

B2B Sales in 2020: Strategies for Success

An overview of high-performing
teams, technology trends and
selling methods

Executive summary

Without a high-performing sales team to drive revenue, an organization will fail. As B2B sales teams around the world adapt established tools and methods for a workforce of remote sellers, it's more important than ever for these teams to minimize losses and inefficiencies.

In this report, we present a data-driven snapshot of the business-to-business sales climate at the turn of the decade. In it, you'll find information about the way top B2B sales teams measured success, invested in technology and prepared for the future. While the global sales landscape has changed since the time of the survey, the future described by our respondents is still clear, and it's arriving sooner than anyone thought. The focus on using an innovative technology strategy to streamline sales processes and improve connections to other internal teams is no longer an ideal for the future, it's a requirement to do business now.

Here's an overview of our key findings:

A blueprint for high-performing sales teams

Teams that exceed their sales goals report several commonalities. They're investing in technology to reduce administrative work and enable internal collaboration that will help sellers succeed. In today's remote selling environment, high-touch internal reviews are difficult or even impossible. Teams that aren't adapting quickly will likely be facing even more challenges.

The importance of spending time with customers

Leading sales teams are building out processes with the goal of freeing up individual sellers to spend time adding a personal touch to their sales efforts. Early adopters are incorporating automation throughout their sales processes to make more effective use of a seller's time, but there's still a lot of room for improvement, especially in post-sales processes.

Incomplete technology strategies

Sales teams see huge opportunities for those investing in technology, and have already started to implement new tools with the hopes of modernizing their workflows. However, despite the ambitious goals of technology initiatives, individual sellers aren't seeing the benefits of those investments now or in their predictions of the future.

This report contains the full results of our survey as well as some strategies to learn from early leaders and solve today's sales challenges with modern technology.

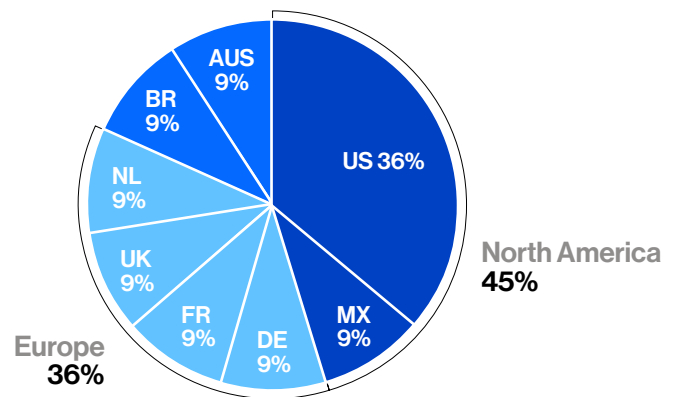
Methodology and participant demographics

For the 2020 B2B Sales Trends report, we surveyed 895 key decision makers and influencers in business-to-business sales functions across the world. The survey was conducted in late 2019 and early 2020. Participants came from a range of key sales roles in eight countries across four continents. They also represented a healthy mix of industries and organization sizes. The survey included approximately 40 questions about sales priorities, current trends, technology and more.

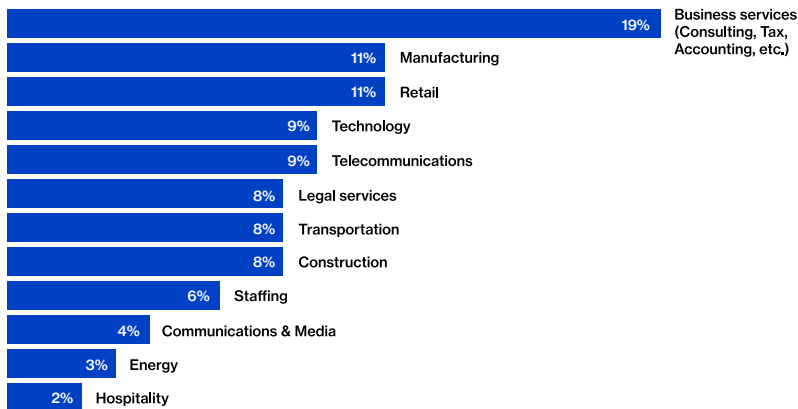
Nearly half of this year's survey participants were from North America (45%), with Europe (36%) as the second largest continent sample.

The companies in our survey represent a healthy blend of industries – led by business services (19%), manufacturing (11%) and retail (11%) – and roles – led by sales operations (25%) and outside sales (24%).

