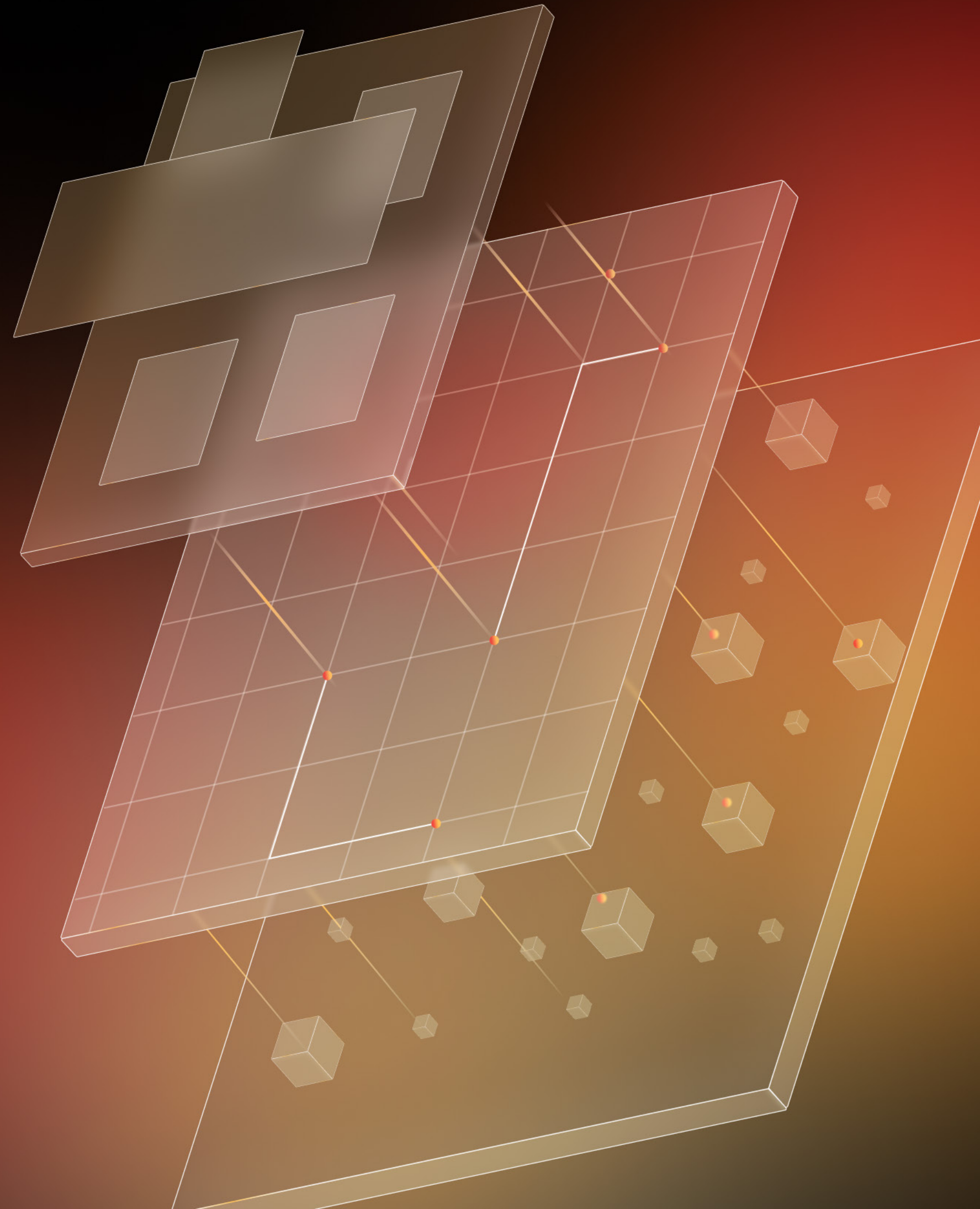


 **AlloyAutomation**

The Integrations Report for Product Managers



Product managers play a balancing game in every organization

Let's be honest, product managers deal with a lot of shi*t.

Constant requests from internal teammates and end-users, product bugs, bad partner documentation, red tape from upper execs... the list goes on.

And how many times have you been asked to redesign your product roadmap to fit the current economic landscape?

These tasks make it difficult to find the resources and time for one critical part of your job: building integrations with other tools.

Yet, integrations are always highly requested from partnership and sales teams, so they can build strategic alliances to drive revenue. Plus, the end-users of your platforms are expecting their entire tech stack to be seamlessly connected, but it's hard to continue keeping up with the most popular technology in your industry.

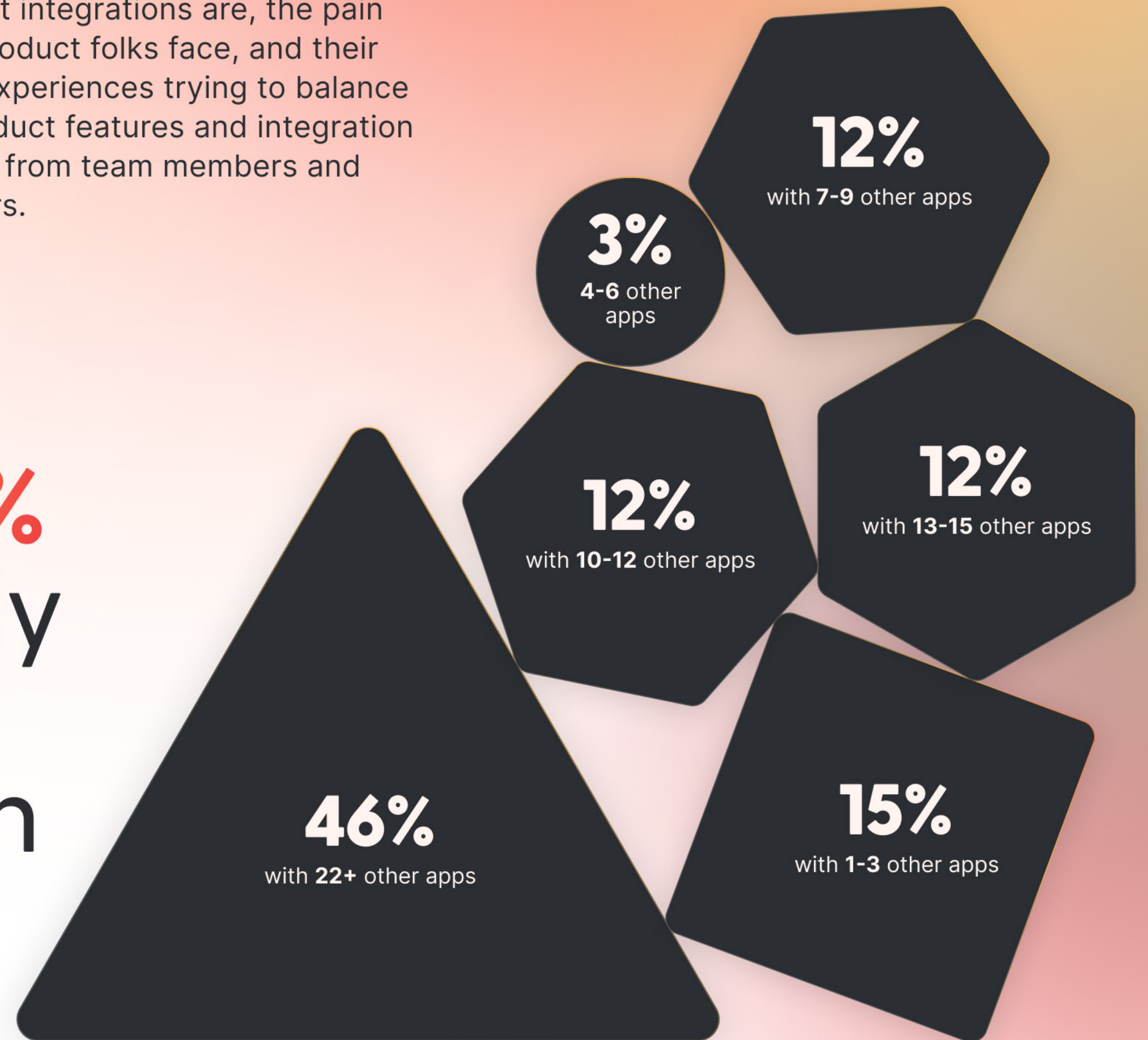
You're expected to continue driving product expansion while meeting your team's and end-user's expectations—with very few resources and many restrictions.

That sounds like a headache, so what should you do? Hopefully, this whitepaper will help.

We ran **qualitative** and **quantitative** surveys with product managers across various apps in the ecommerce industry, including platforms, loyalty, reviews, email and SMS, subscriptions, 3PLs, returns, and more. Each business varies in size: from teams of less than 10 to over 8,000.

