CherryPeople

State of Mid-Market SaaS Sales

APAC Benchmark Report 2026

Actual insights from AEs on the ground — quota attainment, pipeline quality, blockers, market sentiment and more

n = 23 respondents | Data collected April 2026

At a Glance: Six Numbers Every Revenue Leader Needs

Read this slide first. Understand the market in under 60 seconds.

$142k
Average Base Salary
Typical range: $130k–$168k

$262k
Average OTE
Typical range: $220k–$300k

48%
AEs on track to hit quota
52% are behind — a market-wide signal

39%
Believe <30% of team will hit
A systemic condition, not individual failure

70%
Need 3–4x pipeline coverage
Pipeline quality matters more than volume

39%
Report 4+ month sales cycles
Ramp time implications: 9–12 months

WHAT REVENUE LEADERS SHOULD TAKE AWAY

→ Quota attainment is an unreliable signal of talent quality right now — market conditions are the primary driver of underperformance

→ Compensation expectations are not softening — offers below $130k base will face candidate resistance at offer stage

→ The top-performing AE profile has fundamentally changed — AI leverage, self-sourced pipeline and strategic positioning are the new baseline

→ Ramp assumptions need recalibrating — 9–12 months to full productivity is realistic for mid-market hires in this environment

Survey Methodology

Respondent Profile

- 23 SaaS Account Executives
- Representing Australian and APAC markets
- Mid-Market focused roles
- Typical deal sizes: <$20k to $100k+ ACV

> *While the sample size is intentionally focused, respondents represent a meaningful cross-section of Australian SaaS sales professionals operating in today's market. All responses were collected anonymously.*

23
SaaS AEs Surveyed

April 2026
Data Collected

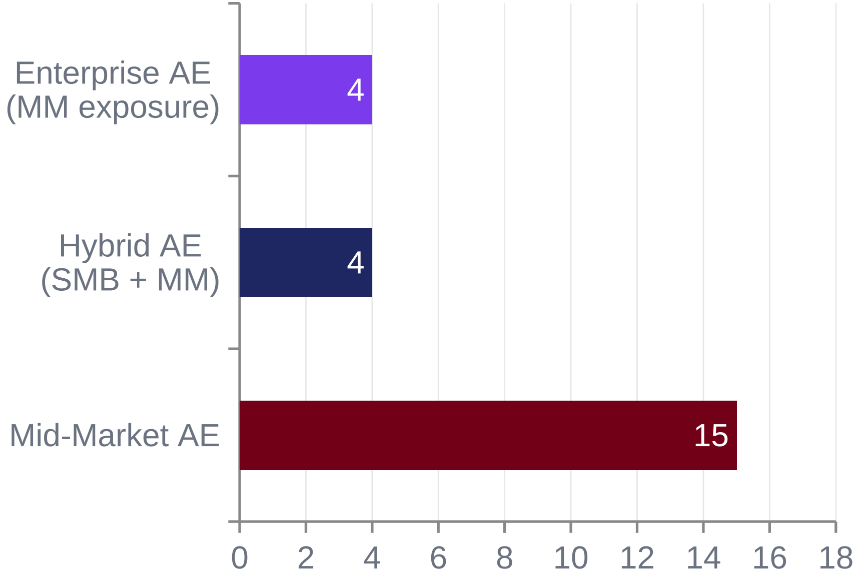
100%
Anonymous Responses

Key topics covered:

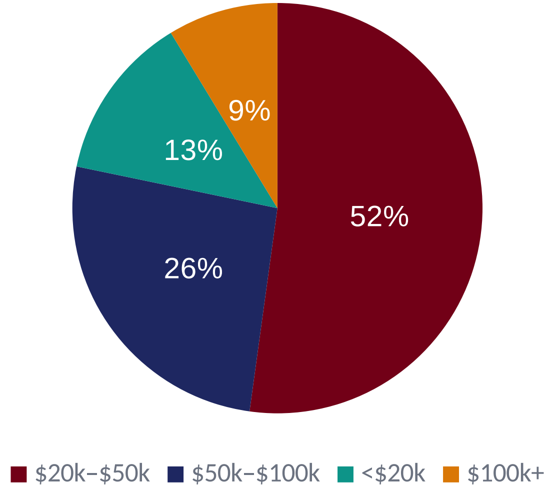
Base salary & OTE · Quota attainment (individual & team) · **Pipeline health & coverage** · Sales cycle length · **Biggest blockers** · Top performer habits · **Market sentiment 2026**

