[Study]

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

2026

[Study Results, 01/2026]

Strategy & Management
EbelHoferConsultants

Executive Summary

Between November and December 2025, EbelHofer Consultants surveyed companies across a broad range of industries to assess their business outlook for 2026. This paper aims to provide insights into companies' expectations regarding top-line growth and price trends across sectors. The key implications are outlined below.

Key Insights

- 78% of companies expect revenue growth (+3%-pts over 2025).
- 72% of companies aim to increase prices (+5%-pts over 2025).
- Across industries, the overall outlook for 2026 remains positive.
- Companies increasingly anticipate customer negotiations when implementing price changes.
- Overall, companies remain confident in their ability to maintain or selectively grow market shares despite rising competition.

Compared to last year…

… the outlook for the Automotive sector has improved significantly.

… more companies expect revenue growth, while fewer anticipate declining sales.

… customer negotiations are expected more often when prices are adjusted.

… fewer companies expect rising competitive pressure.

Almost 4 out of 5 companies expect revenue growth for 2026

Overall, companies anticipate an increase in sales revenue, with almost 4 out of 5 expecting top line growth (Figure 1). We see an upward trend, as this number has increased consistently from 68% in 2024, to 74% in 2025, to 78% in 2026. Another 7% expect at least a stable top line. Compared to last year, less companies predict top line decline – only 15% compared to 26% last year.

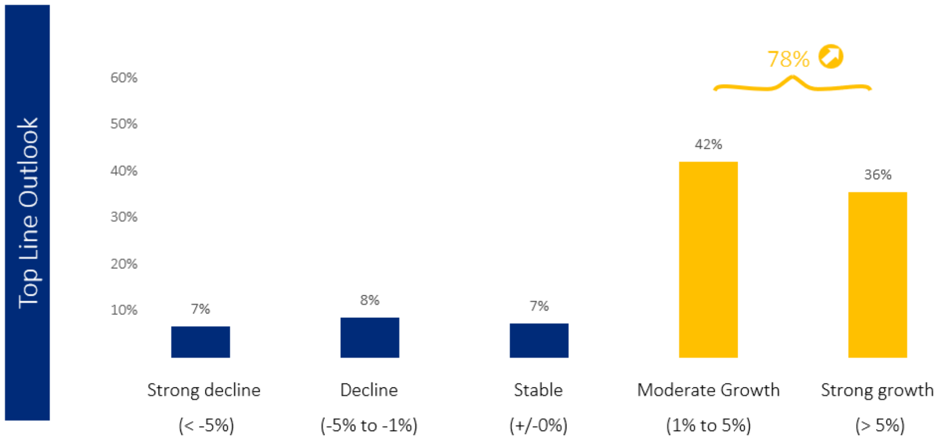

Figure 1: Top line development planned for the upcoming year (revenue change year-on-year)

The vast majority of companies aim to increase prices

The vast majority of surveyed companies aim to increase their prices this year (Figure 2). 72% expect price level increases, primarily within a range of 1% to 5%, illustrating a slight increase compared to last year's figures (68%). Companies expecting a strong increase remain at 11%, a similar level compared to last year (12%). In contrast, approximately 12% of companies plan to lower their prices, which is a slight decrease (- 2%) from last year's figures.

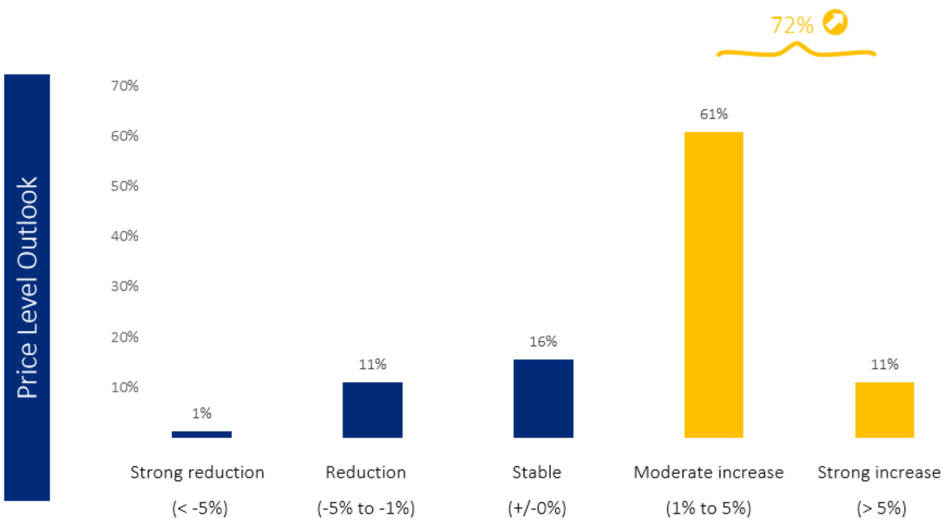

Figure 2: Price level change planned for the upcoming year (average for entire business)

