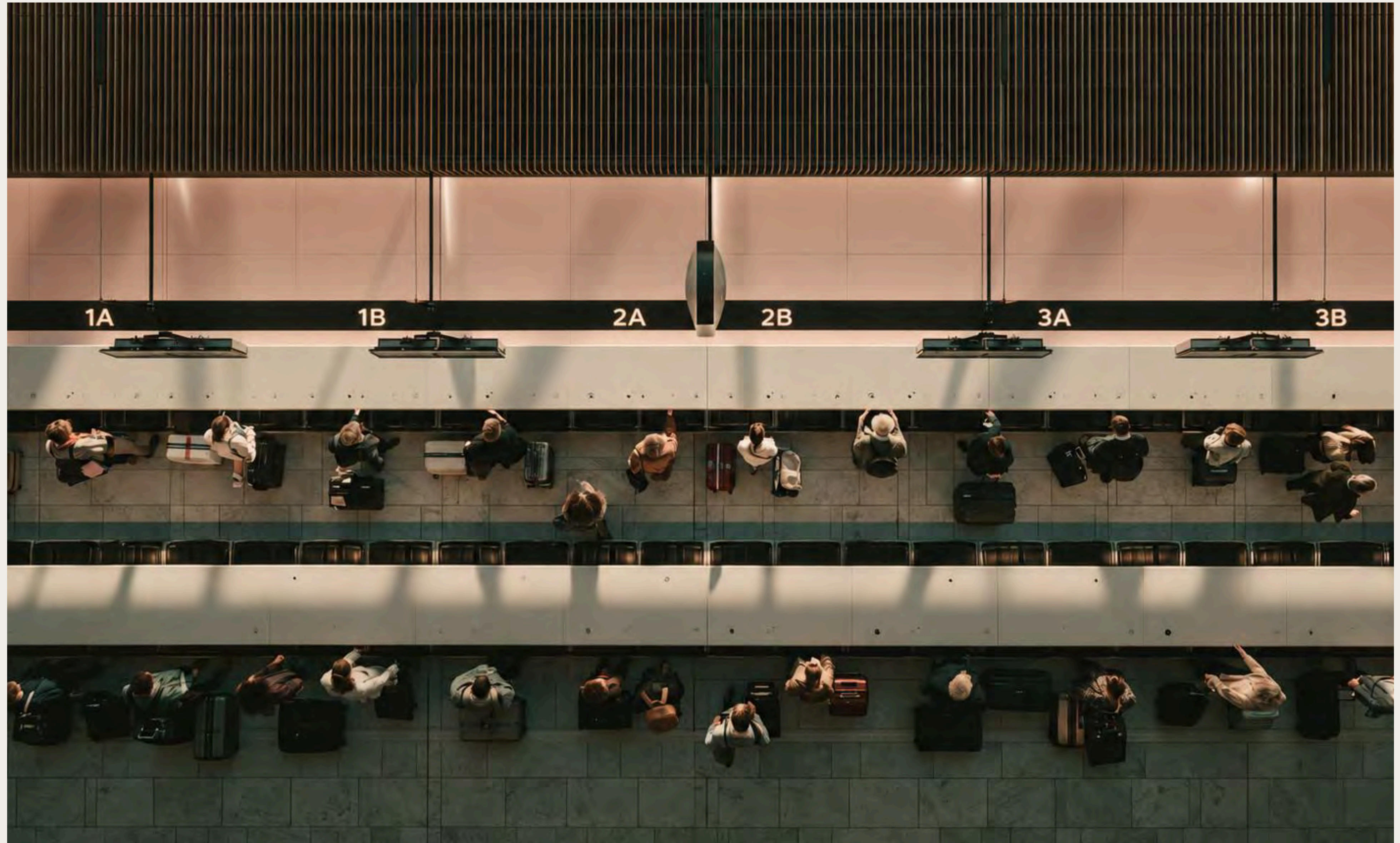
Figure 2. Usage-based metering now sits ahead of flat subscription as a current pricing approach.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter two

This is a logical response to the way digital services now create value. Two customers may have access to the same product but use it in very different ways. One may consume more data, run more transactions, generate more events, process more workloads or create more cost-to-serve. A flat subscription can hide those differences. Usage components allow the provider to create a closer relationship between value, consumption, cost and revenue.

Hybridization creates operational complexity. A hybrid subscription plus usage model must still manage the base subscription. It must also meter usage, apply contract terms, calculate variable charges, support exceptions, explain the invoice and reconcile the result with revenue recognition rules. Every additional commercial component creates downstream consequences. It is also where the gap between what has been sold and what can be measured, billed and defended first becomes visible: each new commercial layer is another place that link can hold, or fail.

Subscriptions are not disappearing. They are being re-engineered around usage. That rebuild is one of the clearest signs that usage monetization has become part of the mainstream revenue architecture, and it is also the surface on which the report's central question is being tested in practice: can the organization run a hybridized commercial model with the trust, accuracy and financial control its customers and its finance team now expect?



Chapter three:

The decline of the seat-based assumption



Subscriptions are being rebuilt because the seat, the unit they were built on, no longer carries the weight of software value.

For years, seat-based pricing gave software companies a simple commercial unit. More users meant more value, and more value meant more revenue. That model worked well when access was the main proxy for adoption. But the relationship between seats and value has weakened as software has become more automated, usage-

intensive, data-rich, API-driven and outcome-oriented.

The pressure is visible in the drivers behind usage and outcome-based pricing. 41.2% of organizations cite competitive pressure or shifting market norms. 39.8% cite the need to better align price to value delivered. 37.7% cite rising delivery costs or margin pressure, including compute, data and AI costs. The shift is being pulled by market

expectations, pushed by cost pressure and shaped by the need for stronger value alignment.

The seat model struggles when value is created without a corresponding increase in users. A small number of users can generate high levels of consumption, automation, data processing or compute cost. A larger number of users may generate relatively little. Pricing by seat

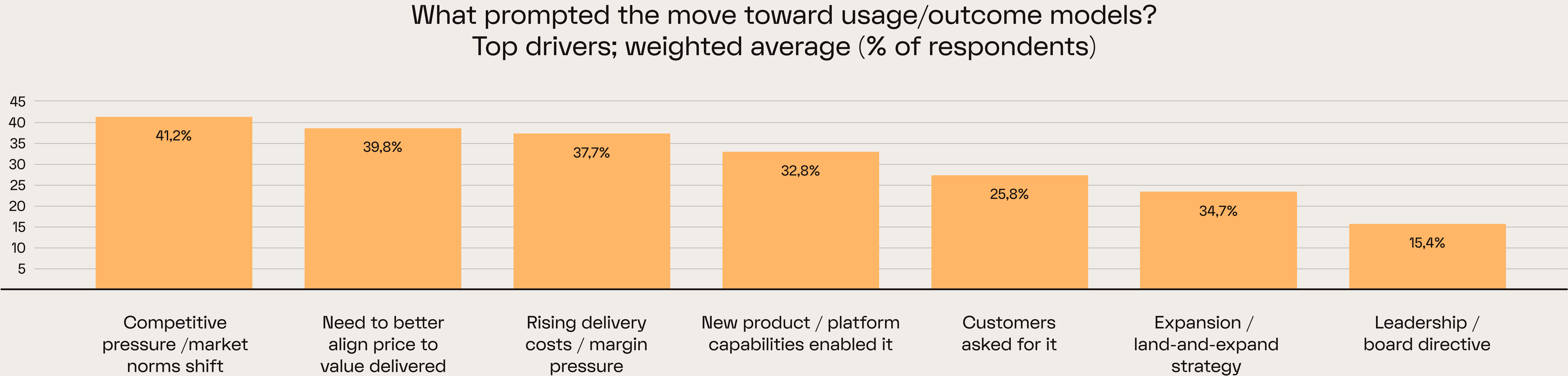


Figure 3. Competitive pressure, value alignment and delivery-cost pressure are the leading prompts for usage or outcome-based models.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Pricing by seat alone can therefore miss expansion, hide subsidies or create margin exposure.

In each of those cases, what has been sold by the seat no longer matches what is actually happening in the product – the same gap the rest of this report tracks, applied to the unit that used to settle it.

The expected benefits explain why organizations are moving beyond that assumption. 52.3% say revenue growth is the leading expected benefit, and 31.5% cite customer acquisition. Usage monetization can help providers capture expansion more naturally as customers consume more. It can also reduce upfront commitment and help customers start smaller before scaling.

But the move away from seats raises a harder question: what is the unit of value? If the answer is no longer simply the user, the organization must define value in a way that can be measured, billed, defended and explained, to customers as much as to finance. That is where many usage adopters encounter the next layer of complexity, because the customer’s view of what counts as fair is now part of the answer.