Who Responded

Role breakdown



Typical deal size (ACV)



65% of respondents are pure Mid-Market AEs selling into APAC

Base Salary Benchmarks

Mid-market AE base salaries — Australian SaaS market, 2026 (n=23)

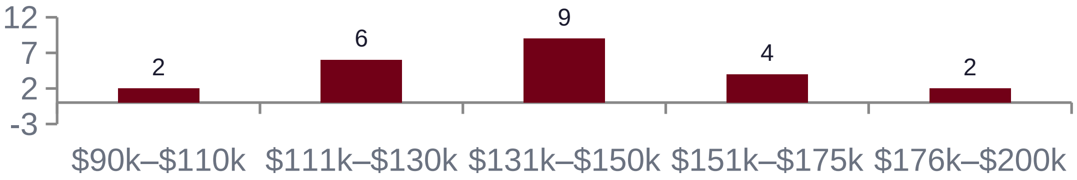
$142k
Average

$130k – $168k
Typical range (25th–75th %ile)

$90k – $200k
Full range (min–max)

Salary range

Salary distribution (# of respondents)



KEY INSIGHT

Competitive hiring processes should benchmark base salary within the $130k–$168k range to avoid losing candidates at offer stage.

Offers below $120k will face significant resistance from experienced mid-market AEs — and signal a lack of market awareness.

Build your offer around the $142k average, then use OTE structure and growth trajectory to differentiate.

OTE Benchmarks

On-target earnings across mid-market AE roles — Australian SaaS market, 2026 (n=21 valid)

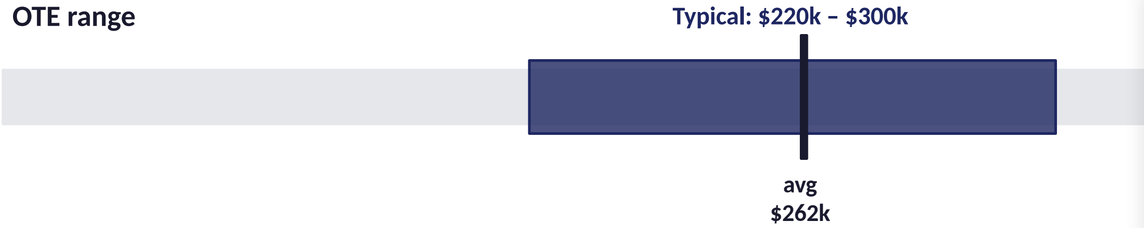
$262k
Average OTE

$220k – $300k
Typical range (25th–75th %ile)

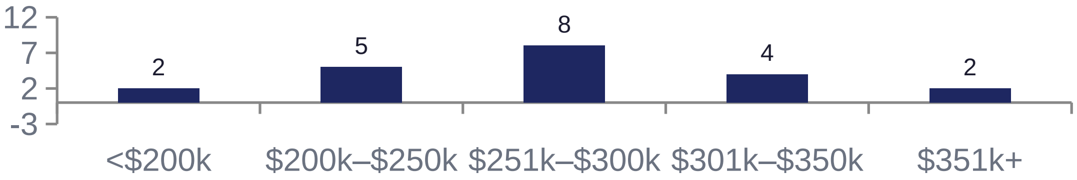
$140k – $400k
Full range (min–max)

~1.85x
OTE:Base multiplier (avg)

OTE range



OTE distribution (# of respondents)



KEY INSIGHT

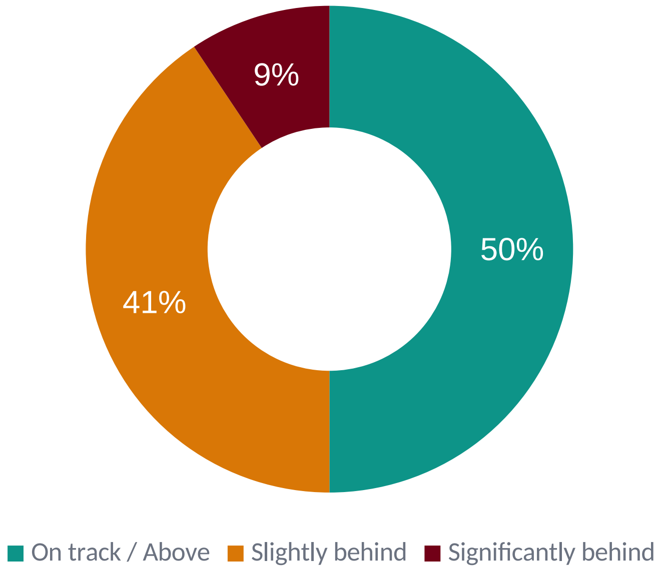
Competitive offers should benchmark OTE within the $220k–$300k range to avoid losing candidates at offer stage.