Most industries share a generally positive outlook for 2026

The general positive impression for both, top line (Figure 3) and price level growth (Figure 4), holds true for almost all industries. Especially, the *Automotive* sector illustrates significantly more optimism with regard to top line growth in comparison to last year: 75% expect at least moderate growth – an increase of 42%-points.

With regard to the price level outlook, especially the *Software and IT Industry* expect growth this year with 55% expecting moderate growth and 30% strong growth. Compared to last year, this represents a very positive change as in 2025 only 3 in 5 companies expected growth. Furthermore, most companies operating in the *Automotive* industry expect stable prices (67%), only 33% expect moderate growth. Last year, 56% of Automotive companies expected moderate growth.

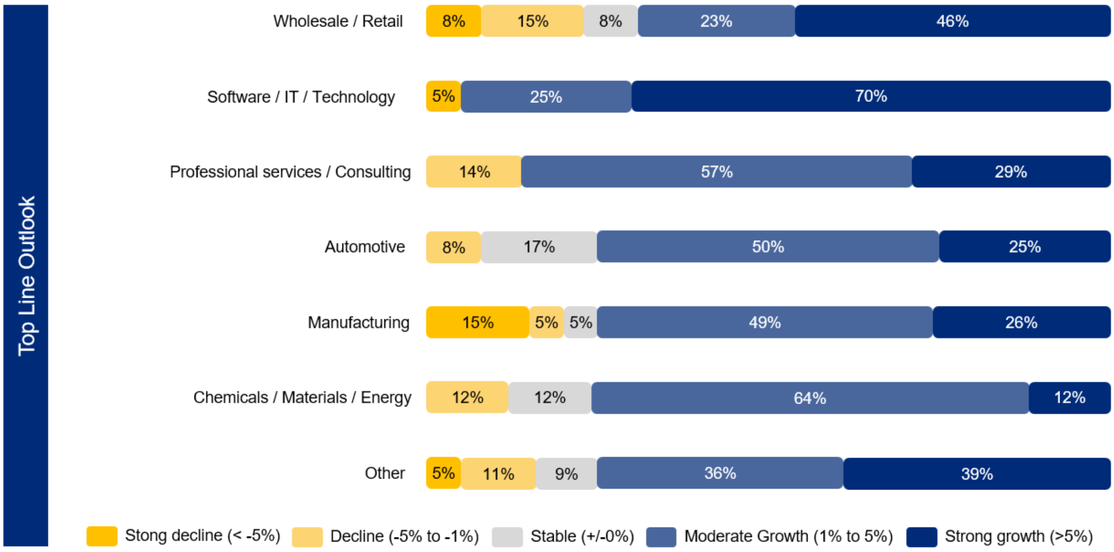

Figure 3: Top Line Outlook distinguished by industry

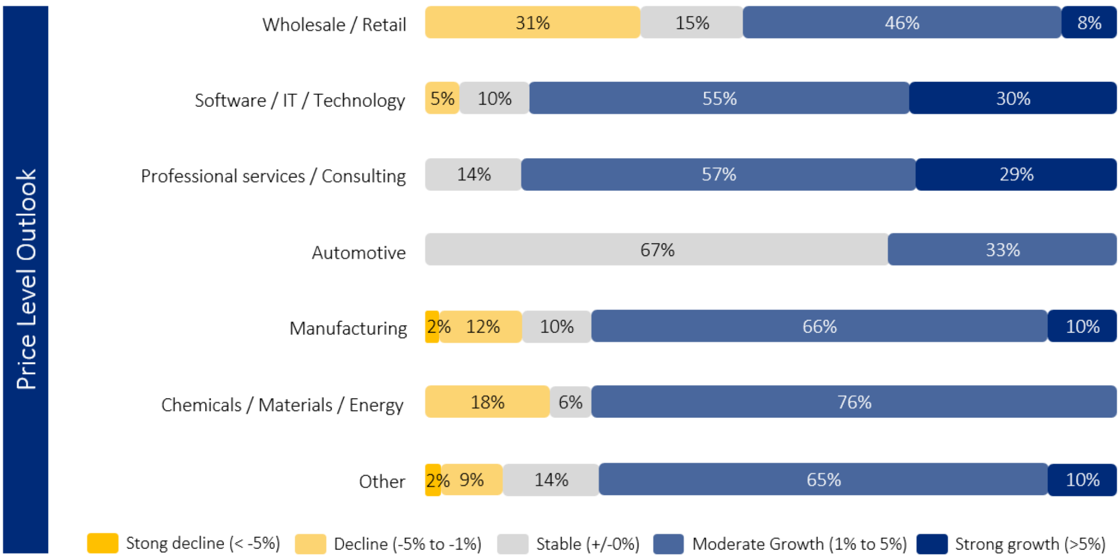

Figure 4: Price Level Outlook distinguished by industry

Compared to last year, more businesses focus on differentiating price changes by product segments.