Expected outcomes from usage/outcome models
Weighted average (% of respondents)

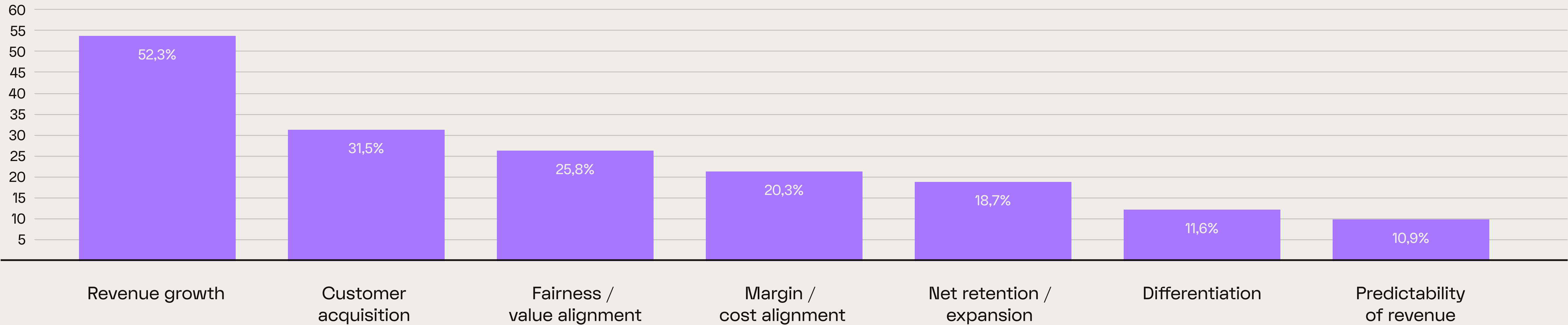
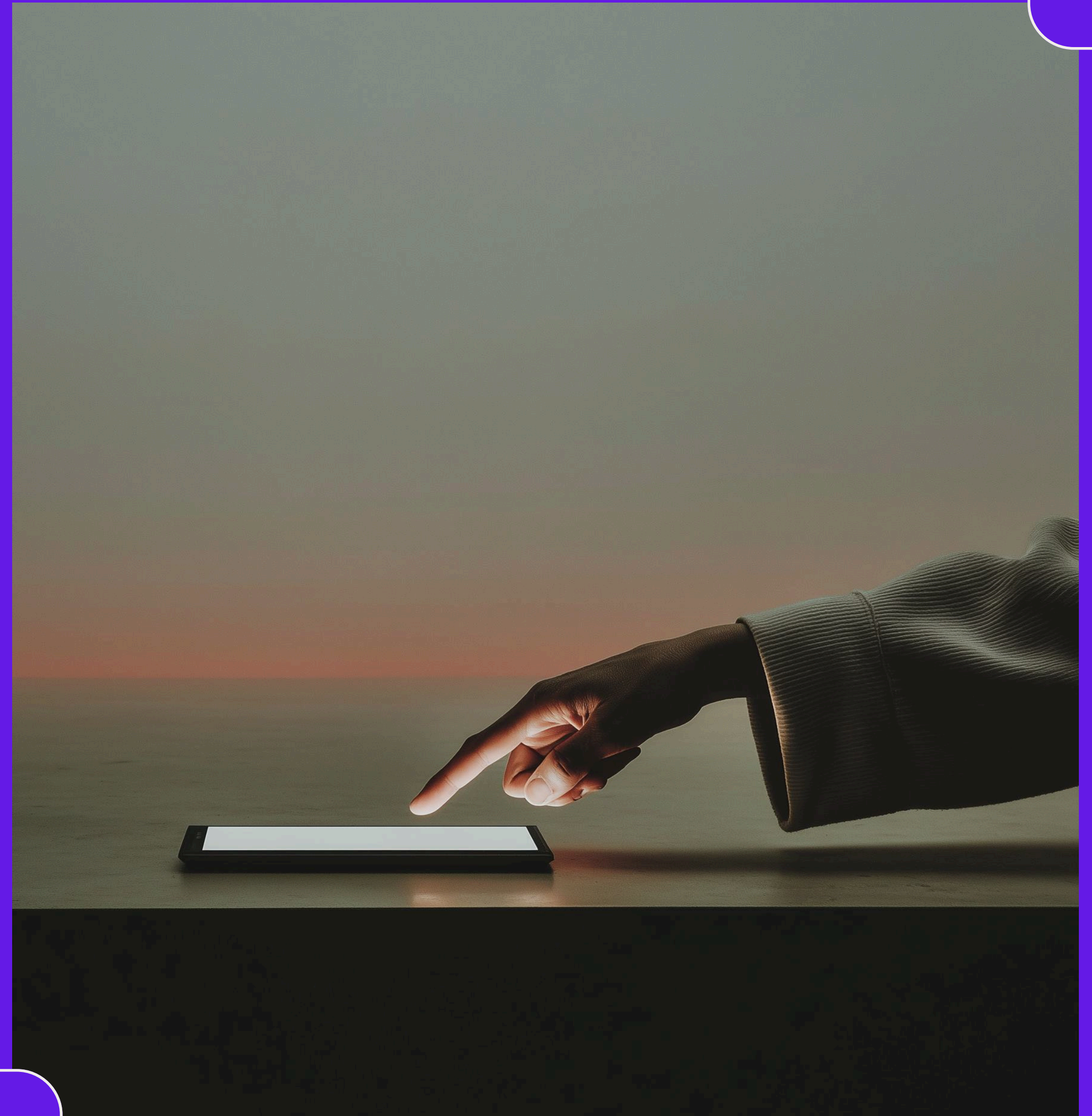


Figure 4. Revenue growth is the leading expected benefit, followed by customer acquisition.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter four:

Customer trust is the adoption constraint



Chapter four

Customers are not rejecting usage and outcome-based pricing outright. They are asking for trust.

Variable pricing can create anxiety because customers fear surprise, loss of control or charges they cannot explain internally. But the research does not show broad opposition. It shows a market in which customers can accept usage monetization when the model is predictable, transparent and supported by guardrails.

The constraint is still real. 25.7% say customer acceptance or pushback is the single biggest constraint on scaling usage or outcome-based pricing. But only 1.9% say customer response is mostly negative. 41.2% say customer response is mixed, and 20.9% say customers are cautious and need guardrails or education.

This tells usage adopters where to focus. The challenge is not to persuade customers to accept volatility with no safeguards. The challenge is to make usage monetization understandable and controllable. Customers need to know what they are being charged for, how the charge is calculated, when spend is approaching a threshold and how they can manage usage.

Organizations are already responding. 48.5% use or plan to use budget alerts or threshold notifications. 44.5% use or plan to use invoice previews or real-time cost dashboards. 34.9% use or plan to use usage tiers or volume discounts. Only 4.9% say they have no guardrails currently.



Guardrails are becoming part of the usage monetization architecture. Budget alerts, dashboards and invoice previews give customers visibility before the charge becomes final. They make usage easier to manage and help commercial teams move the conversation from surprise to control.

Customer trust cannot be treated as a communications issue alone. It must be built into the operating model through data accuracy, timely visibility, clear commercial rules, transparent invoice design and dispute handling processes that can resolve questions quickly. The organizations that do this well will turn variable pricing into revenue customers accept. Those that do not will produce disputes, pushback and slower scale, and the gap between what has been sold and what can be defended will continue to widen on the customer side, even when the economic logic of usage pricing is sound.

Customer response when usage/outcome pricing is introduced Weighted average (% of respondents)

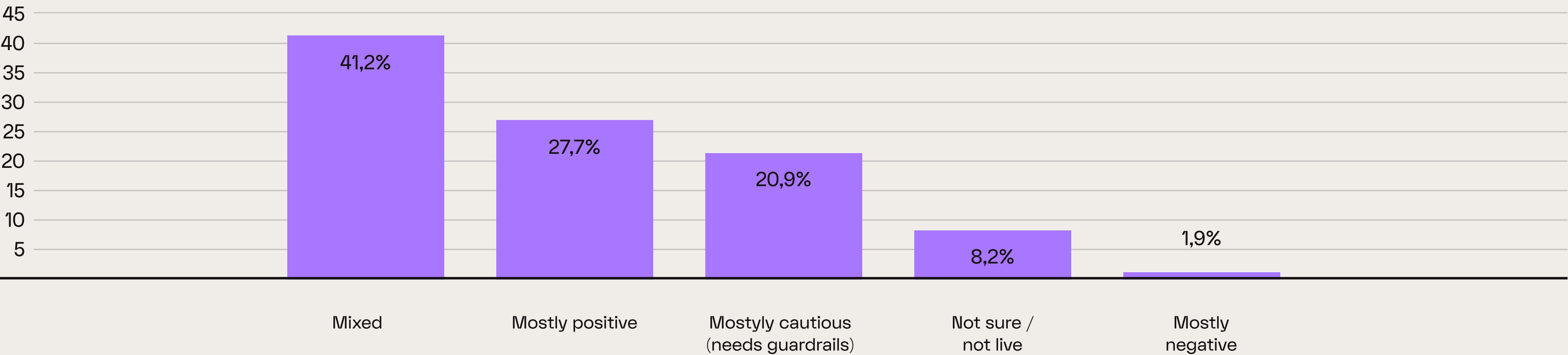


Figure 5. The customer issue is caution and mixed response, not broad rejection. Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Guardrails used or planned to build trust Weighted average (% of respondents)