We asked questions about how important integrations are, the pain points product folks face, and their shared experiences trying to balance core product features and integration requests from team members and end-users.

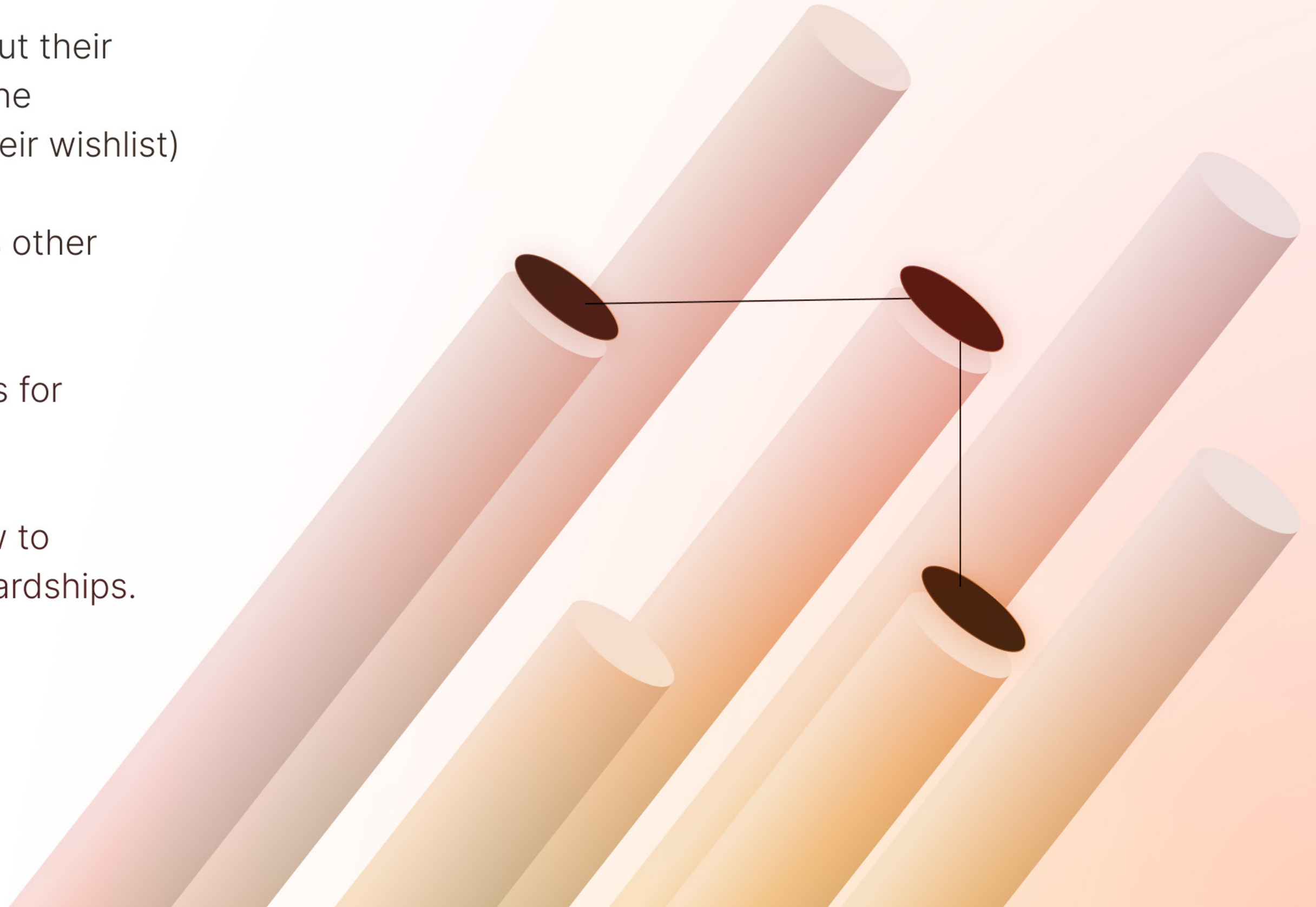
Of those interviewed, **46%** said they already have over 22 integrations with other apps.



What will you learn?

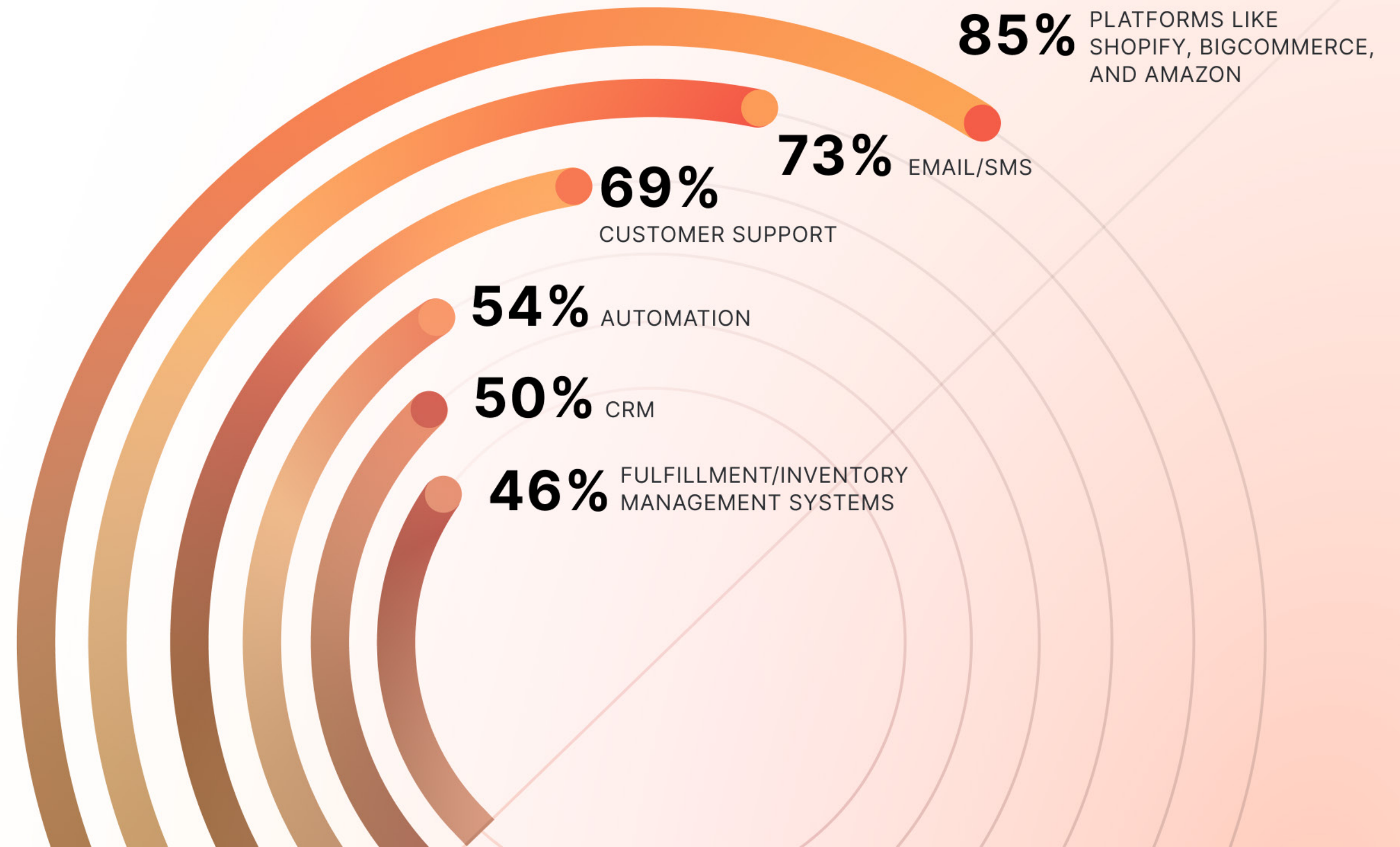
- How competitors think about their integration roadmap (and the integrations currently on their wishlist)
- How these compare across other teams in your organization
- The most common blockers for product managers

We'll also share tips for how to overcome some of these hardships.



The top 6 integration categories, according to product managers at ecommerce apps

We asked each product manager to share which app categories their businesses are already integrated with.



What does this mean for you?

Platforms being the most common integration category isn't surprising. However, for the rest of the categories listed, at a minimum, you should be integrated with apps in these areas.

End-users expect their tech stack to be integrated with these categories—and there's a good chance your competitors are already offering them. These six integration categories indicate what should be included in your upcoming roadmap if you want to stay competitive.

“

Platform extensibility and expanding marketing channels continue to drive growth as merchants understand the increasing need to broaden their customer reach across a multitude of channels.