We also asked companies about how differentiated they implement price changes. The majority of companies either implement price changes differentiated by products and product segments (+12% compared to last year) or customer and customer segments (Figure 5). Differentiation by market segments and industries or by sales channels is also utilized, although comparatively not as often implemented. Overall, companies chose a modest granularity for price adjustments.

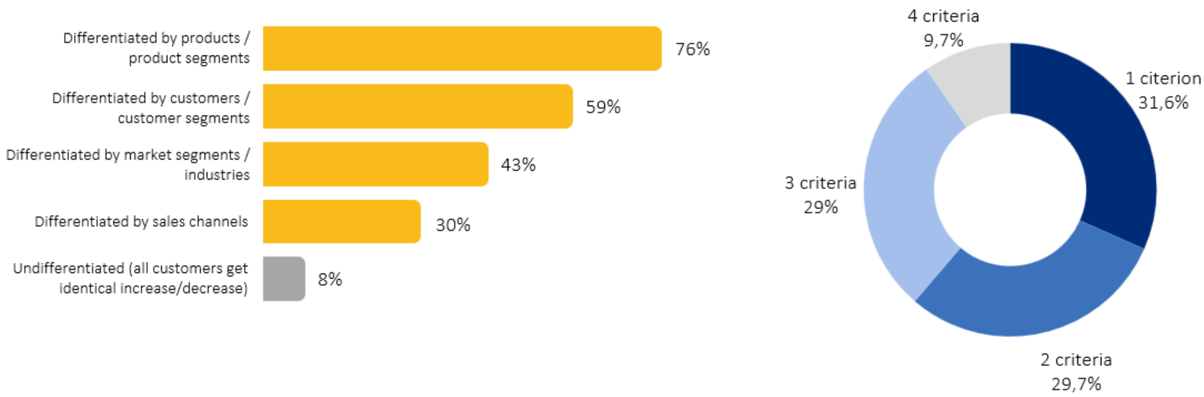

Figure 5: Granularity of Price Adjustments

Companies increasingly expect customers to negotiate when prices are changed in 2026.

Companies mostly indicate that they expect their customers to negotiate when prices are adjusted (Figure 6). In comparison, 25% believe customers will accept the new prices without further discussion. Only 7% expect customers to refuse price changes outright. Compared to last year, when 63% expected negotiations, the negotiation dynamic has intensified slightly, while outright refusal has eased.

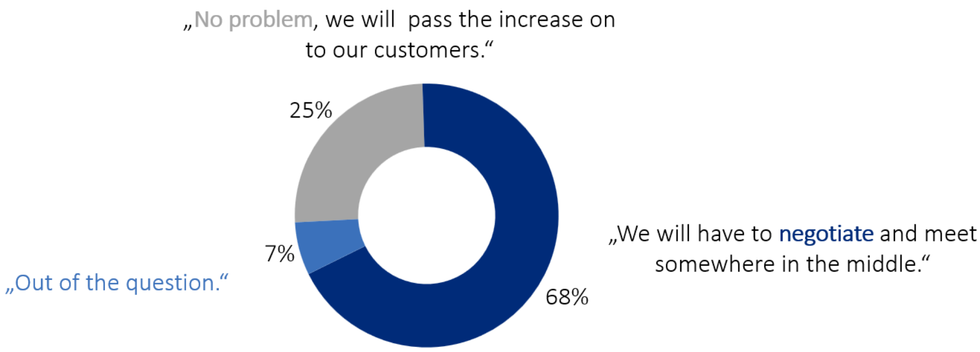

Figure 6: Expected reaction of customers

With slightly declining competitive pressure, most companies expect stable or growing market shares in 2026

The competitive environment is expected to remain dynamic. 50% of companies anticipate increasing competitive pressure, while 38% expect it to stay stable. Compared to last year, when 62% expected competitive pressure to rise, the outlook has shifted slightly and indicates less pressure overall (Figure 7).