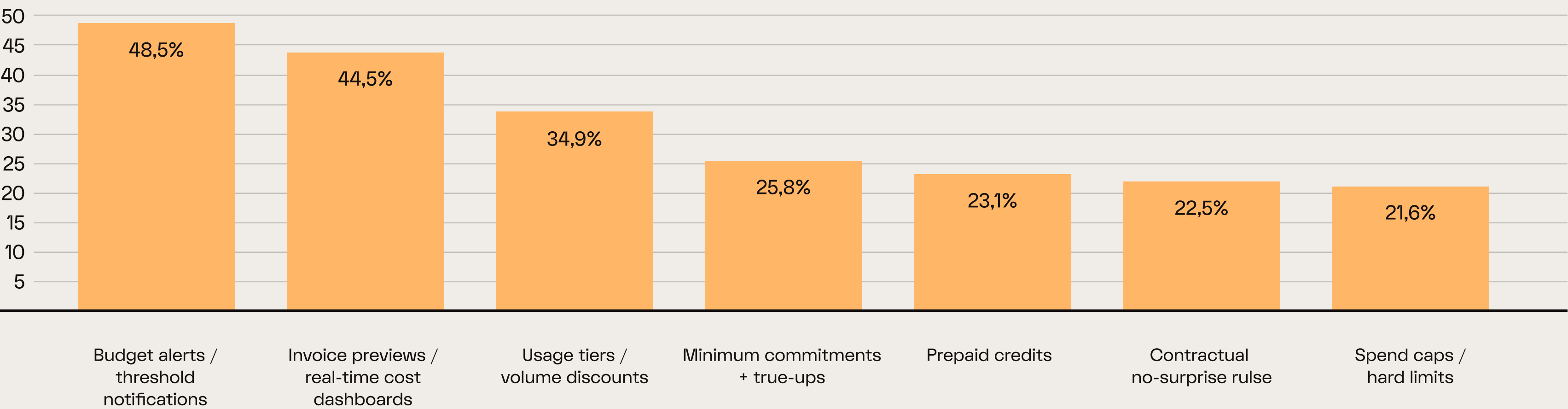


Figure 6. Predictability controls and explainability features are becoming part of the trust layer. Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter five:

The hard part is turning usage into revenue



Chapter five

Usage pricing is easy to describe. Turning usage into revenue is the hard part.

At the commercial level, the idea is simple: customers pay based on what they use or the outcomes they receive. Behind the scenes sits a chain. The business must meter usage activity, identify which events matter, capture them reliably, validate and cleanse the data, apply rating rules, account for contract terms, translate usage into billable line items, generate accurate invoices, manage adjustments, handle disputes and recognize revenue correctly. The chain can hold at low volumes and inside a single product. It begins to strain when volume rises, when multi-product usage has to be attributed back to the individual user, when contracts diverge from one another, and when the model moves from measuring usage to monetizing it. Each step in the chain is also a point of failure, and each failure widens the gap between what has been sold as usage pricing and what can actually be measured, billed and defended.

The research shows that these challenges are already material. 35.7% cite revenue recognition, accruals or reporting as a breaking point. 32.0% cite dispute handling and adjustments. 31.5% cite capturing usage events reliably. 29.8% cite translating usage into billable line items. 28.4% cite validating or cleansing usage data. The difficulty runs across the full path from product activity to financial outcome.

Raw usage does not automatically become revenue. A single product may generate millions or billions of events, but only some

are commercially relevant. Some need to be aggregated, filtered or mapped to customers, accounts, products, plans, contracts or entitlements. Some fall inside allowances or commitments. Some need to be rated differently because of customer tier, geography, channel, partner relationship, negotiated terms or timing. The business has to translate single or multiple products reality into commercial reality.

That is why usage monetization requires mediation as much as measurement. Measurement captures that something happened. Mediation determines what that event means commercially. It turns raw activity into a chargeable unit that the provider can bill and the customer can recognize as fair.

Translating usage into billable line items is imperative because customers do not pay for raw events. They pay for a commercial interpretation of those events. That interpretation must be clear enough to appear on an invoice, align with the contract and make sense to the customer. A technically accurate usage measure can still fail commercially if it cannot be explained in business terms.

Data validation and cleansing complete the chain. Usage data may be high-volume,



fast-moving and sourced from multiple products, platforms or channels. It may include errors, duplicates, missing fields or mismatches between product systems and customer records. Without validation, the business risks billing from flawed data. With too much manual validation, the business risks creating a model that cannot scale.

Revenue recognition is the most frequently cited breaking point because it is where

commercial complexity becomes financial responsibility. Once usage affects revenue, finance needs to know when revenue should be recognized, how variable charges should be accrued, how adjustments should be treated and how reporting should reflect the model. If usage data arrives late, is incomplete or requires manual correction, the finance process becomes exposed.

Usage monetization does not succeed when a business starts charging by usage. It succeeds when the business can convert usage into revenue accurately, automatically, transparently and in a way finance can trust.

Where usage monetization breaks in practice
Breaking points experiences; weighted average (% of respondents)

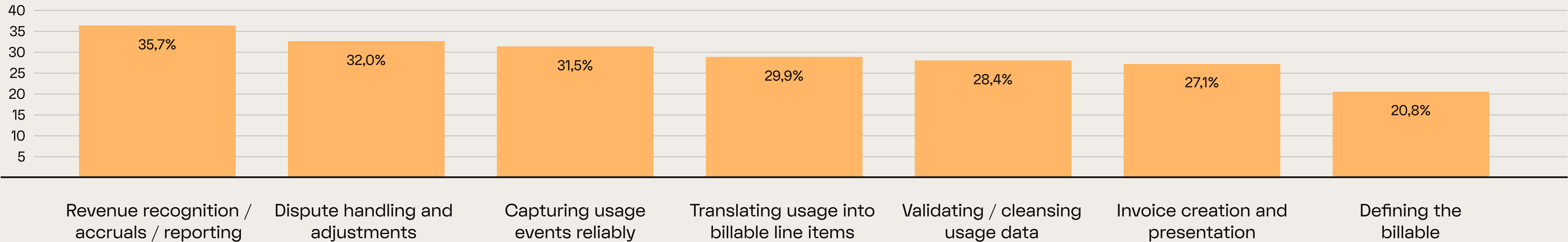


Figure 7. The breaking points sit across the full path from product activity to financial outcome.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter six:

Billing and finance systems are becoming the bottleneck



Chapter six

Billing and finance systems have become commercial scaling constraints.

That framing matters. The limitations exposed by usage monetization should not be treated as a narrow technology issue or a back-office process problem. They now affect growth, customer trust, revenue accuracy and the ability to operate variable commercial models at scale.

Many billing and finance systems were designed for a different commercial world: fixed subscriptions, recurring invoices, stable contract values and predictable renewal cycles. Usage monetization places different demands on them. It introduces high-volume activity, variable charges, complex rating rules, customer-specific terms, product usage feeds, invoice explainability and greater dependency on integration between products, billing, ERP and finance.

The constraints are clear. 33.4% say complex rating rules are hard to implement. 26.0% cite poor integration between product usage data and billing or ERP. 23.5% say revenue recognition or reporting is difficult. 23.0% say customer-specific pricing or contract terms are hard to support. 22.7% say invoicing lacks transparency or line-item explainability. Only 18.7% say they have no major stack limitations.

Complex rating rules lead the list because

usage pricing often depends on more than a single unit price. Charges may vary by tier, volume, product, region, contract, entitlement, commitment, customer segment or usage type. Some customers may have negotiated terms, free allowances, caps, volume discounts or bundled offers. The billing system must interpret all of this accurately.

The low share of organizations reporting no major stack limitations is significant. Only 18.7% say they have no major limitations. That means the majority see some form of infrastructure constraint. In a market where usage and outcome-based pricing have crossed the adoption threshold, this gap creates commercial pressure. The offer has become more dynamic than the systems supporting it.

This has direct consequences for leadership. A company may decide that usage pricing is strategically necessary, but if its billing and finance infrastructure cannot support the model, the strategy will create friction. Sales may sell terms that are hard to bill. Product may produce usage signals that finance cannot consume. Customers may receive invoices they cannot understand. Finance may rely on manual adjustment. Revenue operations may become the shock absorber for a model the stack cannot support.

That is why the bottleneck should be addressed as a commercial priority. Better



billing and finance infrastructure can unlock growth by making more flexible models easier to launch and easier to trust. It can reduce manual work, improve revenue accuracy, support customer transparency and give finance more confidence in variable revenue. The investment case is therefore not simply operational efficiency. It is commercial scalability.

Usage monetization exposes the limits of legacy revenue systems because it changes what those systems must do. The businesses that recognize this early will treat metering, billing, ERP integration, rating logic, revenue recognition and invoice explainability as core elements of monetization strategy. Those that do not may find that the constraint on growth is

not customer demand. It is the revenue system’s ability to keep up.