”



NIK CHENG, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT STAMPED

What drives the decision to build a new integration?

We asked product managers to select the top values that drive their decision to implement a new integration.

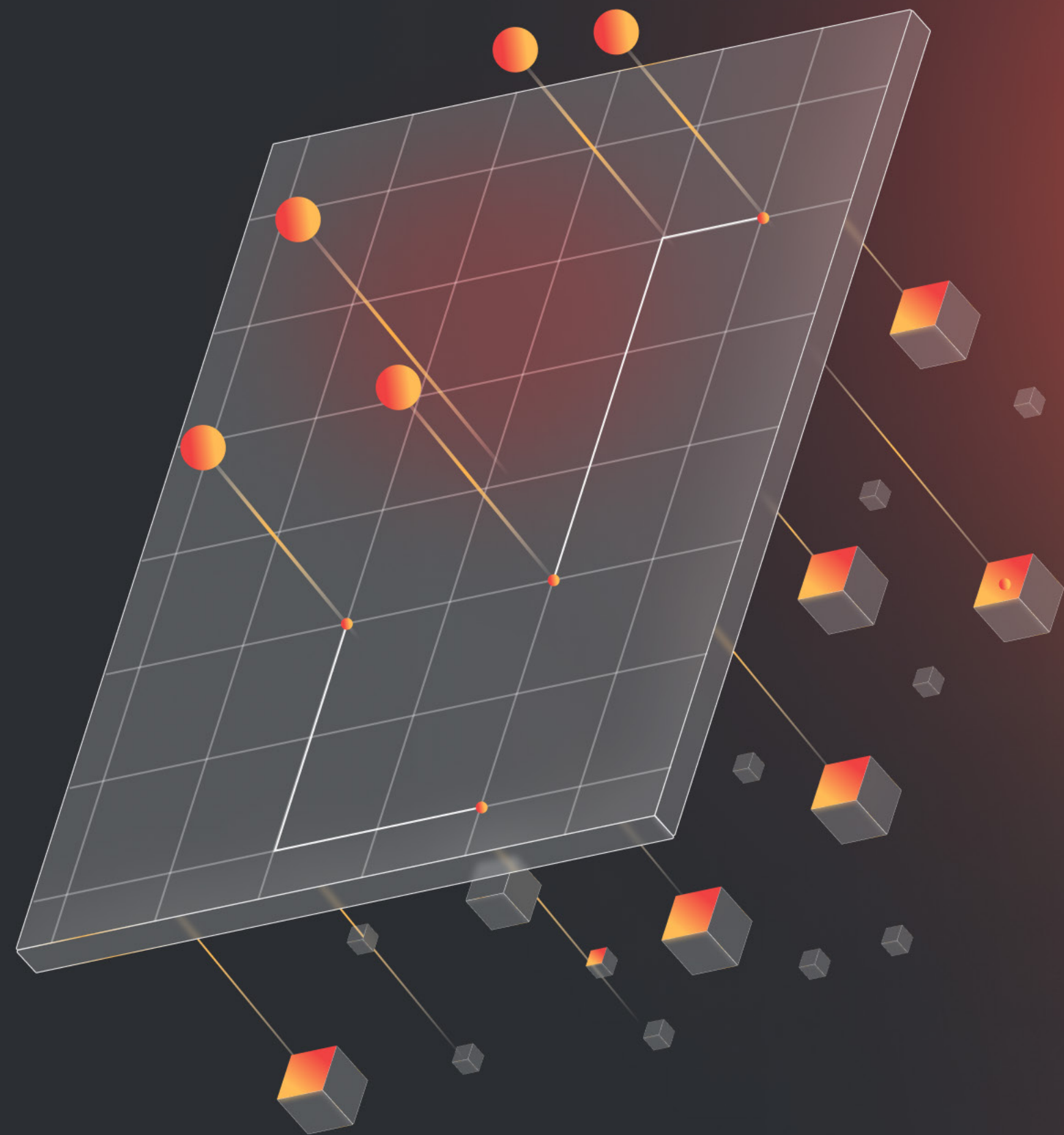


Why are these things important?

The ecommerce app marketplace is ever-changing and continuously growing in competitiveness. *(How many new subscription apps have you seen in the past year?)* New apps are launched constantly, and it's impossible to keep up with the latest and greatest technology.

Product managers feel pressure to natively integrate with the top-growing apps to drive growth, increase product expansion, and increase TAM.

Integrations are always requested to unlock large deals, but you can't commit to building them without falling behind in building the core features in your product roadmap.



According to Katya Sapozhnina, Director of Product at Octane AI, you have 3 main questions to ask yourself and your team:

- 1 What is the main reason for integrating your product with another app? Share it with the whole team.
- 2 What is a metric that would make each individual integration worth it? Share it. After that, ask if it's worth talking about prioritization.
- 3 Is this the right time for this integration? (based on resources, the season, etc.)

“

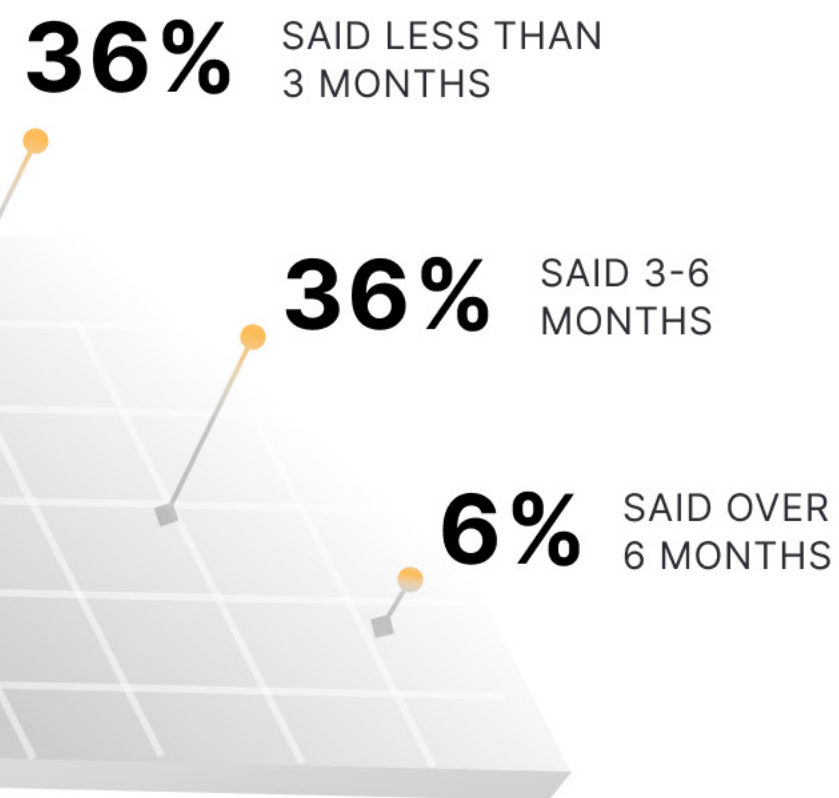
When you look at each opportunity, you need to come back to your questions and see if this particular project is worth it. The answer might be no. Or, it might be yes. Or, also likely, it might be yes but not now. I highly recommend pretending that the answer is always 'yes' and gathering as much evidence to prove it. Then, take a look again at what is realistic. Once you understand your decision, present it to upper management with all sorts of evidence backing up your claim.

”



KATYA SAPOZHNINA, DIRECTOR
OF PRODUCT AT OCTANE AI

Timeline for building integrations from scoping to GTM



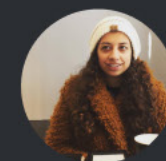
Note: When we asked founders this same question, 80% said it takes less than three months, and 20% said 3-6 months. Why do founders think it takes less time to build integrations?

This shows that there are high expectations for product managers to complete integrations quickly on top of their other many to-do's.

“

Of course, there is a disconnect between teams. Communication is hard. Teams always need to communicate more. The solution is to communicate a shared vision repeatedly and bring everything back to it.

”

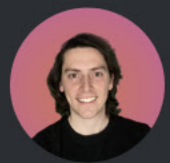


KATYA SAPOZHINA, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT AT OCTANE AI

“

Engineers might look at logs, PMs might look at event data, and founders might look at dashboards. Everyone is dealing with different levels of abstraction. To improve this disconnect, naming conventions, taxonomy, and consistency help tremendously. Without explicit guidelines, a ‘conversion’ can mean something different to different teams, and meaning can get lost in translation.

”

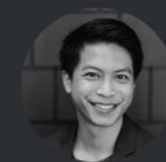


AUSTIN HUTCHISON, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT WONDERMENT

“

The difference in response data between product managers and founders reflects their functional considerations and priorities and can make for a healthy debate on prioritization if there is respectful communication and resulting buy-in from all parties. Product managers typically have a closer pulse on engineering velocity, complexities, and considerations for integration GTM timing whereas founders need to drive a public-facing growth narrative and timelines that reflect that.