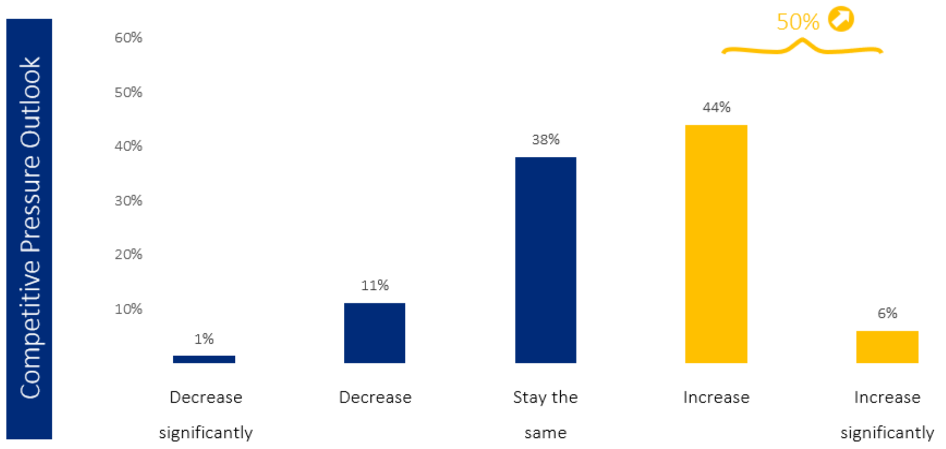

Figure 7: Expected change of competitive pressure in 2026

Despite expectations of a more dynamic competitive environment, companies remain largely confident in their market position. Overall, 50% of respondents expect their market share to increase in the coming year, while 39% anticipate maintaining stable market shares (Figure 8). Compared to last year, the outlook has softened slightly: market share growth expectations declined from 57% to 50%, while the share expecting stability increased only by 2% to 39%. The results suggest that many companies aim to defend their positions and pursue selective gains despite changing competitive conditions.

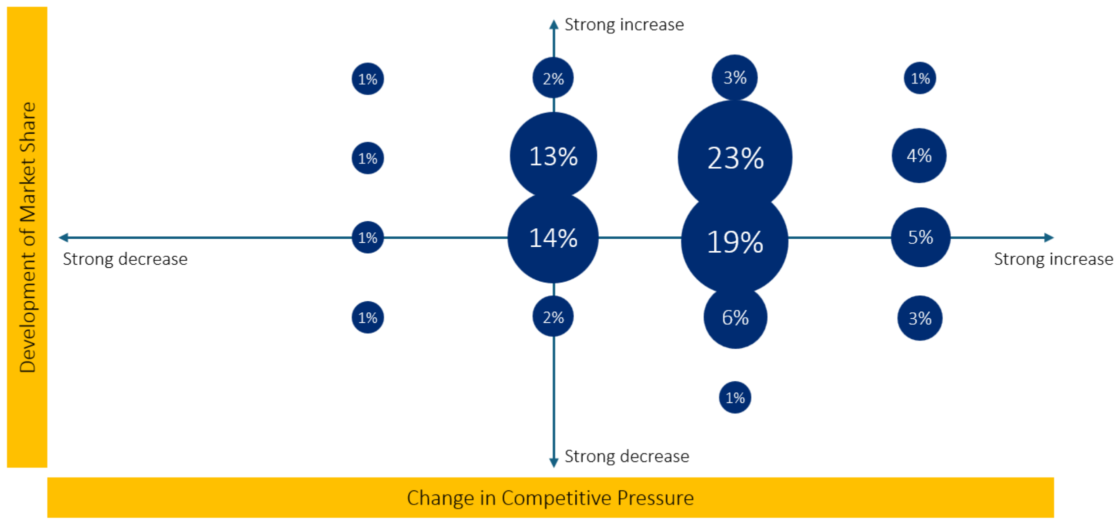

Figure 8: Expected change of competitive pressure with expected development of own market share

Conclusion

Overall, the 2026 business outlook remains positive, with most companies expecting continued revenue growth and further price increases. At the same time, customers are widely expected to negotiate when prices change, suggesting that price adjustments will often be accompanied by discussions rather than being accepted immediately. The competitive environment is still seen as dynamic, although expectations indicate somewhat less intensifying pressure than in the previous year. Despite this, companies remain broadly confident in their ability to grow, or at least maintain, their market positions.