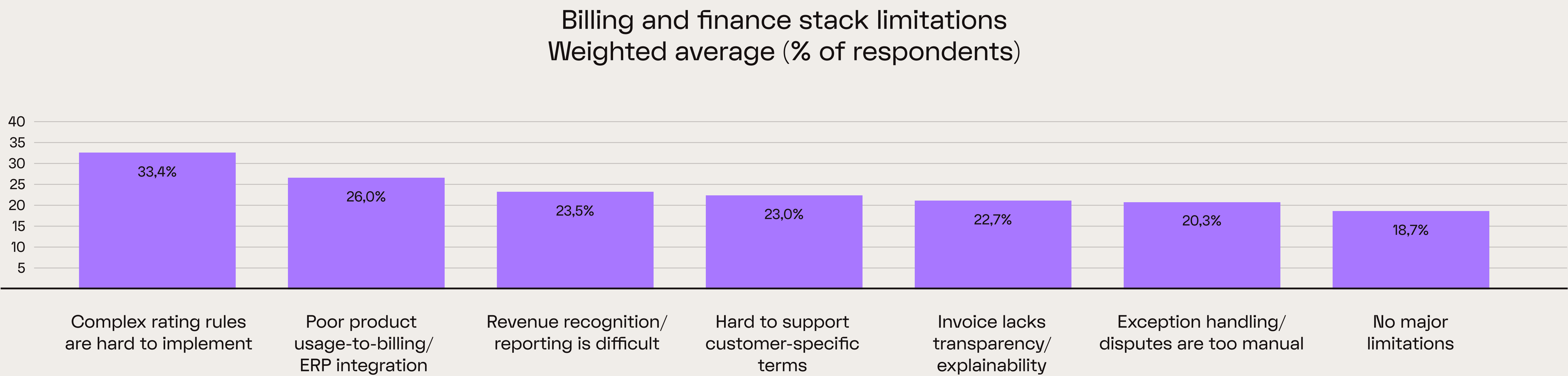


Figure 8. Stack limitations are now commercial scaling constraints, not just back-office issues.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

Chapter seven:

Usage data has become revenue data



Chapter seven

Once usage becomes billable, usage data becomes financially material.

The same data that once helped product teams understand adoption, engagement or performance now plays a direct role in revenue. That changes the standard it must meet. Product insight can tolerate some approximation. Financial-grade usage data cannot.

The research initially suggests confidence. 48.0% of organizations say they have high or very high confidence that their usage data is accurate, complete and auditable when it becomes billable, and 44.7% have moderate confidence. Yet the same respondents say they handle 67.0% of usage invoices with manual work and dispute charges at 75.4% of customer accounts. Confidence in the data is not matched by confidence in what the data produces.

The validation findings show why. Only 26.0% have mostly automated validation with an audit trail. 46.0% rely on some automated checks plus manual review, and 19.5% rely mostly on manual checks. That creates a serious question about what confidence actually means. If only a quarter have mostly automated validation with an audit trail, high confidence is not the same as financial-grade confidence.

Organizations may be confident that they understand how their products are being used. But billable usage requires a different level of precision, especially when customers use multiple products.



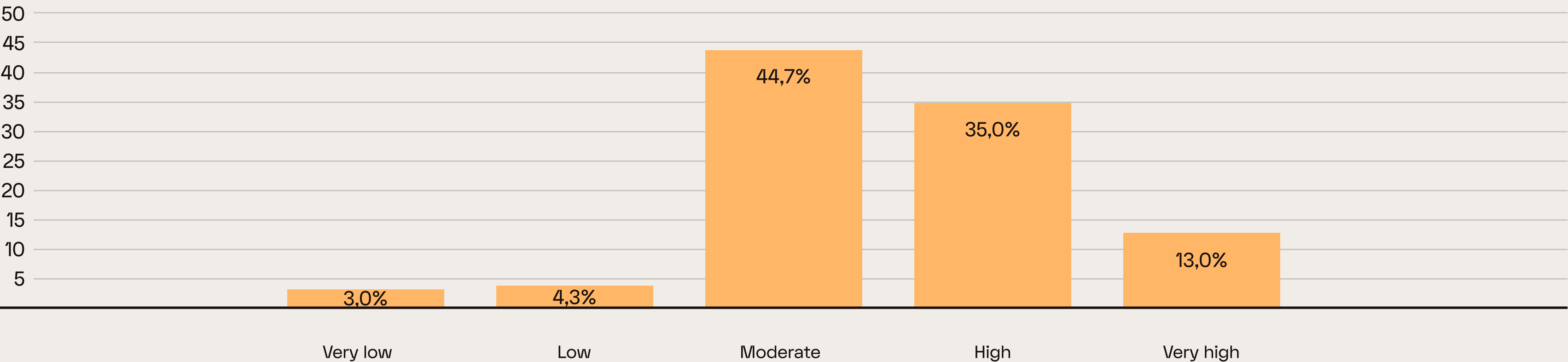
The data must be aggregated, validated, metered and mediated down to the right customer, account, across products, contract, entitlement and billing period. It must then flow downstream to billing, ERP and finance systems with enough integrity to support an invoice, an audit trail and a revenue recognition process.

Auditability is the crucial word. A business can only treat usage data as revenue data if it can trace how a usage event became a charge. That trace should show what happened, when it happened, which customer or account it belonged to, which rule was applied, what charge was calculated and how that charge appeared on the invoice.

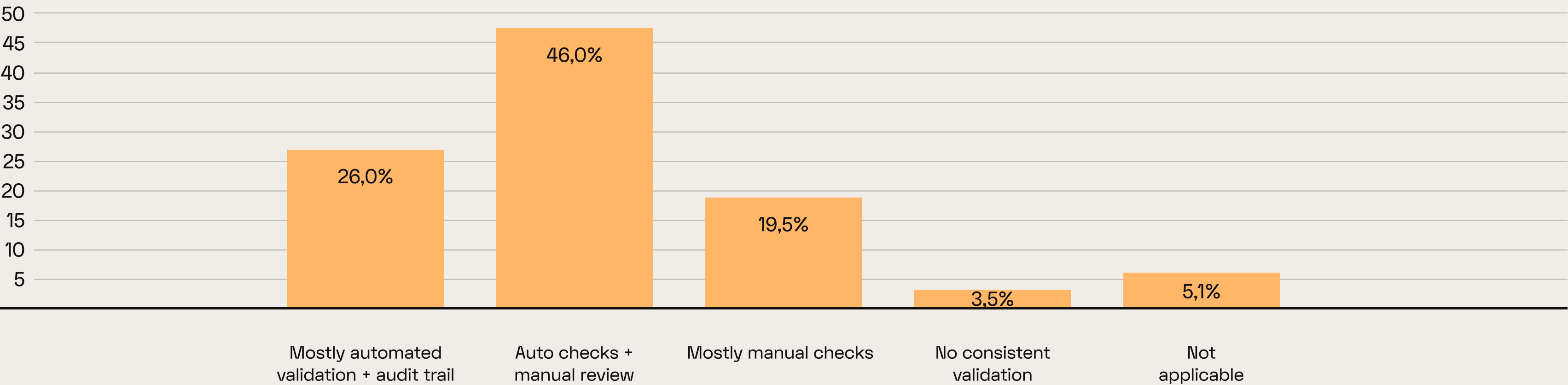
The market has reached a point where usage data can no longer be treated as an analytics asset alone. It has become part of the financial system. The gap between 48.0% high confidence and 26.0% audit-grade validation is where that recognition is still catching up, and it is the most direct measure of why this is the year trust broke. The organizations that close it first will set the standard the rest of the market is judged against.

Confidence in billable usage data
Accuracy, completeness and auditability

Figure 9. Confidence in usage data is high on the surface, but validation maturity shows why financial-grade trust is harder.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.



How usage transactions are validating before
invoicing, Weighted average (% of respondents)



Chapter eight:

Manual work and disputes are the hidden cost of usage pricing





Usage-based pricing can create flexibility, but flexibility has an operational cost when the model depends on manual intervention or when customers cannot understand the charge.

That cost is often hidden at first. Early volumes may be manageable. Manual checks may feel prudent. Adjustments may feel normal. Disputes may be treated as part of customer management. But as usage revenue scales, these frictions slow billing, increase cost, absorb specialist time and undermine trust.

The manual work data is striking. 67.0% say more than 5% of usage or outcome invoices require manual work before being sent. 43.1% say more than 10% require manual work. 17.9% say more than 25% require manual work. Only 22.2% say just 0-5% require manual intervention. Manual work is not an edge case. It is a common feature of the current operating model.

That should concern leaders because manual work limits scale. If a meaningful share of invoices requires human checking, correction or adjustment, the operational burden grows as the model succeeds. Growth creates more work for the revenue team and weakens the operating leverage usage monetization is supposed to create.