”



NIK CHENG, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT STAMPED

The most frustrating part of integration scoping

We asked respondents to share the most frustrating part of the scoping process. Here's some feedback to consider:

"Partner API docs."

"Hard to anticipate shortcomings of an API/platform before starting the actual technical scoping. Trade-offs often have to be made after the product and design work has been completed."

"Ambiguity about what comes out of the box versus what edge cases or data or functionality still has to be custom built."

"Hidden gotcha's - it feels like most partnership calls start very smoothly and idealistically when, in reality, there are always hurdles that come up while the integration is currently in progress."

"Waiting for answers when things are unclear or missing in the documentation."

"Understanding the core functionalities that users want and how that's structured in the data without making the user do too much work."

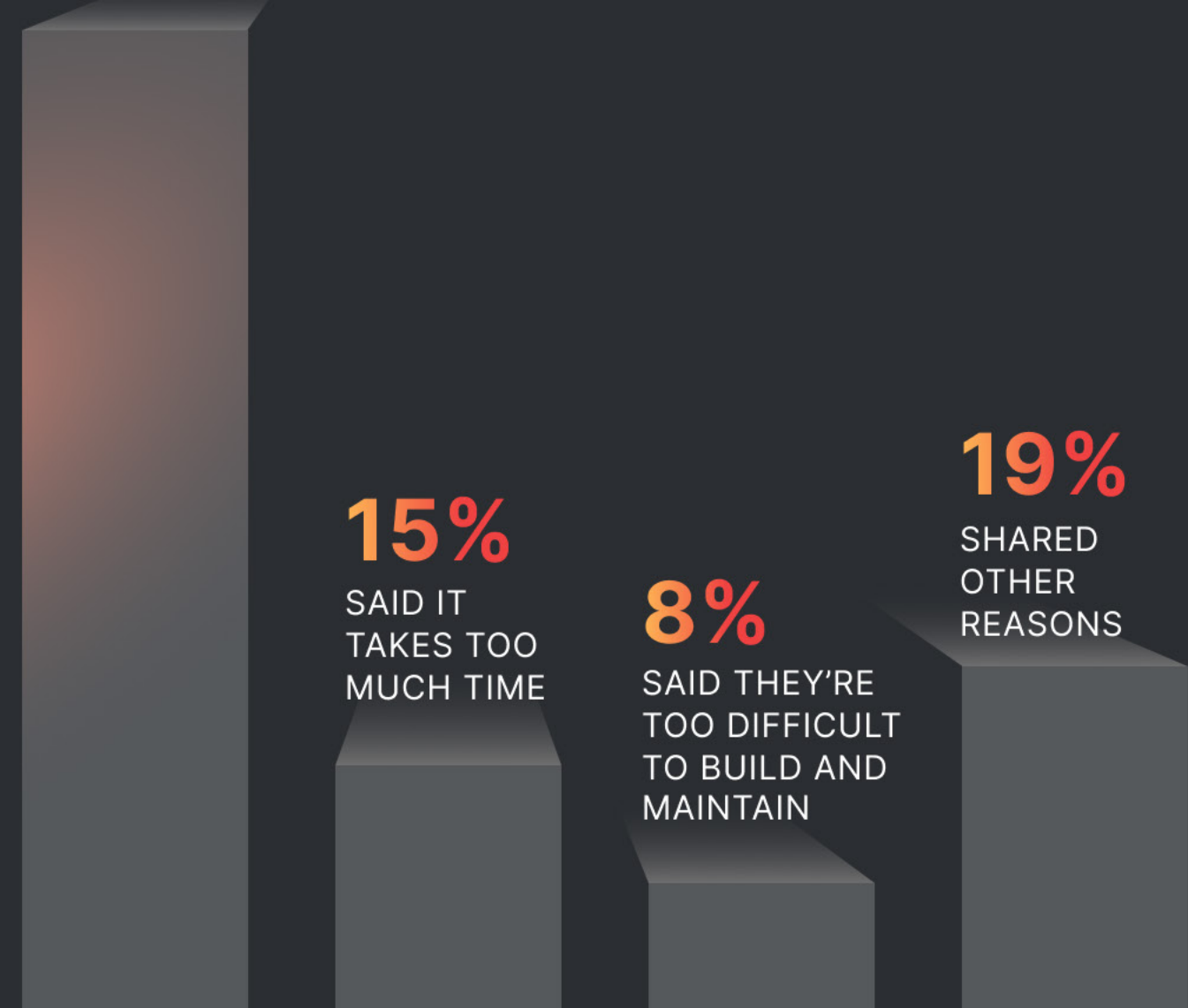
"Getting the right set of data from the particular integration's API responses and mapping the data to our data storage."

Note: In most responses, bad API documentation was a common pain point for product managers.

Integration blockers for product and engineering teams

58%

SAID NOT ENOUGH
ENGINEERING RESOURCES



A few other reasons that were mentioned by product managers include

Not enough budget

Too much internal red tape

Difficulty justifying the integration to upper management

A lack of resources from the partner they're trying to integrate with

Note: This is true for companies with less than 20 employees to those with 1,000+. A lack of engineering resources is always a blocker for product teams who want to build more integrations.

However, a common trend is that as the company size gets bigger (in the 500+ teammates range), respondents shared more blockers related to internal bureaucracy and red tape as a reason integrations don't get built.

“

Ask many 'why' questions to understand why the red tape exists. Their processes are coming from somewhere, and the better you understand their feelings, the better you understand how to reach a compromise that helps the whole business.

”



KATYA SAPOZHINA, DIRECTOR
OF PRODUCT AT OCTANE AI

Tips for product managers who are facing multiple requests

From Austin Hutchison ,
Product Manager at Wonderment

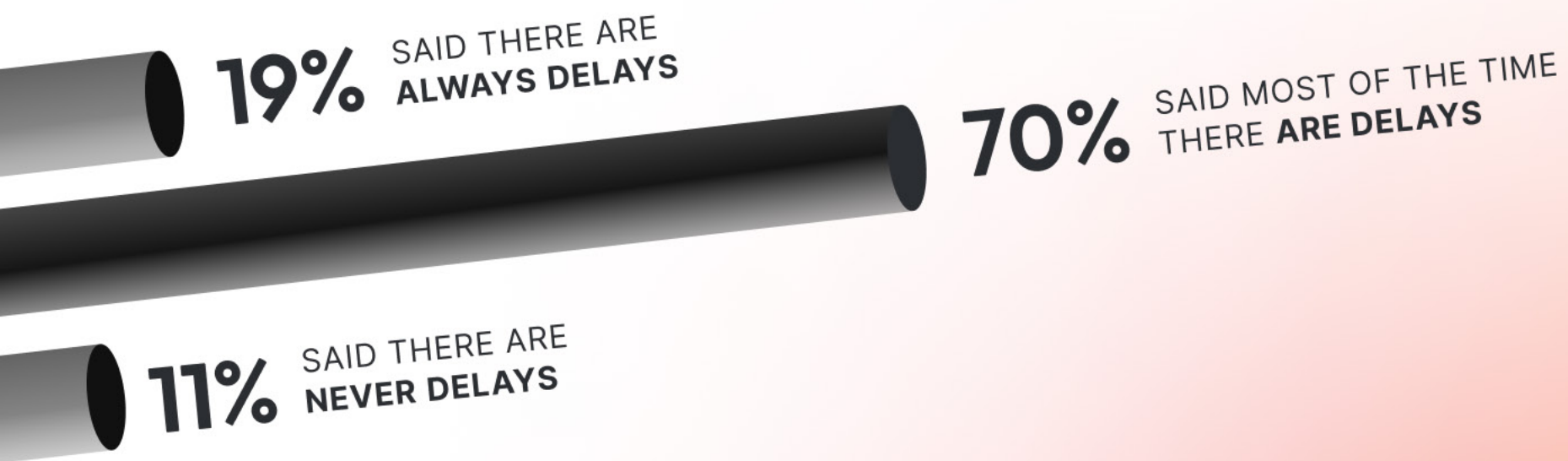
- Tip 1** Focus. Have a few tools at your disposal to deflect distractions and shield your team from getting derailed by ad-hoc product requests. This can be a request intake form, a public backlog/roadmap, or a communication strategy.
- Tip 2** On partner documentation and red tape: Make it easy to say yes. The tactics might be different depending on the context, but, for example, if you're working through a partner's application process to enable an integration, follow their guidelines as closely as possible and be quick to respond. With your own exec team, bring data to the table when asking for resources.