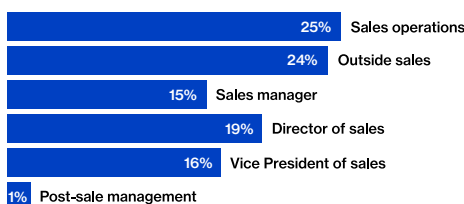
Our survey respondents came from an even mix of organization sizes, with a plurality (37%) coming from companies with 501 to 1,500 employees. The size of respondents' sales teams followed a normal distribution, with the most common size of 21-50 sales employees (41%).



Industries



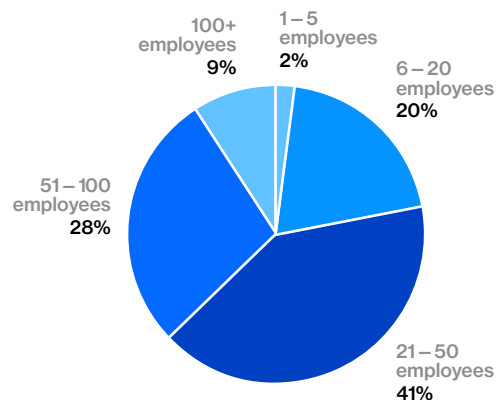
Roles



Company Size



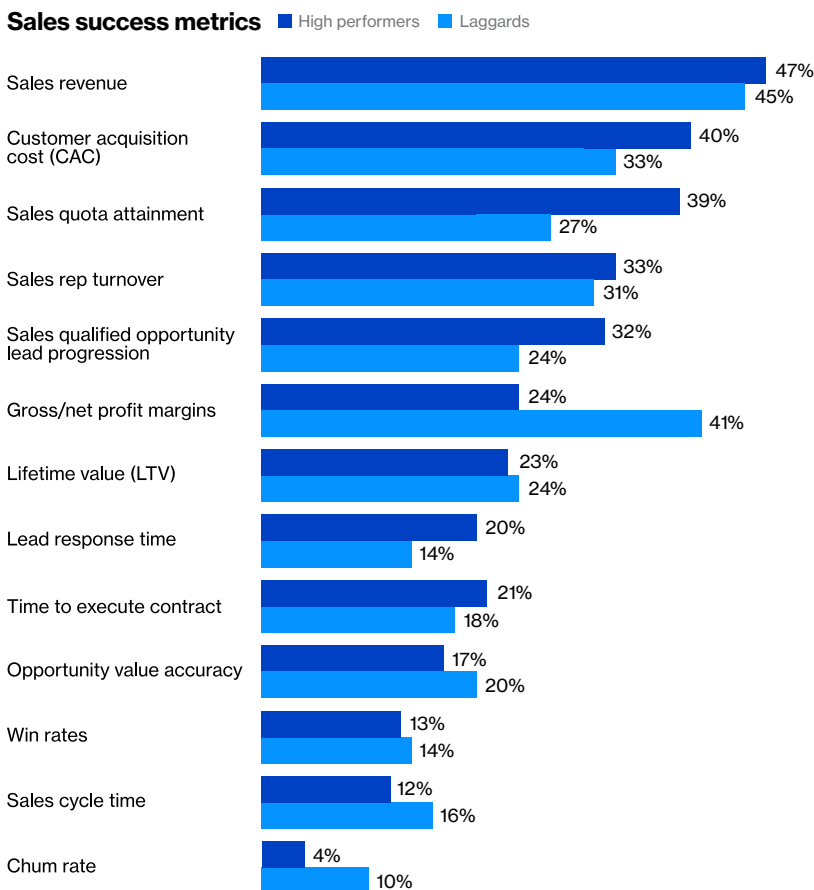
Sales Dept. Size



Building a high-performance sales team

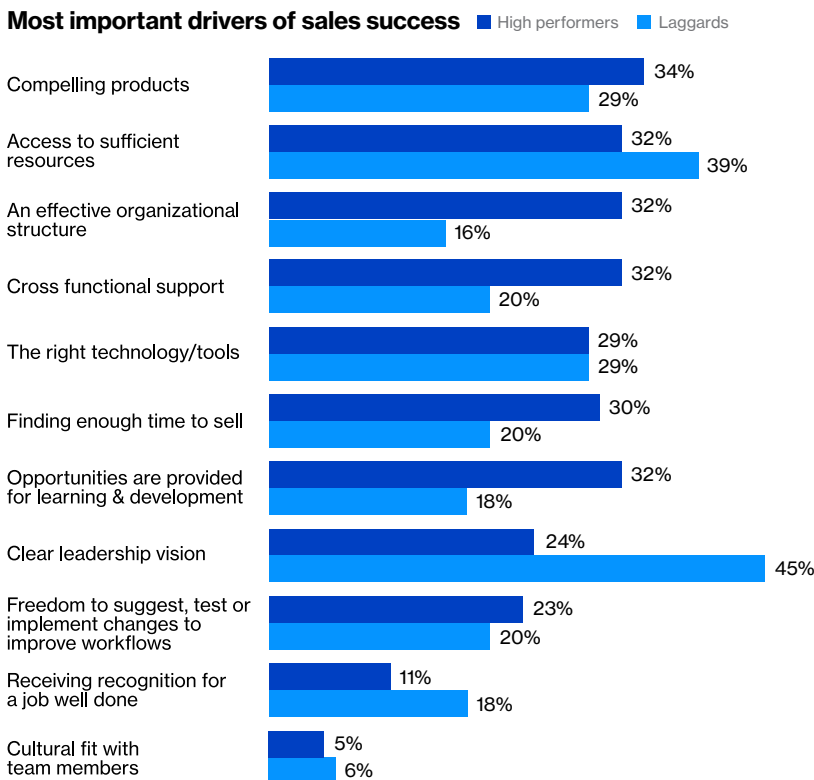
Understanding B2B sales success

Sales teams of all sizes in all markets are primarily motivated to hit revenue targets. By a significant margin, our respondents identify sales revenue as the most common metric to determine their success. This is no surprise. However, a close examination shows noticeable gaps in the importance of other metrics when respondents are separated into those who exceeded sales targets in the last year (high performers) and those who missed sales targets in the last year (laggards).



High performers are more likely than laggards to measure their sales success by quota attainment (39% vs. 27%), qualified lead progression (32% vs. 24%) and customer acquisition cost (40% vs. 33%). On the other hand, laggards are more likely to measure their sales teams on the basis of gross/net profit margins (41% vs. 24%).