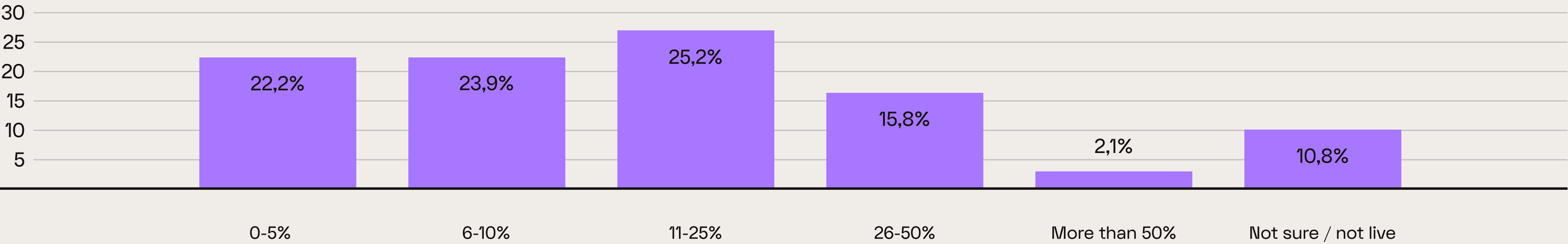
The dispute data adds a second layer. 75.4% say customers dispute usage or outcome charges at least occasionally, meaning 2% or more of invoices. 31.4% say disputes happen regularly or frequently, meaning more than 5% of invoices. 32.0% cite dispute handling and adjustments as a breaking point. 22.7% say invoicing lacks transparency or line-item explainability.

This challenges any easy claim that organizations have strong confidence in billable usage data. If customers regularly question the charge, the issue is not only operational efficiency. It is revenue trust. A business with clear audit trails, transparent dashboards and explainable line items can resolve disputes faster. A business relying on fragmented data or manual reconstruction will struggle.

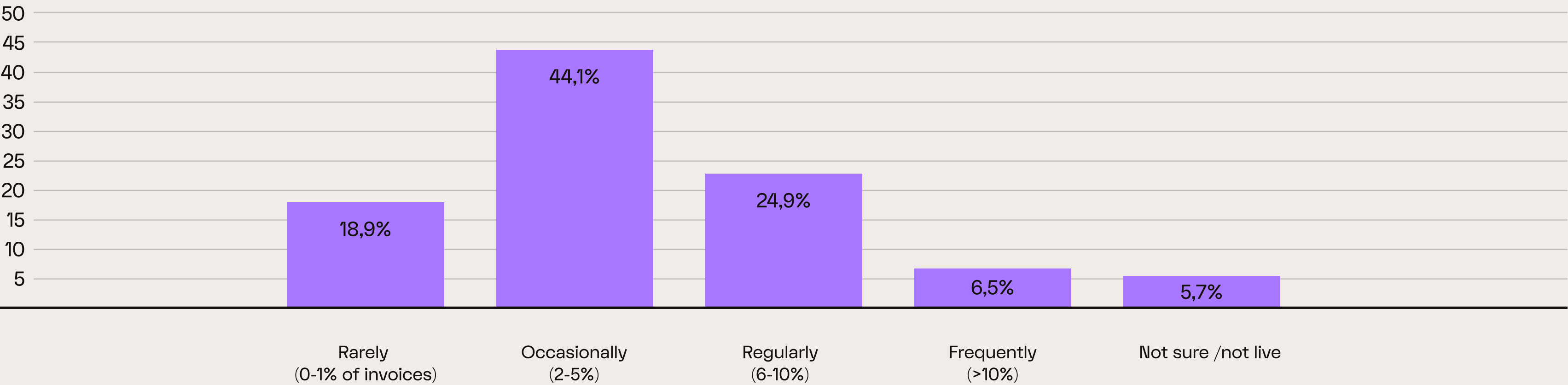
More automated rating and invoicing is therefore not simply an efficiency improvement. It is a scale requirement, and only when automation sits on reliable data and clear rules. Automating a weak process will not create trust. It will only scale the break this report is named for.

Share of usage/outcome invoices requiring manual work, Weighted average (% of respondents)

Figure 10. Manual invoice work and customer disputes reveal the hidden cost of immature usage monetization. Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

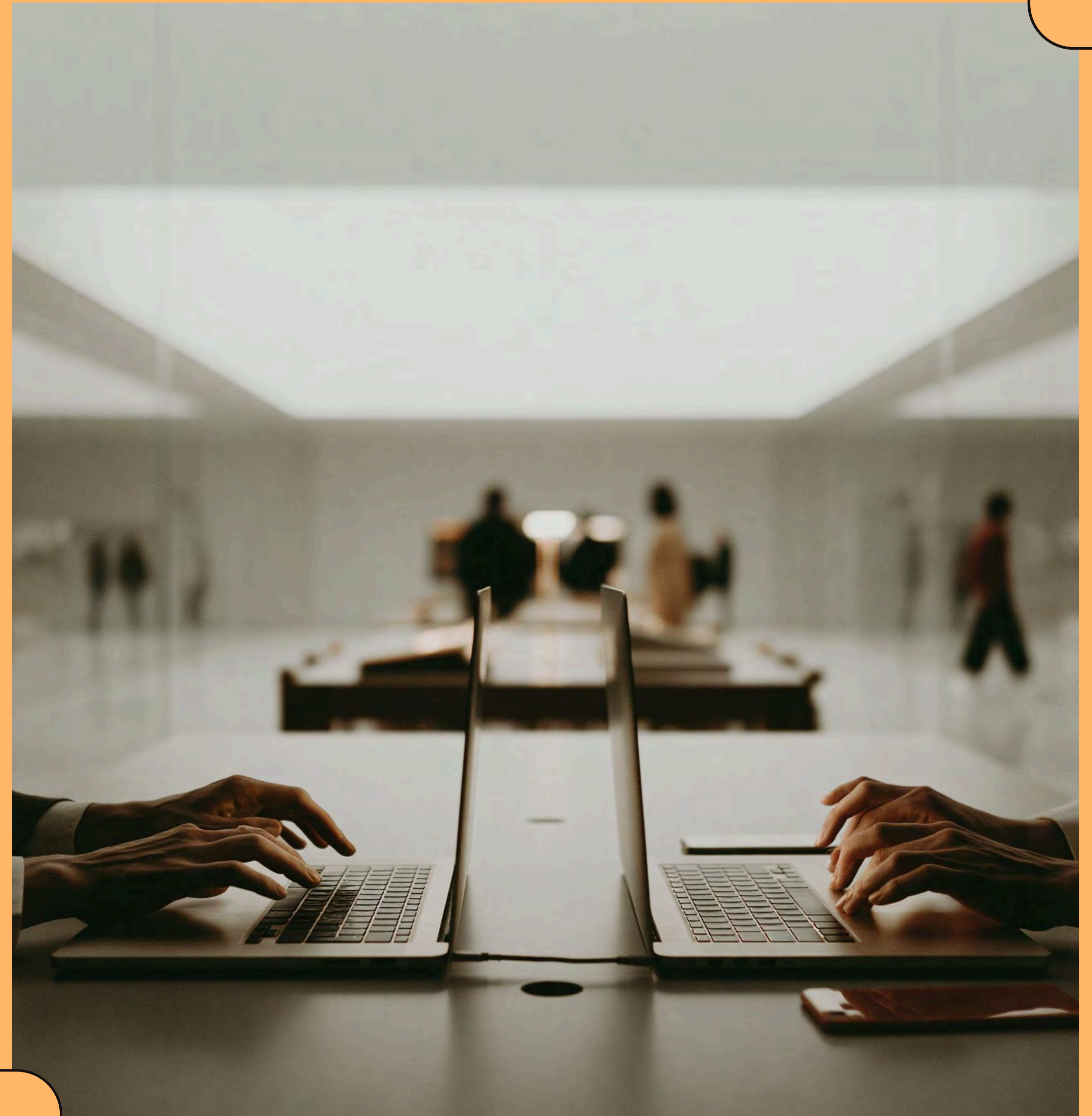


How often customers dispute usage / outcome charges Weighted average (% of respondents)



Chapter nine:

Finance and billing now own the usage monetization challenge



Chapter nine

Usage monetization may begin as a product or commercial strategy, but accountability increasingly lands with finance, billing and order-to-cash teams.

This is one of the clearest signs that usage monetization has become a revenue operating model rather than a pricing exercise. Product teams may define the value. Commercial teams may shape the offer. Sales may take the model to market. But once usage becomes billable, the organization must turn it into revenue that can be invoiced, recognized, reported, defended and trusted.

The ownership data is clear. 39.0% say finance or revenue accounting owns end-to-end accountability for usage monetization. 27.1% say billing, RevOps or order-to-cash owns it. Combined, finance and billing-related teams own accountability in 66.1% of organizations.

But the readiness findings create a concern. Only 21.7% rate billing, RevOps or O2C as very ready. Product readiness is higher at 44.4%, while sales and customer success readiness stands at 36.1%. Accountability is landing with the teams the data shows are least ready.