Company Profiles

of the approx. 200 surveyed companies

Company Size (Revenue 2025)

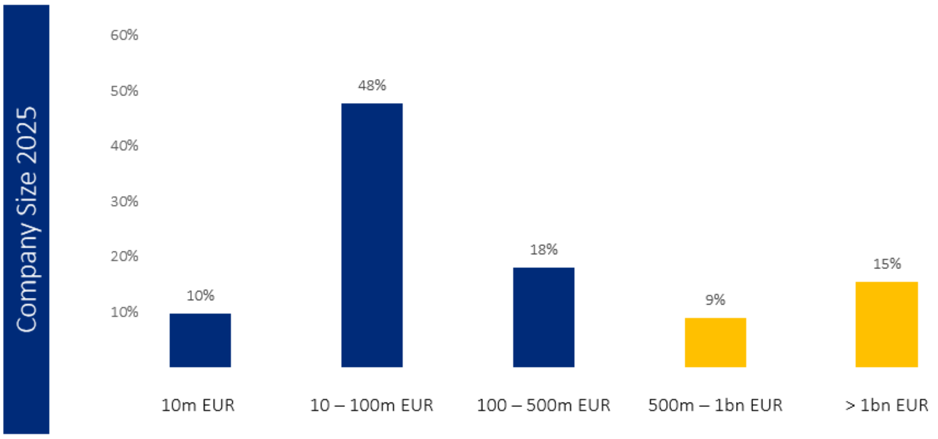

Figure 9: Clustering of surveyed companies by revenue made in 2025

Industry

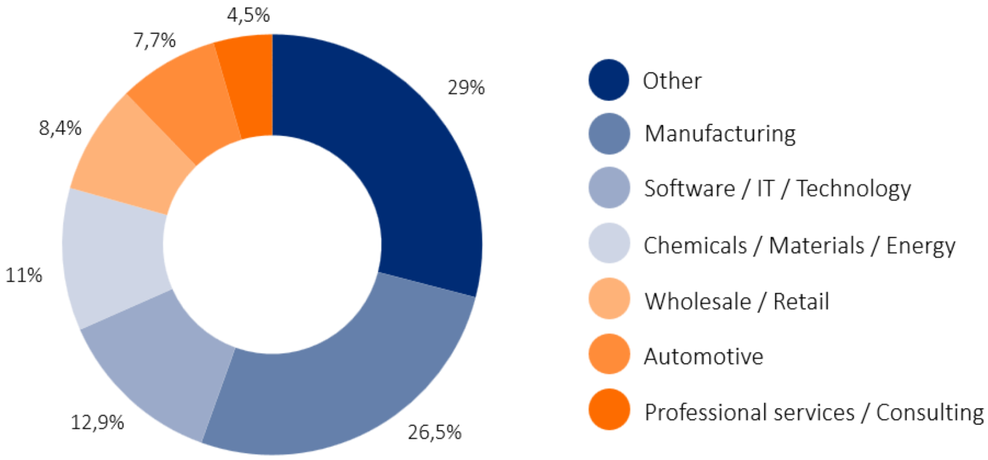

Figure 10: Clustering of surveyed companies by industry

About the authors:

DR. RAINER SCHLAMP
Partner
rainer.schlamp@ebelhofer.com

DR. BENEDIKT NEUFANG
Partner
benedikt.neufang@ebelhofer.com

EMILIA VON PETERFFY-ROLFF
Consultant
emilia.rolff@ebelhofer.com

SIMON MACKEPRANG
Associate Consultant
simon.mackeprang@ebelhofer.com

EbelHofer Consultants support their clients to realize opportunities for profitable growth on the market side. We specialize on the optimization of pricing and price management as well as sales management and have an international project track record with various industry-leading companies. For more information, please reach out to us.

EbelHofer Strategy & Management Consultants GmbH
An der Wachsfabrik 10
50996 Cologne
+49 (0)2236 38383 0