From Nik Cheng ,
Product Manager at Stamped

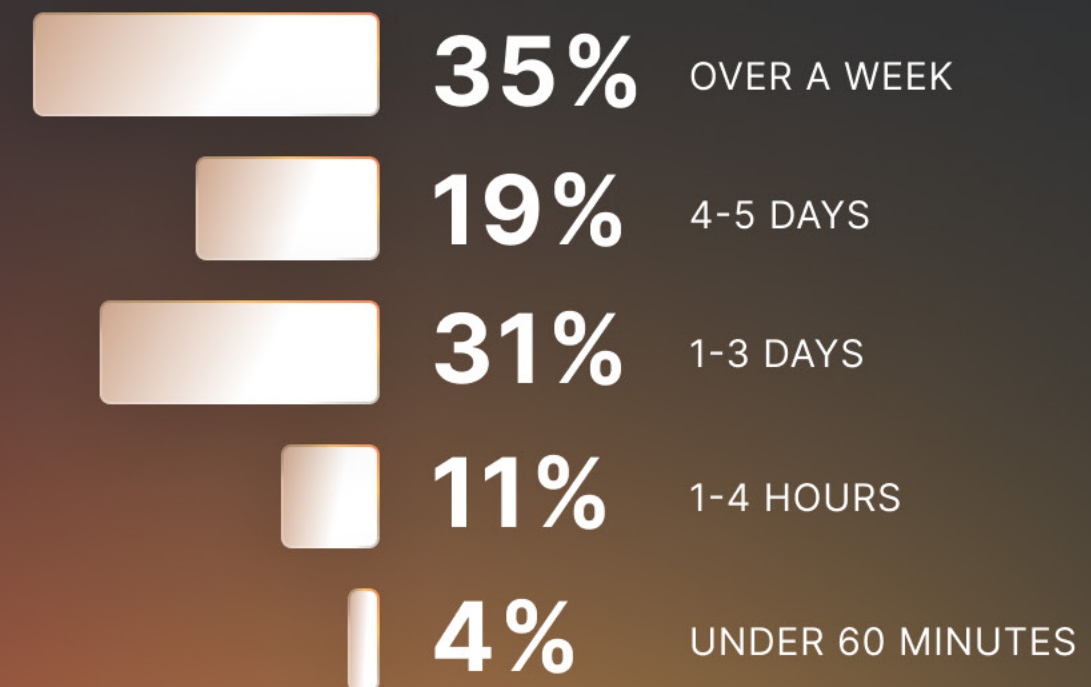
- Tip 1** Keep constant communication and alignment check-ins with stakeholders to ensure all parties understand the context for priority decisions made.
- Tip 2** A sense of balance can be achieved in waves between differing types of requests while keeping a minimum threshold for addressing other non-current priority areas, as opposed to trying to keep a constant balance between all requests.

Delays are guaranteed

When building an integration, how often does a build experience delays (in scoping, building, testing, going to market) or reprioritization? **89% of the product managers we surveyed said delays are almost guaranteed.**



How long does it take to implement a new SDK?



Using an Embedded IPaaS to build integrations more efficiently



Despite being able to expedite a team's integrations roadmap, **65%** of product teams said they're not using an embedded integration platform (IPaaS).



Why?



The **Embedded IPaaS** market is still fairly new, and businesses aren't fully aware of what these platforms are and what they can offer.

However, 69% of respondents said they'd be comfortable relying on a third-party integration platform if it meant getting integrations built quickly and securely.

27% said they weren't sure if they would be comfortable using an embedded integration platform (again, likely because they're not fully educated about these platforms yet).

The results of using an embedded integration platform are two-fold:

- 1 Integrations get built faster (Aspire saved two years of time and roughly \$160K)
- 2 You get to focus on product expansion entirely as a product manager, improving your core features to improve retention and market competitiveness

“

If a partner is bigger, they're probably not going to build an integration with you. You have to build it. But they might bring you a lot of business if they are big, so create strong business cases and pitch your execs. Even if it's just one integration, that's one more than you had before. If you can't get the resources but you still want to build it, try to budget for building the integration using a third-party tool.

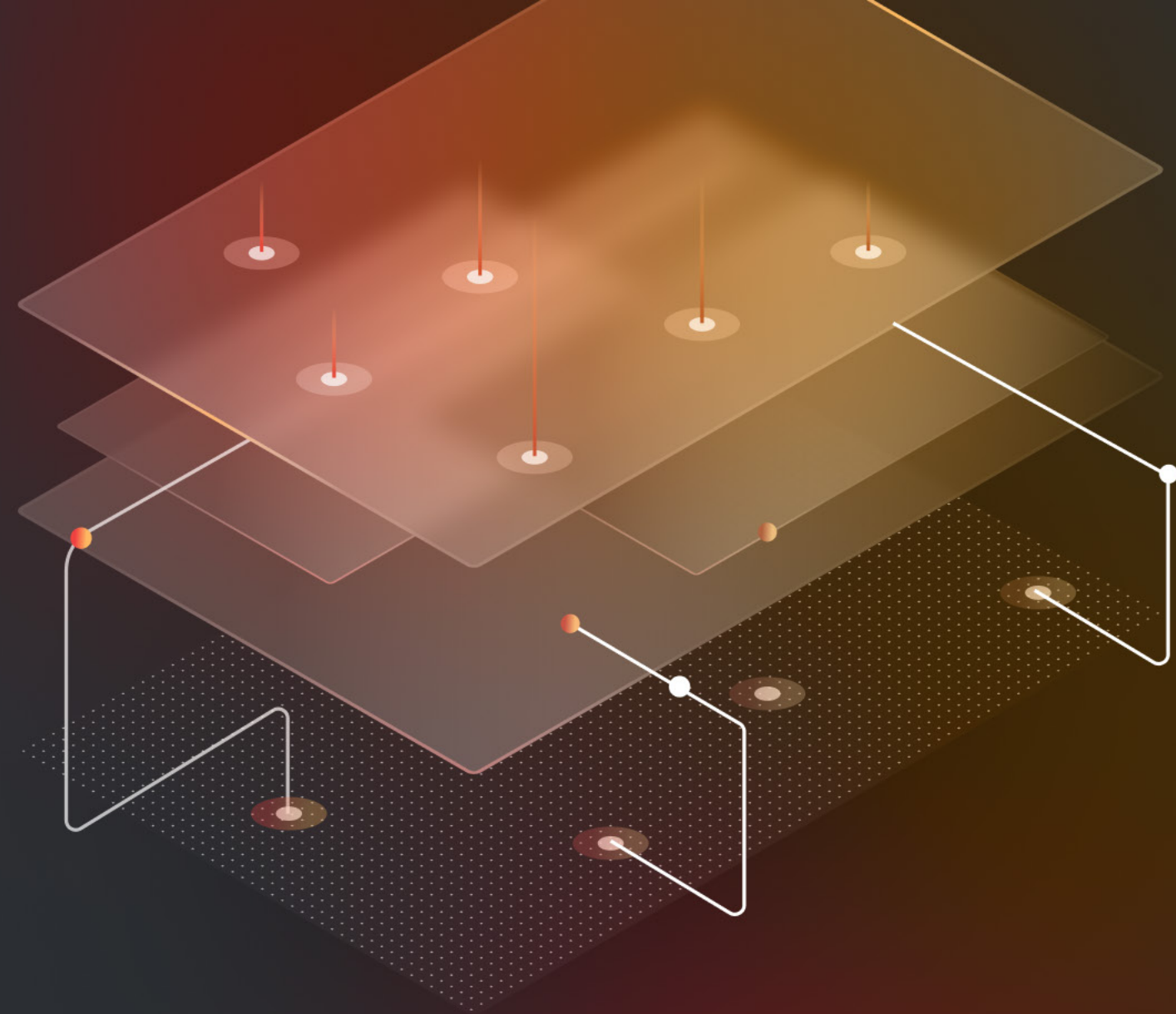
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JOANNA PACEK, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT AIRCALL

So, what is an embedded integration platform?

A cloud-based platform that allows independent software vendors (ISVs) to manage their entire integration process from a single platform. These vendors can white label—or “embed”—an existing product’s capabilities into their own.



Essentially, once the software development kit (SDK) is implemented within your codebase, you’re enabled to build integrations between any number of applications.

The goal? Expand integrations without needing to build processes and infrastructure from scratch. You can then add features and functions to your product easily, without the need for lengthy and expensive development.