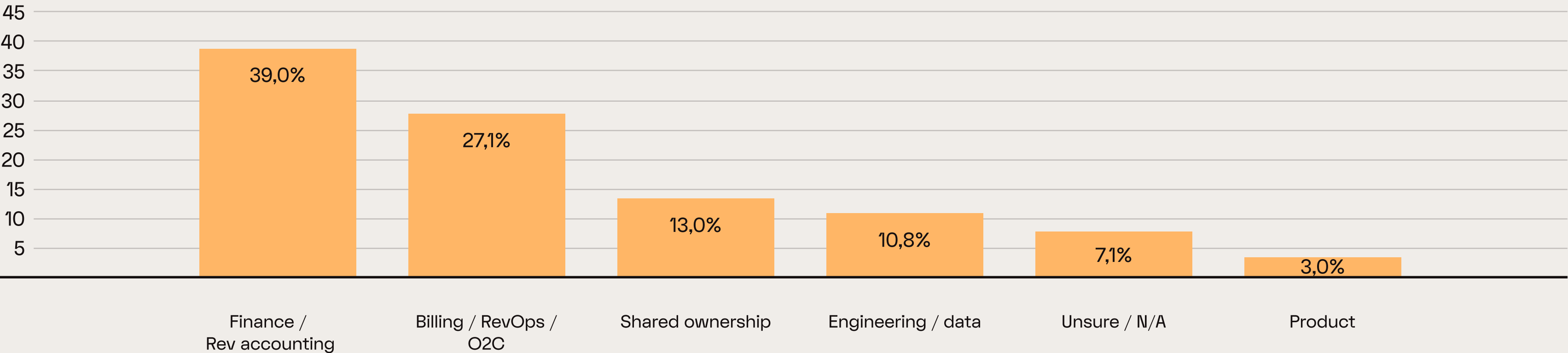
That gap creates organizational strain. If product defines a usage metric that is hard to bill, billing carries the consequence. If sales negotiates customer-specific terms that the system cannot support cleanly, revenue operations must find a workaround. If usage data is incomplete or delayed, finance must manage the reporting impact. If customers dispute invoices, billing and customer success must assemble the evidence.

The shift toward finance and billing ownership should change how organizations govern usage pricing. Decision-making cannot sit only with the team designing the commercial model. It must include the teams responsible for making the model work in practice. Finance needs visibility into revenue recognition implications. Billing needs to understand rating complexity. RevOps needs process continuity. Product needs reliable usage definitions and data. Sales and customer success need to explain the model and manage customer expectations.

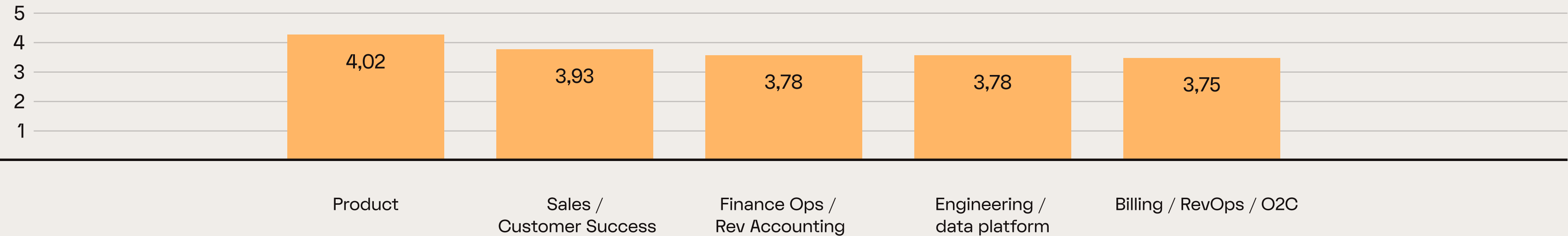
Usage monetization needs explicit ownership, but ownership alone is not enough. When usage data fails, when invoices need manual work, when customers dispute the charge, the cost of the break this report describes lands at finance and billing’s door. The accountable teams must have the systems, data and authority to absorb that load, or the gap between what has been sold and what can be defended widens inside the organization as well as outside it.

Who owns end-to-end usage / outcome billing accountability?
From meter definition to invoice accuracy

Figure 11. Accountability is moving toward finance and billing, while readiness remains uneven.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

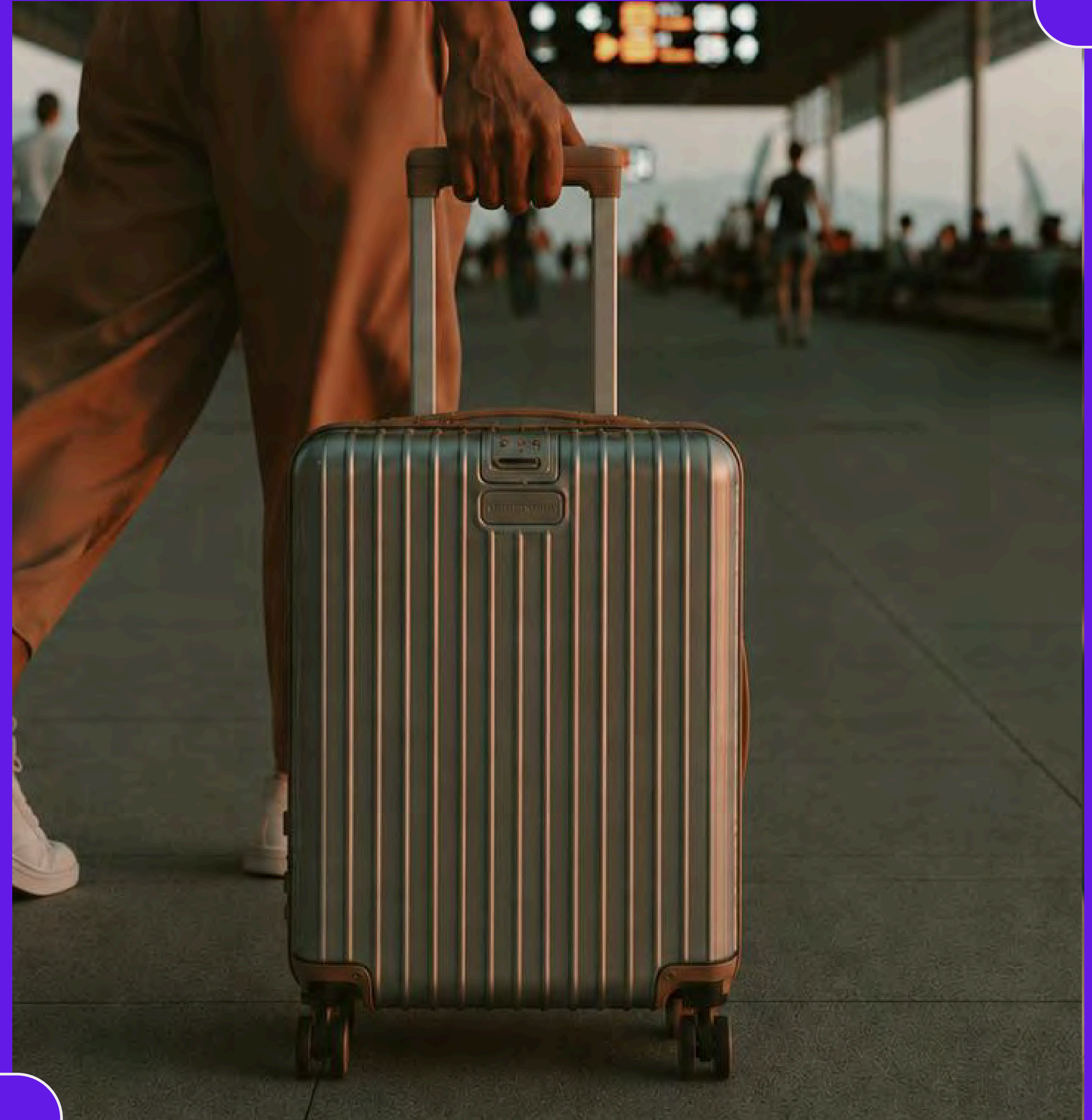


Functional readiness to support usage / outcome pricing
Average readiness scor, 1-5



Chapter ten:

The next phase
belongs to
organizations that
can make usage
trustworthy



The next phase of usage monetization will be won by organizations that make usage trustworthy.	integrity. It means the business can scale variable pricing without creating variable confidence.	transparency. 32.0% say stronger integration from product usage to billing to ERP.	becomes more exposed. Disputes become harder to resolve.
That means accurate, auditable, automated, explainable and connected to finance. It means customers can understand what they are being charged for. It means finance can trust the revenue. It means billing can operate without excessive manual work. It means product usage data can move into commercial systems without losing	The priorities identified by organizations show where the market needs to move. 52.1% say better usage data quality, validation and auditability is the top improvement needed to scale confidently. 37.2% say more automated rating and invoicing. 36.1% say stronger guardrails for predictability. 34.2% say better customer	These priorities describe a strategic agenda. Data quality, validation and auditability lead because they are the foundation of the model. If usage data cannot be trusted, every downstream process becomes weaker. Billing becomes harder to defend. Customer dashboards become less reliable. Revenue recognition	

