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# OpenAI and Anthropic Tap Salesforce Talent



Left: Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff. Right: Denise Dresser, OpenAI's Chief Revenue Officer. Getty Images/Shutterstock.



By Kevin McLaughlin and Laura Bratton

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**As OpenAI and Anthropic build up their teams of enterprise salespeople, they've both been hiring from one of the deepest pools of enterprise software talent anywhere: Salesforce.**

More than 45 [Salesforce](#) employees have joined Anthropic since the start of this year, and close to 40 have joined OpenAI, largely in sales and marketing roles, according to their LinkedIn profiles.

## The Takeaway

OpenAI and Anthropic recruit dozens of Salesforce employees.

OpenAI partners and customers say they have noticed a difference in messaging and approach.

Salesforce veterans bring enterprise relationships and sales-process expertise.

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OpenAI's and Anthropic's interest in Salesforce appears calculated to help them make inroads with the large companies they're trying to sell their AI tech to. Salesforce staff have deep relationships with Fortune 500 companies and have consistently gotten them on board with the idea that new technologies can help those companies do business more efficiently—precisely the idea OpenAI and Anthropic are selling.

The defections come at a difficult time at Salesforce, which, like other enterprise software firms, is reinventing itself for the AI era. Salesforce has rolled out new AI-powered software products and has made a couple of acquisitions, including of Fin, which sells a customer-focused AI agent service, to beef up its AI capabilities. The company faces a skeptical Wall Street: Stock of Salesforce has fallen 39% so far this year, as investors fret about how older enterprise software firms will fare against newer AI rivals.

That environment likely affects the attitudes of Salesforce staffers getting approached by OpenAI or Anthropic. To be sure, the impact of the defections is hard to gauge. Salesforce had 83,000 employees as of January.

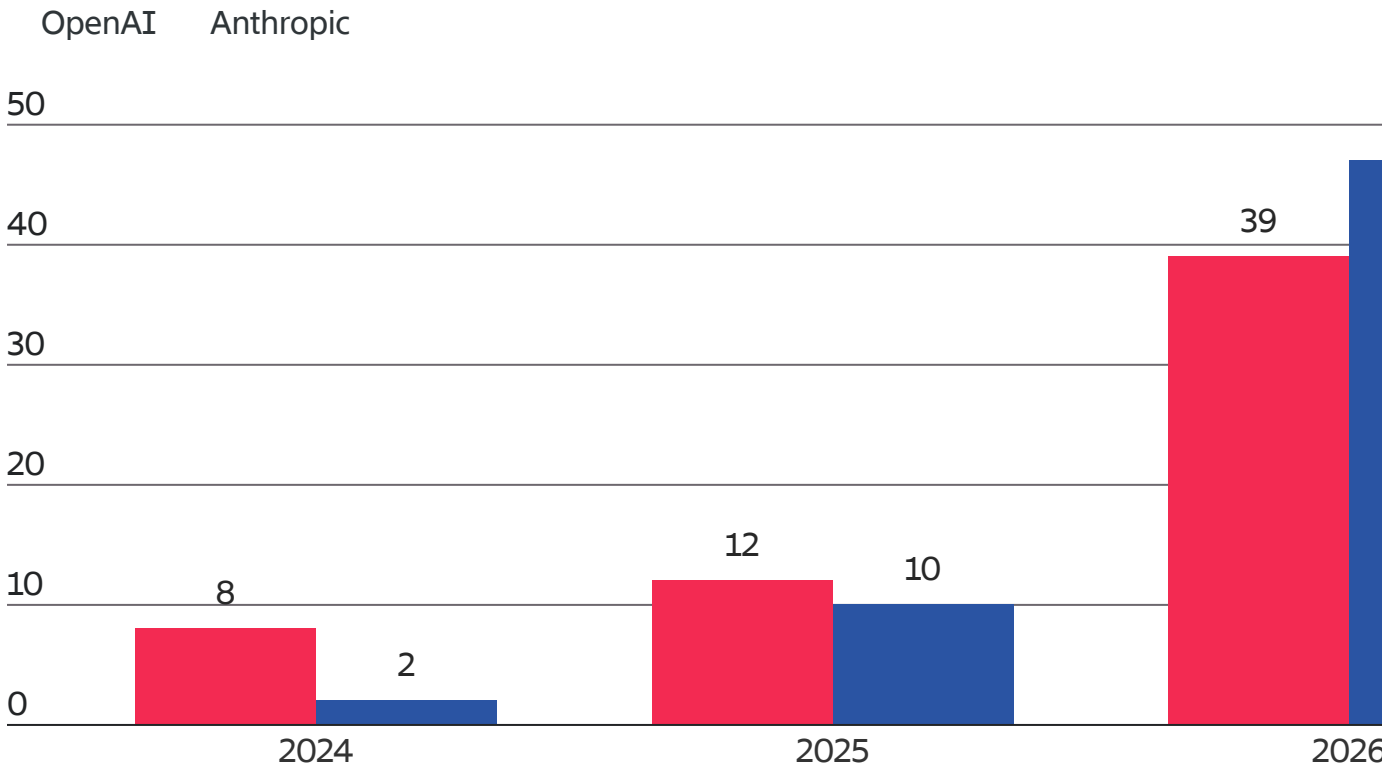
Among the big names to defect to OpenAI from Salesforce is Denise Dresser, who was CEO of Salesforce's Slack unit and who joined OpenAI as chief revenue officer in December. More than 1,000 employees now report to Dresser at OpenAI. Two more senior Salesforce leaders joined her this month.

Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff told some colleagues he was perturbed by Dresser's departure and made an attempt to keep her, multiple people who spoke to him said. For his part, Benioff said in a text message that “none of that is true.”



# Salesforce's AI Talent Pipeline

Number of employees OpenAI and Anthropic hired from Salesforce, per year, based on public LinkedIn profiles.



Source: LinkedIn

Anthropic hasn't made executive-level hires from Salesforce the way OpenAI has, though last fall it hired a former senior executive at IT software provider ServiceNow who previously was a Salesforce sales executive.

## Dive deeper with Deep Research

Will the influx of Salesforce veterans disrupt OpenAI's culture by elevating sales teams over the core researchers who currently hold the most power? →

If OpenAI and Anthropic need private equity spin-offs to prove ROI, does this indicate their models lack viability as off-the-shelf enterprise products? →

Could a looming price war over token usage fees derail the anticipated IPOs for Anthropic and OpenAI as they battle for enterprise market share? →

Due to the strength of its AI coding tools, Anthropic's monthly revenue has quickly surpassed that of OpenAI in overall revenue this year. Before reaching that milestone, Anthropic last year surpassed OpenAI in terms of selling access to AI models through an application programming interface.

Now, though, the two AI leaders are racing to add more enterprise chops, including consultants known as forward-deployed engineers, as more businesses raise concerns about spending on AI without a clear way to measure returns. Numerous companies such as Uber, AT&T and Meta are now limiting employees' AI usage so they can get costs under control.

The shift helps explain why both OpenAI and Anthropic have said they are creating separate companies with private equity firms that aim to do the grunt work of helping companies customize the technology and measure its effectiveness.

The Salesforce vets could also help OpenAI capitalize on the corporate backlash Anthropic has faced over its decision to charge businesses for their token usage in addition to a monthly flat fee. OpenAI has publicly touted its pricing relative to Anthropic's, and its leaders have discussed new ways to help businesses lower costs. A price war between the two companies isn't certain, but it could complicate each of their efforts to go public.

## **Facing Criticism**

Both companies have huge ambitions to convince companies to run AI on top of all their software systems, including Salesforce and Microsoft applications, giving the AI firms heavy influence over the way businesses use and pay for software and AI. As OpenAI and Anthropic battle traditional software providers such as Palantir and Microsoft, the newbies are facing more criticism that their AI tools are still rife with security vulnerabilities and make mistakes, and that their customers may be paying more than they need to.