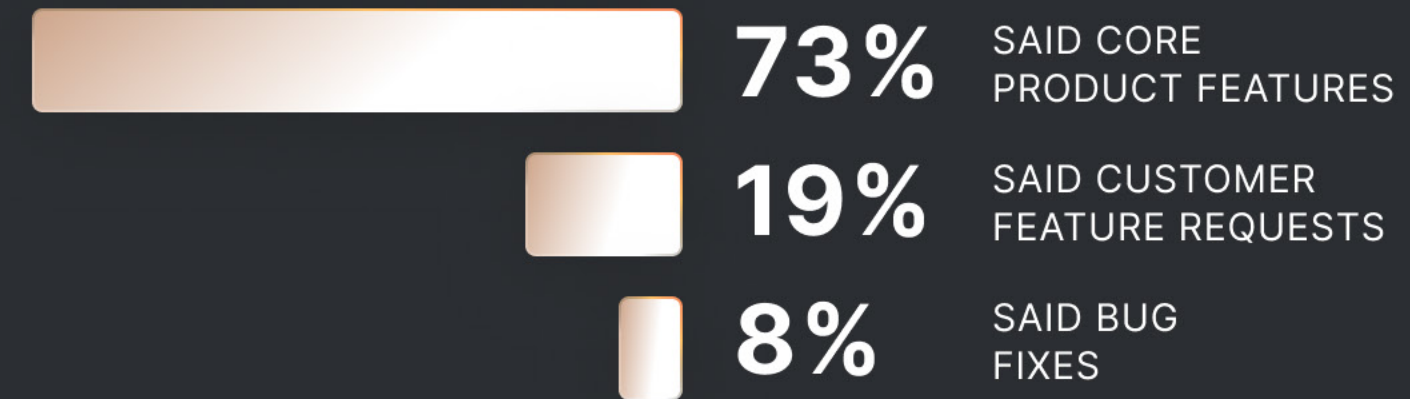
[Read more](#)

Most important tasks in a product roadmap

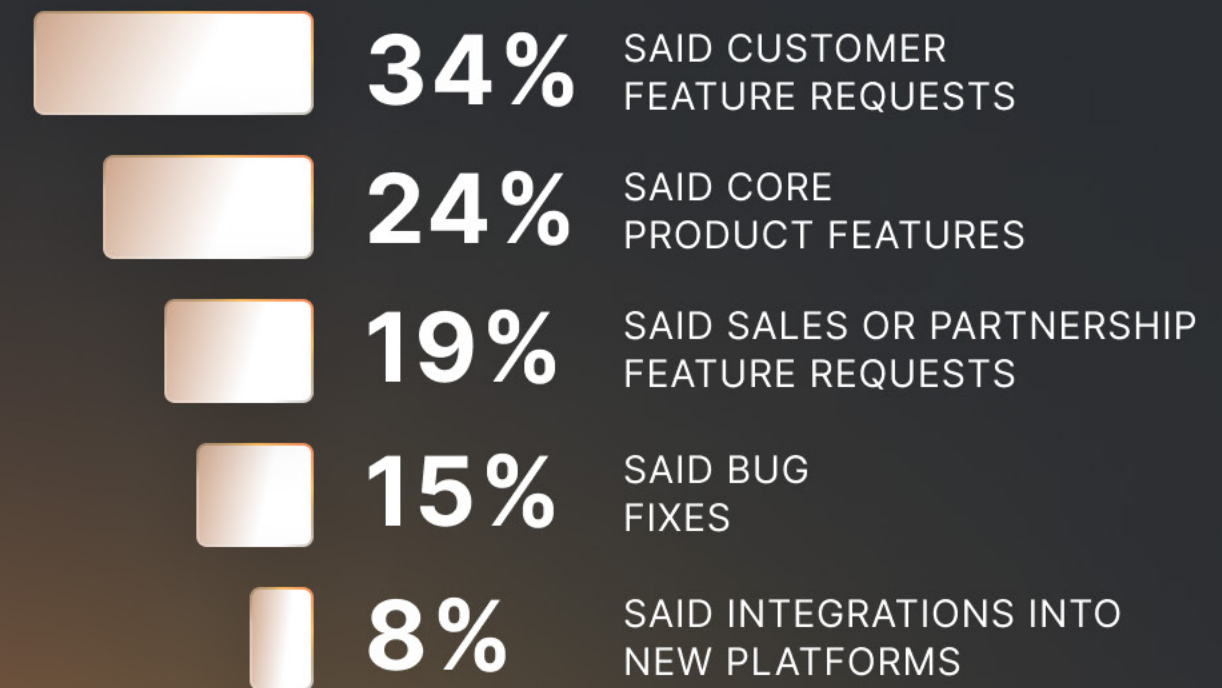
We asked product managers to rank the top three most important tasks from a list that included the following options:

- Core product features
- Customer feature requests
- Sales or partnerships feature requests
- Bug fixes
- Integrations into new platforms

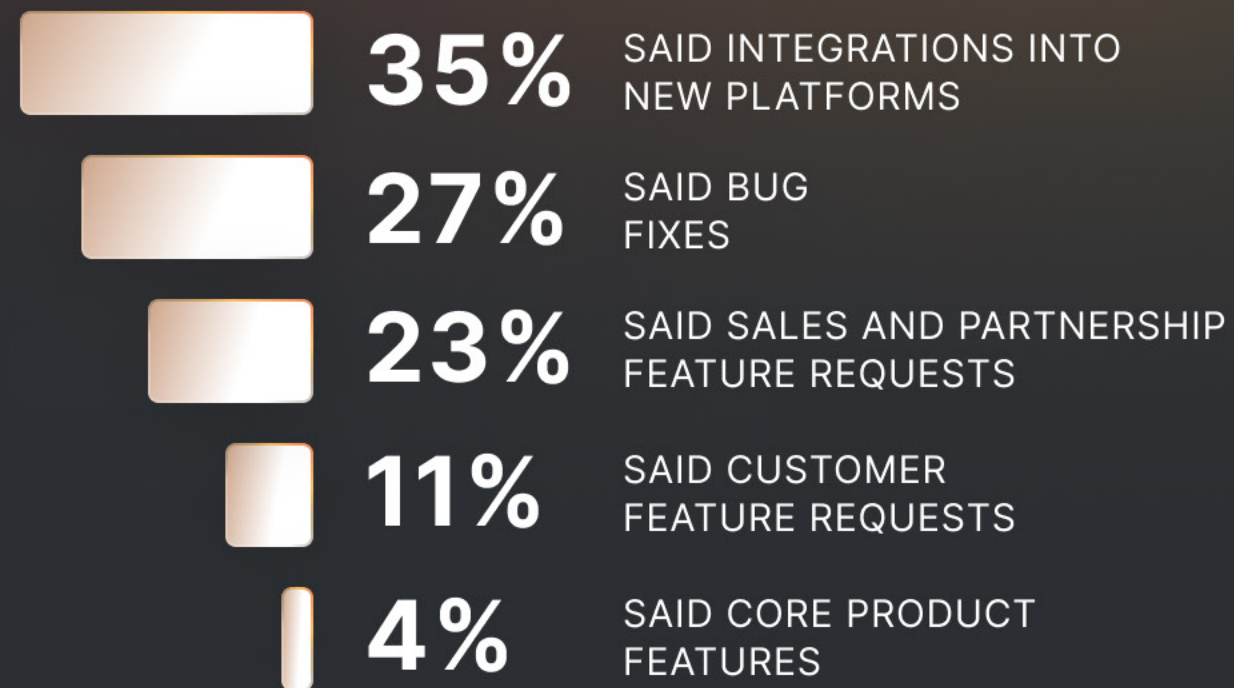
Respondents ranked these choices as the most important



The second most important tasks were ranked as follows



When asked to rank the third important task from the list, product managers chose the following



Key takeaway: In any case, core product features are always top-of-mind for product managers. More generally, the top three most important tasks for product managers tend to be core product features, customer requests, and integrations.

However, balancing these three areas is tricky, especially when product teams everywhere feel like they lack resources.

Also, bug fixes and sales and partnership requests are still important but tend to be a lower priority, which also speaks to a possible disconnect between teams.

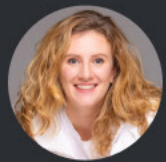
Essentially, product managers want to focus on the biggest market expansion or revenue opportunities (while keeping time and effort tradeoffs in mind).

Given in-house costs in today's economic environment, expanding integrations can be a very low-effort task with high market opportunity (especially when using an Embedded IPaaS tool).