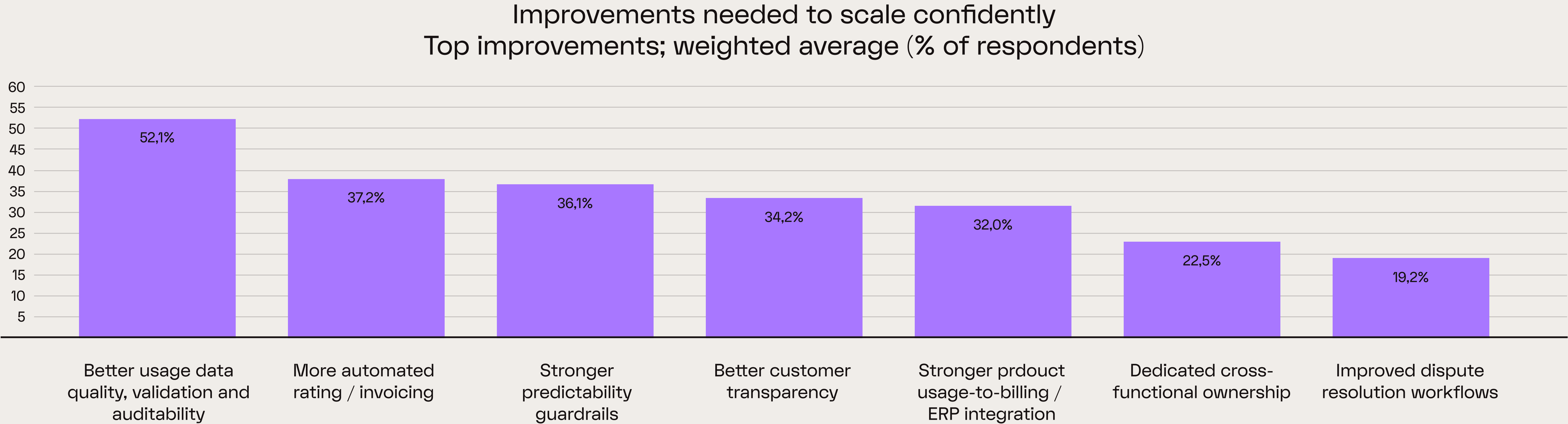


Figure 12. The next phase is defined by usage data quality, auditability, automation, guardrails, transparency and integration.
Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

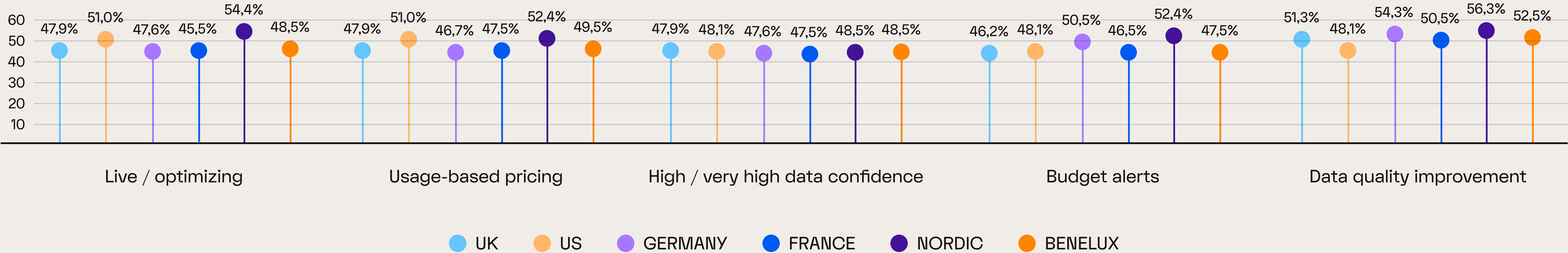
Automated rating and invoicing come next because scale depends on reducing manual intervention. Guardrails for predictability are essential because customers need confidence before variable pricing feels safe. Customer transparency completes the trust equation. A usage-based invoice should not feel like a black box. Integration from product usage to billing to ERP is the structural requirement that connects the whole system.

The regional findings carry the same warning. Nordic respondents lead on adoption, with 54.4% live or optimizing, 52.4% on usage-based metered pricing and only 10.7% not considering the move. They also lead on what comes next: 56.3% name data quality as the top improvement needed to scale confidently, the highest figure in the survey. The most adopted

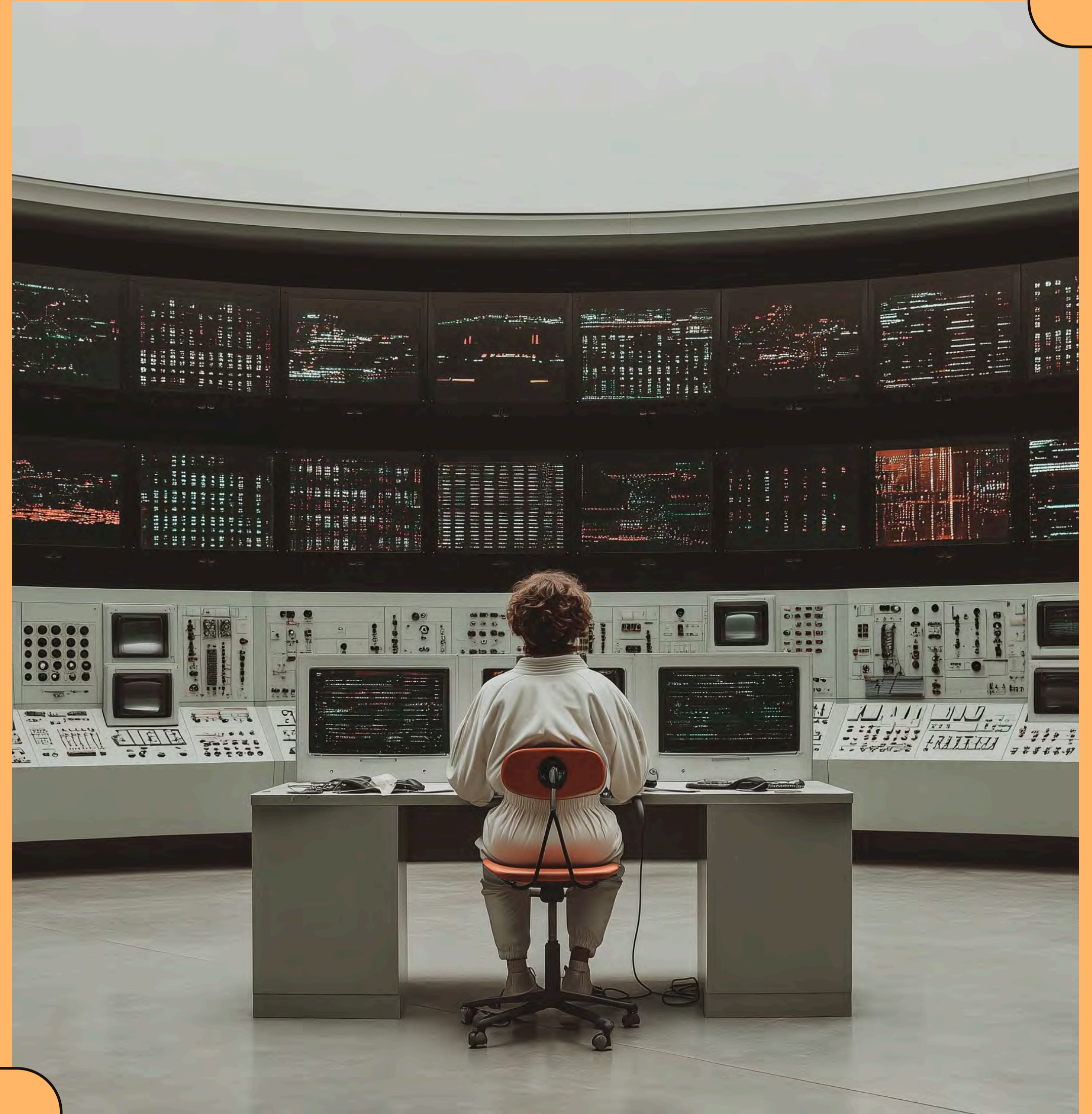
market is also the most exposed to the trust break, and the most decided about closing it.

The market has already adopted the logic of usage monetization. The next advantage belongs to the organizations that can make that logic trustworthy.

Table 2. Regional maturity snapshot



Conclusions





Usage monetization has arrived, and this is the year its operational reality caught up with the commercial story. That is the clearest conclusion of this report. Usage-based and outcome-based pricing have moved beyond the edge of the market and into the commercial mainstream. 83.4% of organizations are at least exploring these models, and 49.1% are already live in some form or optimizing. The market has crossed the adoption threshold.

But adoption is only the first part of the story. The more important finding is that adoption has moved faster than operational readiness. Businesses are embracing usage and outcome-based models because they offer revenue growth, better value alignment, customer acquisition potential and a stronger response to shifting market norms. Yet the systems needed to support these models are still under pressure. Billing, finance, data, revenue recognition, dispute handling and customer transparency are now central to whether usage monetization can scale.

This is why usage monetization should be understood as a revenue trust challenge. Once usage becomes billable, it must be reliable enough to support an invoice, transparent enough for customers to understand, auditable enough for finance to trust and automated enough to scale.