OpenAI says it's well on its way to being a mostly enterprise-focused company, despite its roots in selling subscriptions to its ChatGPT app. Dresser said in an April blog post that 40% of its revenue was coming from business customers, and that the startup expects that number to increase to 50% by the end of the year. At an event in early June, she said OpenAI had two million business customers, double the number from September last year. (It isn't clear whether that figure refers to chatbot subscribers as well as the number of companies that pay for models through its API.)



At Salesforce, sales and marketing staff have long held the most sway, according to current and former employees, but they are second-class citizens at the AI firms, compared to the core researchers who develop the technology.

OpenAI and Anthropic are raiding talent from Salesforce because employees at the 27-year-old cloud software firm know how to handle an influx of demand for new products. Salesforce helped pioneer an approach in which a team of specialists finds and evaluates potential customers, known as sales leads; another team closes the deals; a third one provides technical support for the customers; and a fourth team coordinates contract renewals. Breaking apart these responsibilities into such teams speeds up sales and helps new sales employees to get up to speed on their role, according to two technical consultants who work with the labs.

In addition, OpenAI's most recent big hire from Salesforce, Brian Landsman, who oversaw Salesforce's thousands of partnerships with other software firms, could help OpenAI fulfill its plan to make ChatGPT a tool for more personal and workplace tasks by giving its customers the ability to tap other applications. For instance, ChatGPT customers can access apps from Google, Atlassian, and Salesforce.

Dresser and the Salesforce people who have followed her to OpenAI aim to gain the trust of corporate chief information officers that might have doubts about its ability to balance consumer initiatives with the needs of large businesses. OpenAI in recent years has announced consumer initiatives such as a video app, an erotica-focused version of ChatGPT, and personal devices. (It shut down the video app, hasn't launched erotica, and still plans to reveal a personal device by the end of this year.)

Dresser appears to have made progress. One CEO of a major OpenAI customer said that before Dresser's arrival, he didn't think OpenAI leaders adequately explained their stance on data privacy, for example. But at an event with customers in early June, Dresser and other OpenAI leaders seemed to be more attuned to that and other topics enterprise customers care about, he said.

### **Building 'Tentacles'**

Some consultants who help large companies adopt AI say OpenAI's message to enterprise customers has improved dramatically since Dresser and the other Salesforce people arrived.

At a recent event for business partners, for instance, Dresser and other OpenAI executives talked at length about the costs associated with using AI and how to help customers get a return on their investments in the technology, said Jaclyn Rice Nelson, CEO of Tribe AI, a consulting firm that helps companies with AI projects, who was in attendance.

Cameron Etezadi, chief technology officer at LaunchDarkly, a startup customer of OpenAI that sells tools that let developers test changes to applications before launching them, said OpenAI has been more willing to share details about coming products and features in recent months than beforehand.

The change came after LaunchDarkly pulled back on its OpenAI spending earlier this year after OpenAI acquired one of LaunchDarkly's main competitors, Statsig. OpenAI's staff has pitched ideas for how to customize their models to work with a LaunchDarkly agent that monitors applications and diagnoses the cause of performance drops, he said.

That has “definitely increased my desire to work with them more,” Etezadi said.

OpenAI's tenacity with enterprises is also catching the attention of other software executives. When Box CEO Aaron Levie visited some of his company's financial services customers on the East Coast about two months ago, he found out OpenAI salespeople had paid those same customers a visit several hours earlier.

“That would not have happened, let's say, a year prior,” Levie said. “That just shows you the kind of tentacles that they're building across the commercial landscape.” Box is also a longtime customer of OpenAI.

It also remains to be seen how Salesforce sales and marketing leaders will fit into Anthropic and OpenAI's corporate cultures. At Salesforce, sales and marketing staff have long held the most sway, according to current and former employees, but they are second-class citizens at the AI firms, compared to the core researchers who develop the technology.

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