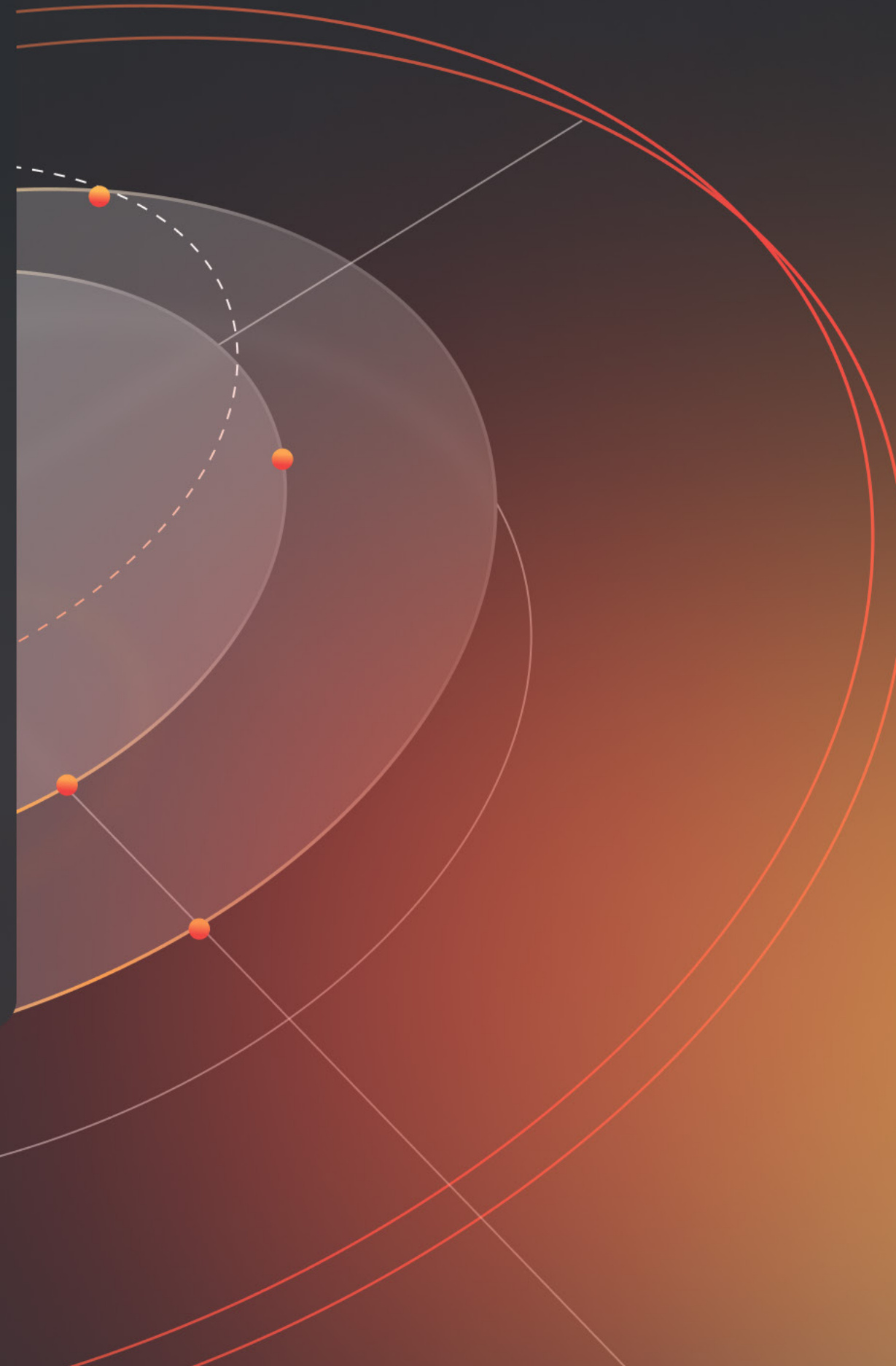
“

Have a combined strategy where you have a strong public API (because there will be companies building integrations with you), and build your own integrations with others... And as a beginning for your strategy, I think it's good to use third-party integration platforms while building a strong public API.

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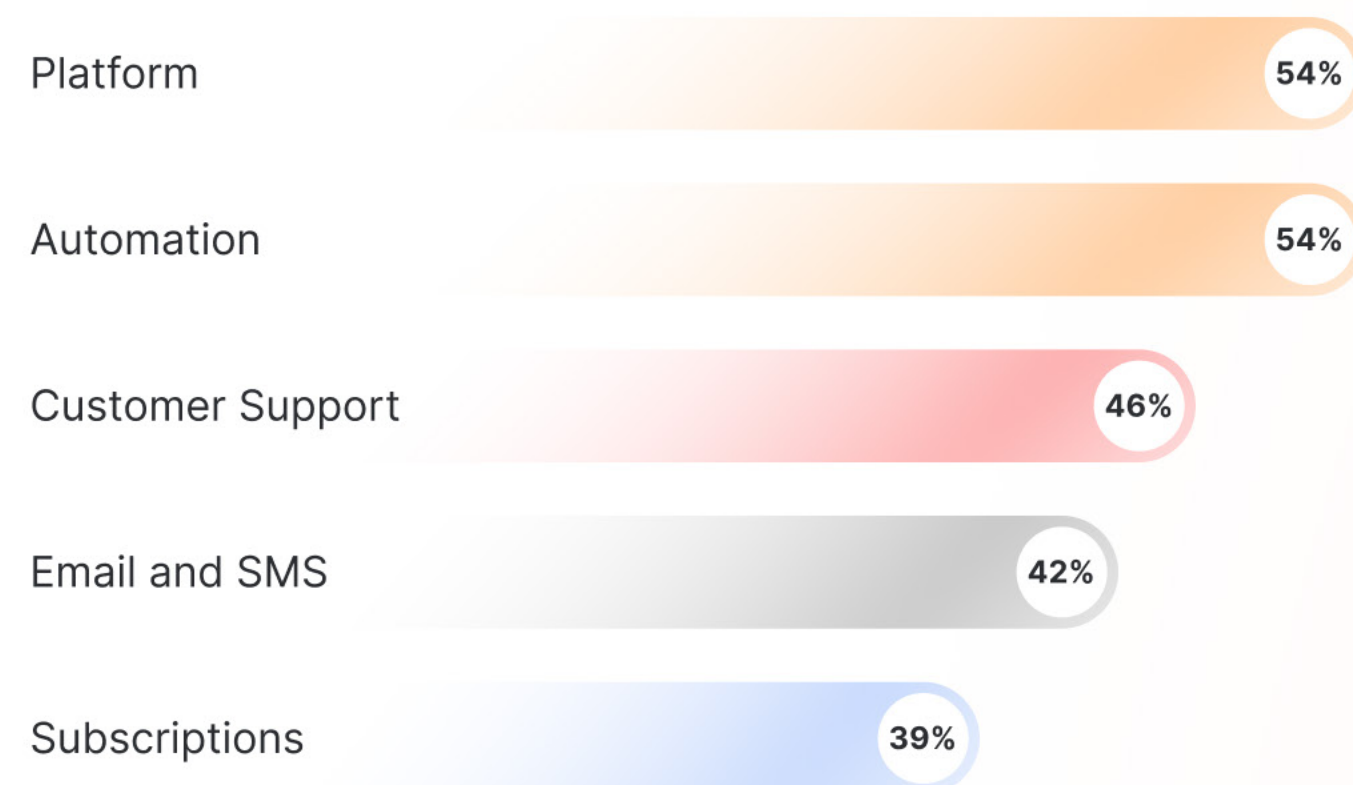


JOANNA PACEK, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT AIRCALL



Highest priority integrations for the next 12 months

The top five categories most agreed on:



“

Platform and automation are usually a higher priority for product managers as there is an inherent domino effect and scalability impact across the customer base compared to certain app logo integrations that partnerships and marketing could leverage more, however, a balance of both is essential for maintaining competitiveness.

”