The 1.85x OTE:Base multiplier reflects candidates' growing scrutiny of variable comp design — a poorly structured incentive plan is now a reason to reject an offer.

The conversation has moved beyond base salary.

Individual Quota Attainment

"Are you currently on track to hit quota this quarter?"



48%
On track or above quota

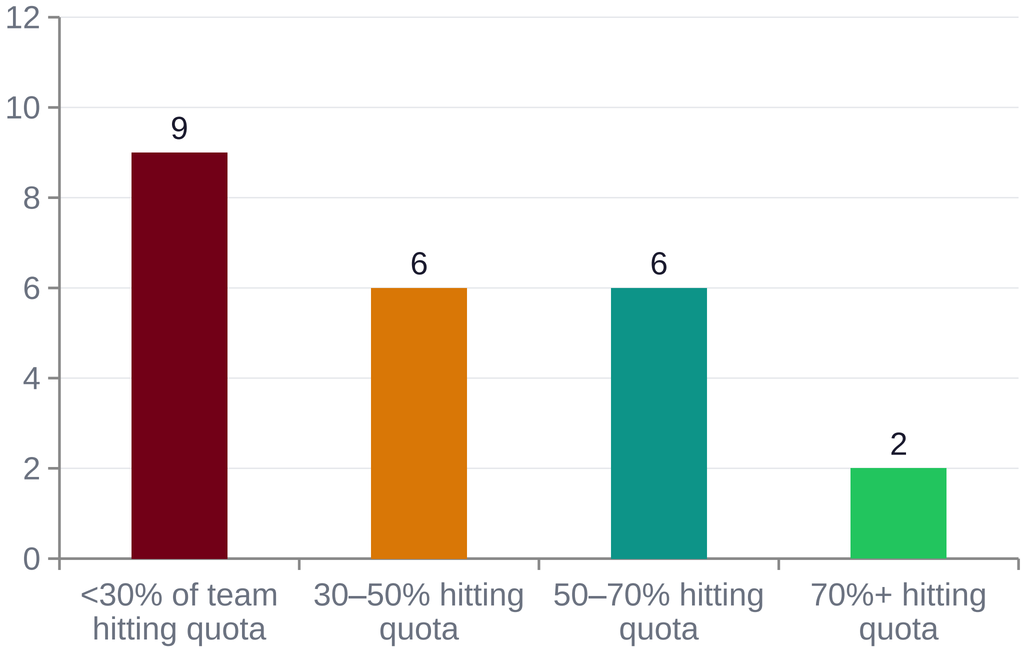
39%
Slightly behind target

9%
Significantly behind

Quota attainment is under market-wide pressure. Revenue leaders should place greater weight on deal quality, pipeline generation and sales process discipline — not quota attainment alone — when assessing candidates.

Team-Level Quota Attainment

"What % of your team do you believe will hit quota this quarter?"



39%

believe fewer than 30% of their team will hit quota

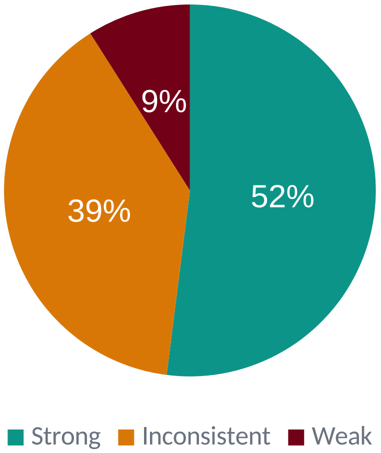
What this means for hiring:

This is a systemic market condition, not an individual performance issue. Strong candidates are available who are underperforming due to factors outside their control — AI-driven buyer hesitancy, extended procurement, and misaligned quotas.