Beyond simply establishing what success looks like, our survey examines the factors that are causing sales teams to succeed. There's not a single clear success factor that emerges, rather several interesting trends regarding the drivers of success for high performers and laggards.



What are your sales team's current challenges?

27%
Closing deals

35%
Differentiating from competitors

38%
Reducing administrative work

High-performing respondents are far more likely to rely on effective organizational structure, cross-functional support and finding more time to sell. In the shifting sales climate of a global pandemic, these factors are even more important because they enable individual sellers to operate independently. Laggards are still relying on a strong leadership vision, recognition for a job well done and access to sufficient resources. As sellers become physically separated from leadership, it gets harder for remote teams to stay productive.

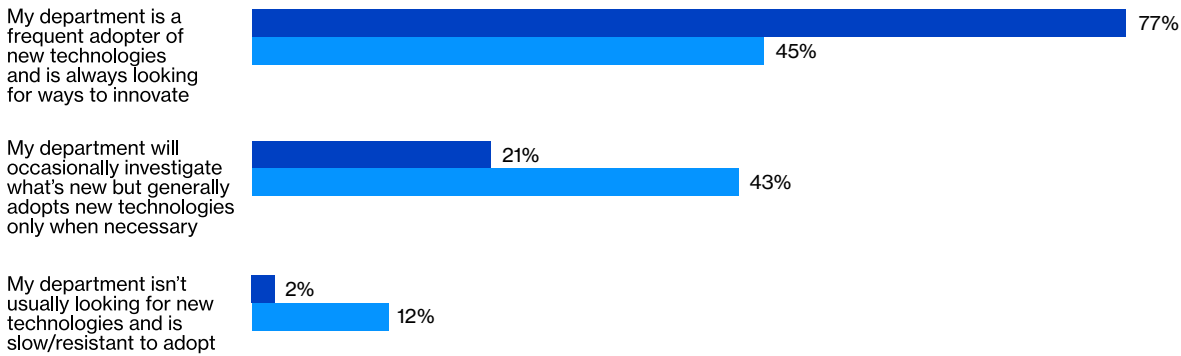
Breaking the respondent base down further, 36% of outside sales organizations identify finding enough time to sell as their top priority. For outside sellers, that action tops their list of success factors.

How high-performing teams operate

Diving deeper into the operational differences between high performers and laggards, there are significant gaps in the approach the two groups have to adopting new technology. High performers are almost four times more likely to be a frequent adopter (77%) of new technology than an occasional adopter (21%). Conversely, laggards are equally likely to adopt new technology frequently (45%) and occasionally (43%).

