

The State of UK Direct Sales

2026

Market analysis, performance benchmarks and operational insights for the UK direct sales industry.

May 2026

Executive Summary

Direct sales remains one of the most effective customer acquisition channels available to UK businesses, yet it is frequently misunderstood, poorly implemented, and unfairly dismissed as outdated. This report examines the current state of the UK direct sales industry, drawing on CM Beyer's operational experience, publicly available industry data, and performance benchmarks from programmes delivered across multiple sectors.

The UK direct sales industry generated an estimated £3.2 billion in revenue in 2025, employing approximately 560,000 people across field marketing, door-to-door sales, event-based promotion and retail-adjacent programmes. Despite the growth of digital marketing, direct sales continues to outperform digital channels on conversion rate in sectors where products require explanation, trust-building or guided decision-making.

This report covers market size and growth trends, channel performance benchmarks, compliance and regulatory considerations, workforce dynamics, and operational best practices drawn from CM Beyer's direct sales programmes.

| Metric | 2024 | 2025 | Change |
|--|---------|---------|--------|
| UK direct sales revenue | £3.0bn | £3.2bn | +6.7% |
| People employed | 540,000 | 560,000 | +3.7% |
| Average conversion rate (D2C) | 14.2% | 15.1% | +0.9pp |
| Average cost per acquisition | £38 | £35 | -7.9% |
| Digital-only CPA (comparison) | £42 | £44 | +4.8% |
| Compliance complaints per 10,000 contacts | 2.8 | 2.3 | -17.9% |

Market Overview

The UK direct sales market has grown steadily since the post-pandemic recovery period, with 2025 marking the third consecutive year of real-terms growth. The primary drivers are threefold: rising digital advertising costs have made face-to-face channels comparatively more cost-effective; consumers in high-consideration categories increasingly prefer human interaction over automated funnels; and businesses in regulated sectors (energy, telecoms, financial services) have found that direct channels provide better compliance control than programmatic digital advertising.

Sector Breakdown

Telecommunications remains the largest single sector for direct sales activity in the UK, accounting for approximately 28% of total industry revenue. Energy (including renewable energy installations) accounts for 22%, financial services for 16%, charity fundraising for 12%, and the remaining 22% is distributed across retail, FMCG, home services and business-to-business programmes.

| Sector | Share of Revenue | Avg. CPA | Avg. Conversion | YoY Growth |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|------------|
| Telecommunications | 28% | £31 | 16.8% | +4.2% |
| Energy & renewables | 22% | £42 | 12.3% | +11.5% |
| Financial services | 16% | £54 | 9.7% | +3.1% |
| Charity / fundraising | 12% | £28 | 18.2% | +1.8% |
| Retail & FMCG | 10% | £22 | 21.4% | -2.1% |
| B2B services | 7% | £68 | 7.8% | +8.9% |
| Other | 5% | £36 | 13.5% | +2.4% |

Digital vs Direct: The Convergence

The framing of direct sales versus digital marketing as an either-or choice is increasingly outdated. The highest-performing customer acquisition programmes in the UK now integrate both channels: digital campaigns generate awareness and capture intent signals, while direct sales teams convert that intent into transactions through structured, face-to-face engagement.

CM Beyer's data shows that programmes combining digital lead generation with direct sales conversion achieve an average cost per acquisition that is 23% lower than digital-only programmes and 18% lower than direct-only programmes in the same sectors. The combined approach also delivers higher customer lifetime value, with retention rates approximately 15% above single-channel acquisition.

Compliance and Regulation

The direct sales industry in the UK operates under a well-established regulatory framework. Consumer protection is governed by the Consumer Rights Act 2015, the Consumer Contracts Regulations 2013 (which provides for a 14-day cooling-off period on doorstep sales), the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR, and the CAP Code for any advertising materials used in the field.

Sector-specific regulators add additional requirements. Ofgem regulates energy sales practices. The FCA regulates financial promotions. Ofcom oversees telecoms sales conduct. Businesses operating direct sales programmes must ensure compliance with both the general consumer protection framework and any sector-specific requirements that apply to their products or services.

The industry's compliance record has improved significantly in recent years. Complaints per 10,000 contacts fell from 4.1 in 2022 to 2.3 in 2025, reflecting increased investment in training, monitoring and quality assurance. The Direct Selling Association and the Institute of Sales Management have both published updated codes of practice that emphasise transparency, consent and consumer welfare.

Operational Best Practices

CM Beyer's direct sales programmes are structured around six core operational principles, each of which contributes measurably to programme performance:

Territory planning. Data-led area selection using demographic, geodemographic and historical performance data. Programmes that use structured territory planning achieve 25-35% higher contact rates than those using ad hoc territory selection.

Scripted conversations. Not scripts that agents read verbatim, but structured conversation frameworks with defined opening, qualifying, presenting and closing phases. These ensure consistency, compliance and measurability while allowing natural interaction.

Daily reporting. Real-time performance data at the individual, team and programme level. Contact volume, conversation rate, conversion rate and compliance metrics are reported daily, not weekly. Issues are identified and addressed within 24 hours.

Weekly coaching. Structured one-to-one coaching sessions based on observed performance data. The focus is on specific, measurable improvements rather than general motivation. High performers are studied to identify replicable techniques.

Compliance oversight. Every programme includes a compliance framework covering data capture, consent management, cooling-off period administration and complaint handling. Mystery shopping and call monitoring are standard, not optional.

Feedback loops. Field intelligence — what customers say, what objections arise, what competitors are doing — is systematically captured and fed back to marketing strategy. This closes the gap between what the market research says and what actually happens in conversations with customers.

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