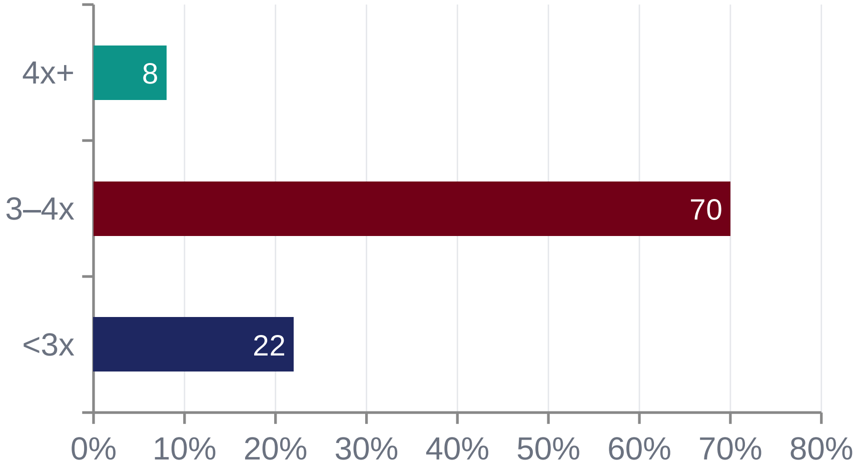
Hiring managers who screen on quota attainment alone risk eliminating the strongest people in the market. Assess context, deal complexity and commercial behaviour instead.

Pipeline Health & Coverage Requirements

Pipeline health



Coverage ratio needed to hit target

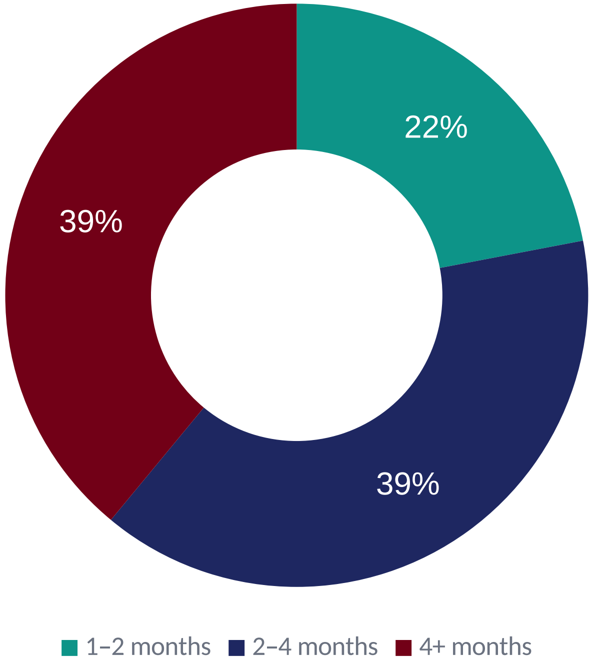


KEY OBSERVATION

Many AEs report strong pipeline health while simultaneously missing quota — suggesting pipeline quality has become more important than volume. Qualification rigour, stage conversion discipline and forecasting accuracy are emerging as the real competitive differentiators. Revenue leaders should audit conversion rates and deal velocity, not just coverage ratios.

Average Sales Cycle Length

"What is your average sales cycle right now?"



22% 1–2 months

Short cycles — typically SMB overlap

39% 2–4 months

Standard mid-market timeline

39% 4+ months

Extended cycles — complexity & risk

Headcount plans built on 90-day ramp assumptions are systematically underestimating time-to-revenue. Plan for 9–12 months to full productivity for mid-market AE hires — and set board targets accordingly.

Biggest Blockers to Hitting Number

Themes distilled from open-text responses — and what they mean for revenue leaders

01 Pipeline Quality

AEs are generating activity but struggling to convert it into qualified pipeline. Qualification discipline — not call volume — is the differentiator. Deal slippage is a symptom; weak discovery is the cause.

Relative frequency

02 AI & Economic Uncertainty

Buyers aren't frozen — they're recalibrating. AI is forcing organisations to reassess what software is worth buying before the landscape settles. The AEs winning deals are those who've learned to sell certainty in an uncertain market.

Relative frequency

03 Procurement & Buying Process

Buying committees are expanding. Finance teams are involved earlier. Approval chains that once took two weeks now take two months. AEs who fail to map multi-stakeholder environments early are losing winnable deals at the finish line.

Relative frequency

04 Product / Pricing Fit

USD-based pricing creates friction in APAC markets. Companies that fail to localise their commercial model are generating unnecessary late-stage objections — and leaving revenue on the table.