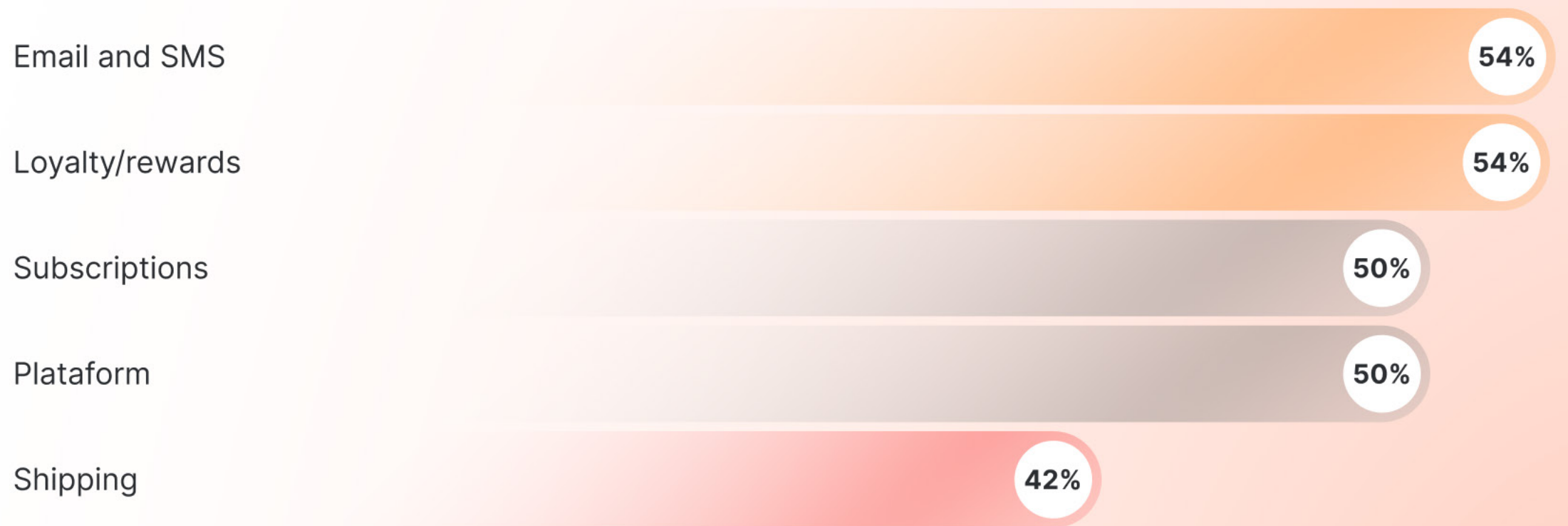


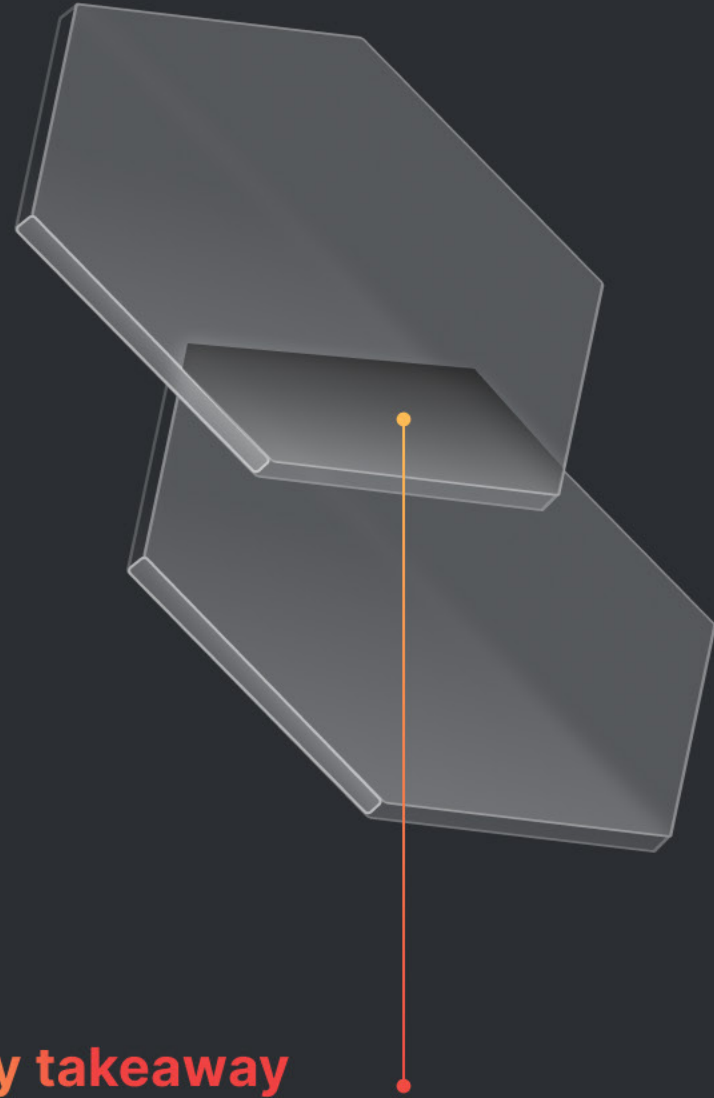
NIK CHENG, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT STAMPED

Respondents were also asked which specific apps their end-users request most often. A few that were mentioned more than once include



Interestingly when we interviewed partnership managers and asked the same question, the responses were a bit different. The top five for partnership teams were as follows:





Key takeaway

There is a misalignment between product managers and partnership teams. This is especially true considering we surveyed some product managers and partnership managers from the same company—yet the highest priority integrations differ between each team.

“

***There's** an app for everything. So think about who you can partner with, and then build your strategy. Also, consider an 80/20 rule. Who are the 80% that will bring you benefits? Maybe you build very few integrations, but they bring you many benefits. So choose wisely.*

”



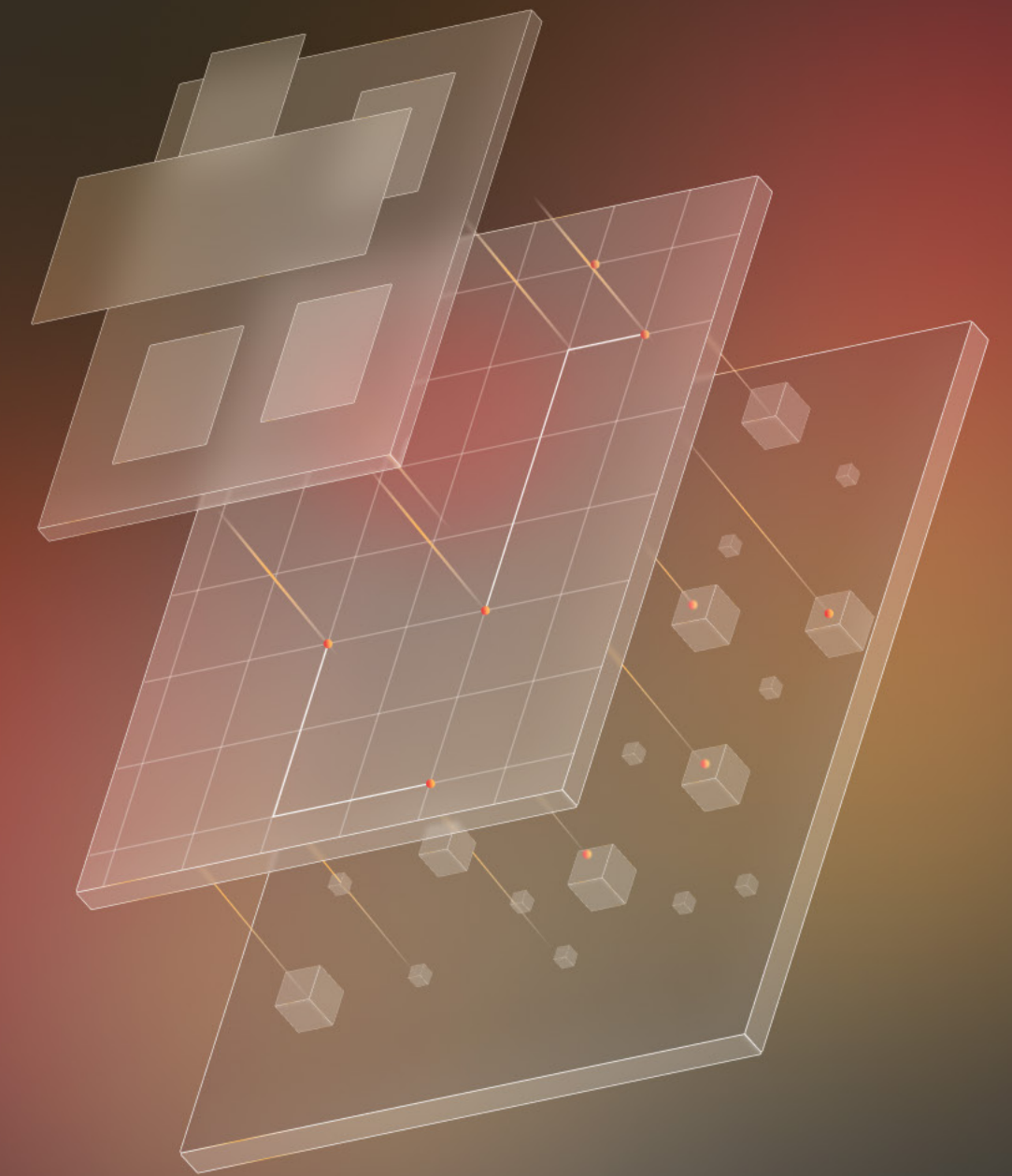
JOANNA PACEK, PRODUCT
MANAGER AT AIRCALL

Build cost-effective integrations without the maintenance



Integrations are always requested by sales and partnership teams to unlock large deals. Still, you can't commit to building them without your product roadmap falling behind.

With Alloy Embedded, you're never forced to balance resources between your core product and integrations again.



[Book demo](#)



[Learn more](#)