Product telemetry alone is not enough. The business needs financial-grade usage data.

The report shows several tensions leaders should take seriously. Organizations express confidence in usage data, yet only 26.0% have mostly automated validation with an audit trail. Many are adopting usage pricing, yet manual work remains common before invoices are sent. Customers are not broadly rejecting variable pricing, yet disputes occur at least occasionally for 75.4% of organizations. Finance and billing teams increasingly own usage monetization, yet billing, RevOps and O2C are less likely than product to be rated very ready.

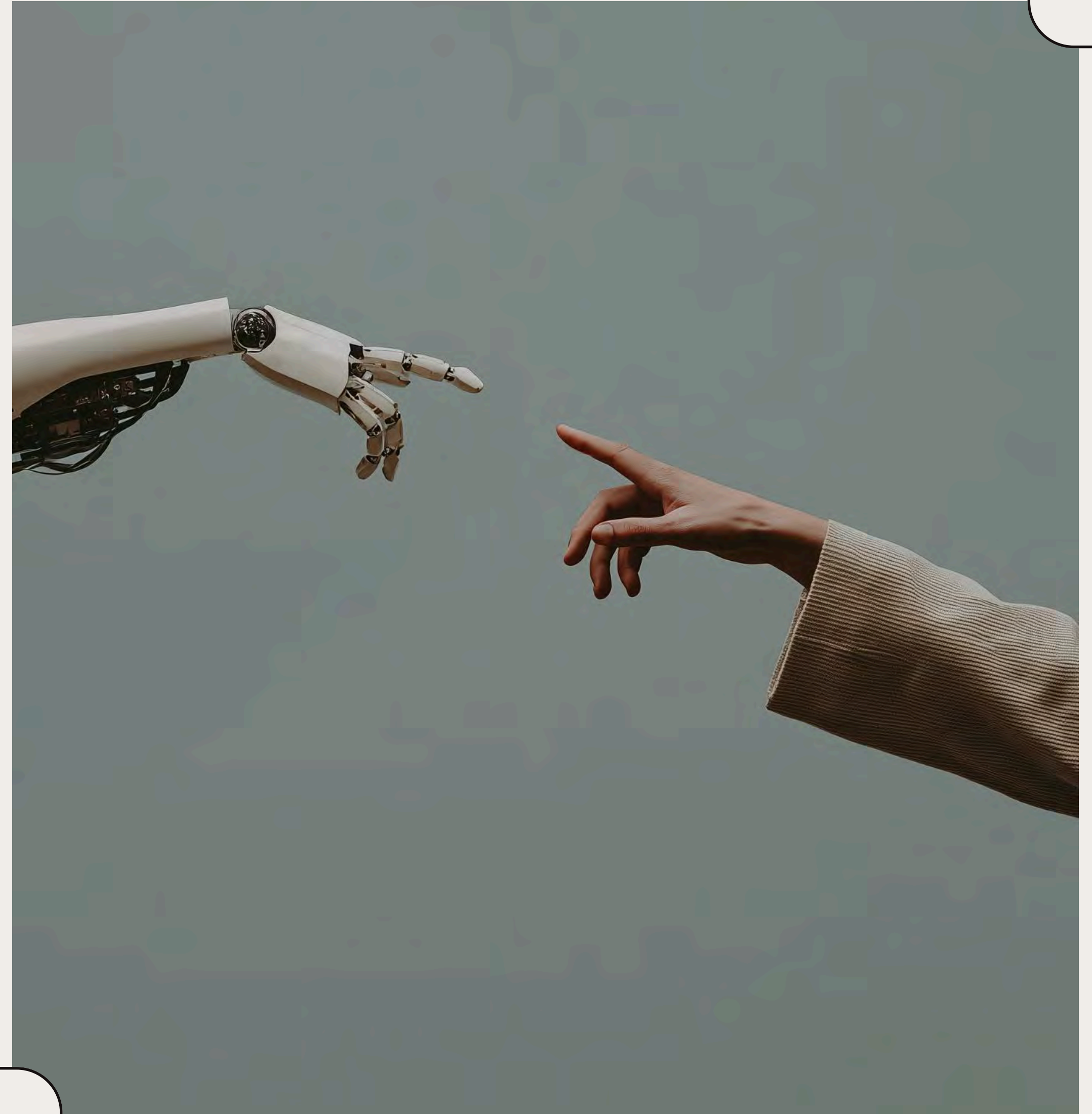
These tensions do not weaken the case for usage monetization. They sharpen it. The model offers real advantages when executed well: closer value alignment, more flexible acquisition, expansion as consumption grows and a more precise relationship between value and revenue. But those advantages depend on trust. Without trust, usage pricing creates surprise, disputes, manual work and weaker revenue confidence.

The businesses that lead the next phase will be operators as much as pricing innovators. They will build systems that can capture

usage events reliably, validate it automatically, rate it under complex rules, invoice it explainably, recognize the revenue cleanly and connect the whole chain from product to billing to ERP. They will make usage trustworthy from the moment it is generated to the moment it is recognized as revenue.

The transition is happening whether organizations are ready or not. The winners will be those that make usage accurate, auditable, automated, explainable and connected to finance. They will turn usage into revenue customers accept and finance can trust. That is what comes after the year trust broke.

Methodology



Methodology

This report is based on structured survey-based market research examining how organizations are adopting usage-based and outcome-based monetization models, and how prepared they are to support those models operationally.

The research draws on responses from 631 survey respondents across six major regional markets. The respondent sample was broadly balanced by region, with participation from the UK, the US, Germany, France, the Nordics and Benelux.

France, the Nordics and Benelux. This regional distribution provides a cross-market view of how usage monetization is being adopted, operationalized and scaled across different commercial environments.

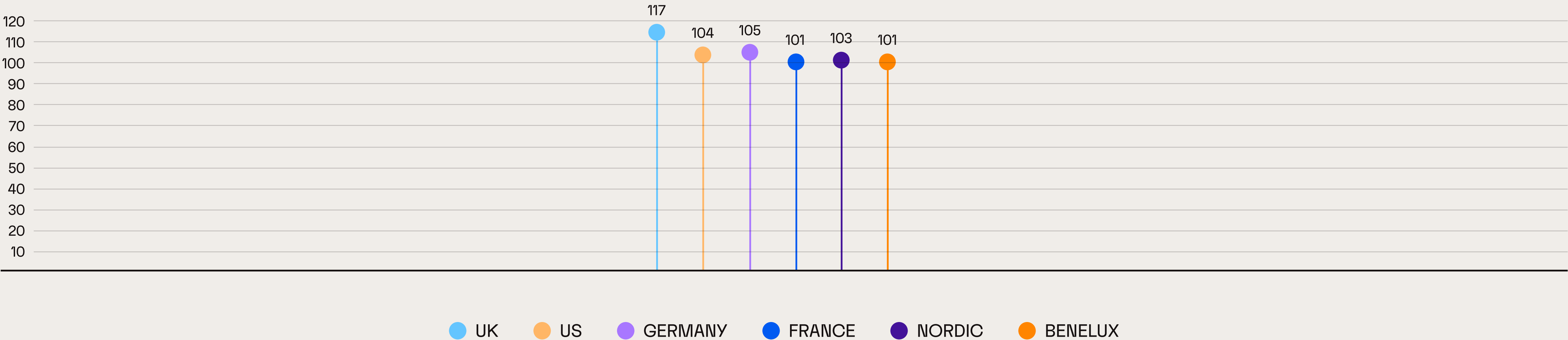
The research explores both the commercial and operational dimensions of usage monetization. On the commercial side it examines adoption status, current pricing approaches, drivers of change, expected benefits and customer response.

On the operational side it examines breaking points in the path from product event to financial outcome, billing and finance stack limitations, confidence in usage data, validation methods, manual invoicing work, dispute frequency, accountability and the improvements organizations believe are needed to scale confidently.

The report treats usage monetization as a cross-functional business issue. The analysis therefore considers the role of product, pricing, finance, revenue accounting, billing, RevOps, order-to-cash, customer success and the systems that connect product usage data to billing, ERP customer success and the systems that connect product usage data to billing, ERP and financial reporting.

As with all survey-based research, the findings reflect what respondents reported about their own organizations, not direct observation of systems or transactions. Their value lies in the strength of the patterns they reveal across a geographically balanced respondent base: usage and outcome-based monetization have crossed the adoption threshold, but the systems required to support trustworthy usage revenue remain uneven.

Table 3. Respondent sample by region



Source: DigitalRoute Usage Adopters Survey, May 2026; n=631.

The strategic case for usage monetization has been made. The work of making usage trustworthy starts now.

DigitalRoute helps usage adopters close the gap between being usage-based and being usage-monetized – making metered activity accurate, auditable and trusted enough to carry real revenue across data, billing and finance. If this report raised questions your organization hasn’t fully answered, we’d like to be part of that conversation.

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A focused conversation on what the 2026 findings mean for your commercial model and where to act first.

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The Usage to Revenue 2026