Relative frequency

What Top Performers Are Doing Differently

Key themes from open-text responses — and what they signal for how revenue leaders should hire

AI-Powered Prospecting

Using AI to research, personalise outreach, and build pipeline faster than peers. Not just AI users — AI-native operators.

Outbound Self-Sourcing

Top AEs generate their own pipeline through direct outreach and networking. They don't wait for inbound to materialise.

Strategic Advisor Framing

Positioning as a trusted advisor — especially critical for C-suite conversations where AI strategy is on the agenda.

Pipeline Hygiene

Ruthless forecast accuracy and early removal of weak deals. They protect team predictability as a discipline, not an afterthought.

Partnership & Stakeholder Alignment

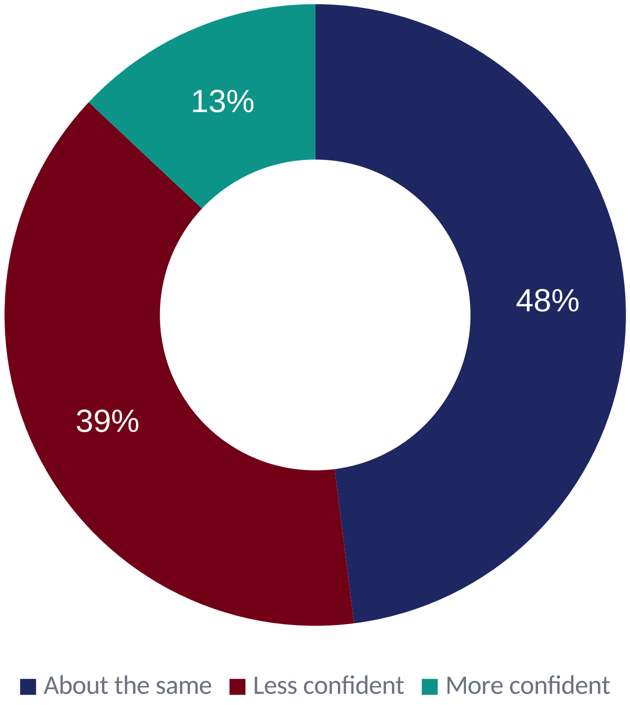
Leveraging partner channels and internal champions to accelerate deal velocity and reduce single-threaded risk.

Buyer Empathy

'Making it easier for the buyer to actually buy.' They map procurement processes early and adapt to the buyer's timeline.

Emerging Profile: The top AE in 2026 combines AI leverage, self-sourced pipeline, strategic buyer positioning, forecast discipline and cross-functional collaboration — a meaningful shift from the traditional 'relationship closer' profile.

How AEs Feel About 2026 vs. Last Year



48% About the same as last year

39% Less confident than last year

13% More confident than last year

"Insecurity and indecision — businesses are still figuring out what AI means for their buying decisions. Until they do, every software purchase feels like a risk."

Only 13% are more confident — the majority of the market is operating in survival or steady-state mode.

Emerging Trends to Watch in 2026

Observations derived from survey responses — not predictions, but patterns already in motion

01

AI Is Widening The Gap Between Average And Elite Sellers

Top performers are using AI to prospect at scale, personalise outreach and prepare for complex buyer conversations. AEs who haven't adopted AI into their core workflow are falling further behind — and the gap is compounding quarter by quarter. This is no longer a future concern.

02

Buying Committees Are Expanding — And Slowing Everything Down

The number of stakeholders involved in mid-market SaaS purchases continues to grow. Finance teams are involved earlier. AEs who map multi-threaded opportunities early and build internal champions are materially outperforming those who rely on a single champion.

03

Sales Cycles Are Lengthening — But Ramp Assumptions Haven't Adjusted

78% of AEs report cycles of two months or longer. This compresses productivity windows, increases the cost of every hire, and reduces forecast predictability. Most companies are still planning headcount with 90-day ramp assumptions — a structural mismatch.

04

Revenue Teams Are Being Asked To Do More With Less

Headcount is flatter, quotas are higher, and ramp expectations haven't been recalibrated to reflect a tougher market. The pressure on individual AEs has intensified — and the talent market is pricing this in through both attrition and compensation expectations.

What The Data Tells Us

CherryPeople's read of the 2026 mid-market SaaS landscape

1

AI is rewriting buyer psychology — and most revenue teams haven't caught up

Buyers aren't saying no. They're saying not yet — because AI is forcing organisations to reassess what software is worth buying before the market settles. This isn't a pipeline problem. It's a positioning problem. The AEs closing deals are selling certainty in an uncertain world.

2

Quota targets haven't adjusted to a market that fundamentally changed 18 months ago

Nearly half of AEs are behind quota and fewer than one in ten believe 70%+ of their team will hit. These aren't underperformers — they're operating against benchmarks set in a different market reality. Revenue leaders who don't recalibrate will lose their best people to better-managed competitors.

3

A new class of elite seller is emerging — and most hiring processes aren't designed to find them

The performance gap between top and median AEs is widening at pace. AI leverage, self-sourced pipeline and strategic buyer relationships are compounding advantages. Organisations that identify and retain this profile early will build durable GTM competitive advantage.

4

Compensation pressure isn't easing — it's shifting in structure, not just level

Total comp expectations are holding despite a tighter market. But the more important shift is in structure: candidates are scrutinising variable comp design, accelerators and ramp packages more closely than ever. A poorly constructed incentive plan is now a reason to decline an offer.

The Cost of Getting This Wrong

Four hiring mistakes that are easy to make — and expensive to recover from

01

Underpaying Candidates

Offers below market benchmarks create longer vacancies, increase counter-offer risk and signal a lack of market awareness. In a market where strong AEs are actively benchmarking, a $15–20k shortfall in base can cost you the candidate — and months of lost pipeline while you restart the process.

02

Over-Relying on Quota Attainment as a Filter

Screening out candidates who missed quota in 2025–26 risks rejecting some of the strongest sellers in the market. The data shows this is a systemic condition, not an individual failing. Applying rigid quota filters narrows your talent pool at exactly the wrong moment in the cycle.

03

Unrealistic Ramp Expectations

Planning for 90-day ramp in a market with 4+ month average sales cycles creates a structural gap between expectation and delivery. The result is missed board forecasts, hiring plans that don't hold, and revenue targets that aren't achievable. Build ramp models around 9–12 months for mid-market roles.

04

Ignoring AI-Native Talent

The performance gap between AI-native and traditional sellers is compounding quarter by quarter. Hiring for experience alone — without assessing how candidates use AI in their workflow — risks building a sales team that is structurally slower, less productive and harder to scale than best-in-class competitors.

Recommendations for 2026 Hiring

01

Anchor comp to market benchmarks — not internal bands

Why it matters: Sub-market offers are the single fastest way to lose strong candidates — often at the final stage after weeks of process. Risk of ignoring: Candidates accept and leave within 12 months, or reject and share the experience. Action: Build offers within the $130k–$168k base range and $220k–$300k OTE range as a minimum baseline. Structure variable comp to reward upside.

02

Assess capability — not just quota attainment

Why it matters: In the current market, quota attainment reflects market conditions as much as individual performance. Risk of ignoring: You will systematically reject strong candidates and hire into a narrower, weaker pool. Action: Evaluate deal quality, pipeline self-sufficiency, multi-stakeholder management and AI tool adoption. Build structured scorecards around these criteria.

03

Build realistic ramp models into headcount planning

Why it matters: 39% of AEs report 4+ month sales cycles — new hires won't be fully productive for 9–12 months. Risk of ignoring: Missed board targets and under-resourced pipelines caused by optimistic ramp assumptions. Action: Revise ramp models, adjust hiring timelines forward, and set board expectations around realistic productivity curves.

04

Hire for the profile that wins in 2026 — not 2022

Why it matters: AI leverage, outbound discipline, strategic positioning and forecast accuracy are the new differentiators — not just relationship management skills. Risk of ignoring: A sales team that is structurally disadvantaged against AI-native competitors. Action: Build interview scorecards that specifically assess AI tool adoption, self-sourced pipeline and multi-threaded deal management.

CherryPeople

Need A Benchmark For Your Team?

CherryPeople helps SaaS leaders make better hiring decisions through:

- ✓ Compensation benchmarking
- ✓ Talent market mapping
- ✓ Interview scorecards & candidate assessment frameworks
- ✓ Hiring process reviews
- ✓ GTM recruitment across ANZ, JAPAC and North America

Specialist SaaS GTM Recruitment since 2018

Based on 20,000+ SaaS GTM connections and active searches across ANZ, JAPAC and North America.

Complimentary Hiring Benchmark Session

Want to compare your hiring process, compensation structure or current search against the market?

Let's talk.

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