Rate of technology adoption

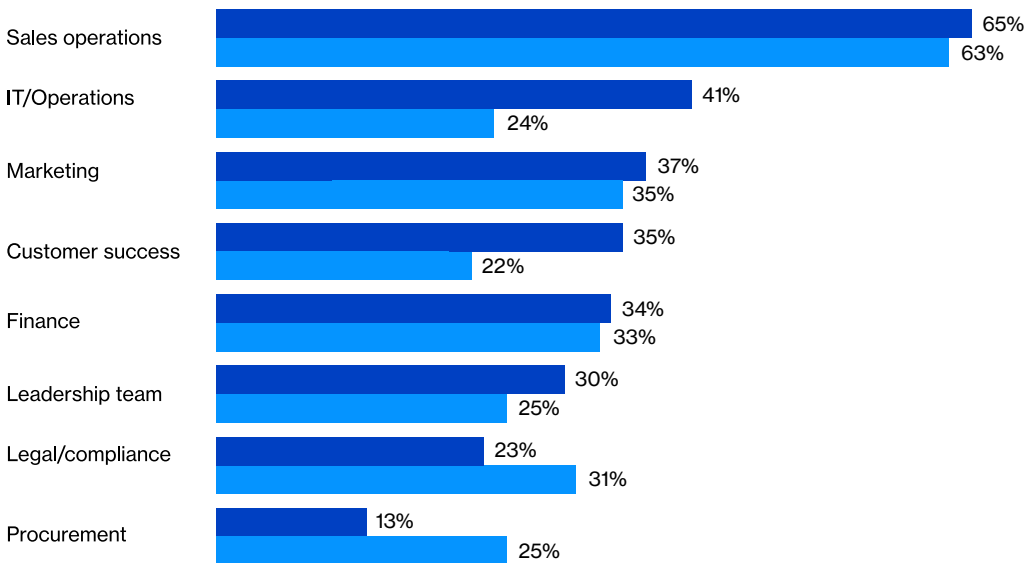
■ High performers ■ Laggards



There's a clear correlation between sales teams that are willing to commit to new technology and teams that exceed their sales goals. This commitment to technology results in frequent internal collaboration between the sales team and their IT/operations counterparts. When asked about frequent internal collaborators, high-performing respondents (41%) were almost twice as likely to work with IT compared with laggards (24%). These slow-to-adopt respondents are spending far more time working with legal/compliance (31%) and procurement (25%) teams than high performers are.

Most common internal collaborators

■ High performers ■ Laggards



What differentiates high performers?

There's a clear picture emerging of how high-performing sellers approach business today. To start, they're focusing on a common set of metrics: revenue, customer acquisition cost and quota attainment. Beyond that, the leaders are separating from the pack by building a sound infrastructure at the organizational level. Compared with laggards, high performers are twice as likely to identify organizational structure as the reason for selling success. With a strategic technology stack in place for all sellers, these organizations can adapt more quickly to new selling circumstances and easily scale to add new members. High performers are also significantly more likely to count on cross-functional IT/operations support to drive sales success. Laggards, on the other hand, are depending on leadership to both establish a sound sales vision and provide recognition for the top sellers. These leadership attributes are still present in high-performing sales functions, but those organizations have added a technology component to create a unique differentiator.

From a technology perspective, today's best sales teams approach new challenges from a perspective that allows them to solve problems with new tools. These technologies are connecting the sellers and their prospective buyers to other experts within their organization. Conversely, the laggards are still focused on partnering with procurement and legal/compliance functions. The investments that early adopters are making in technology are reducing the amount of time they need to spend with those paperwork-heavy functions, freeing them for agile new business initiatives. In a period of such dramatic across-the-board change, agile sales teams will win the race to evolve processes and offer prospects a compelling buying process.

The importance of spending time with customers

Creating opportunities for personalization

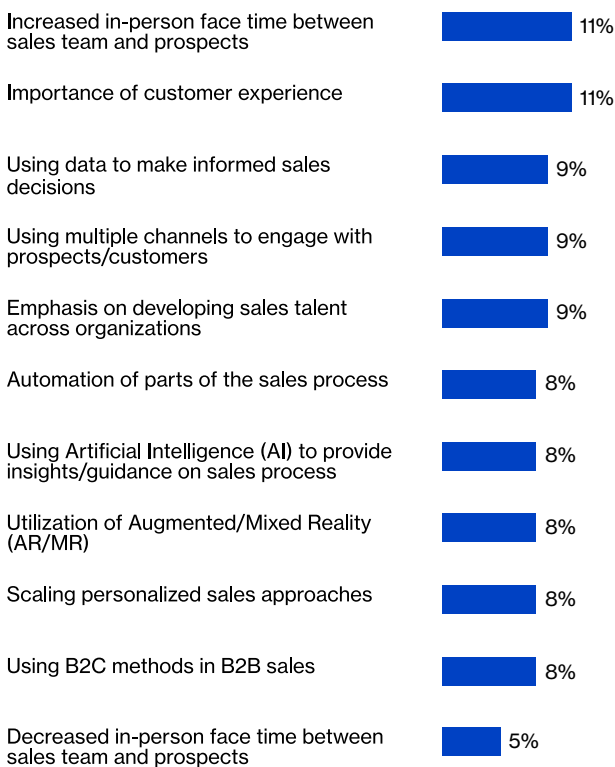
By a large margin, respondents in our survey identify the same top priority for their sales team: increasing face time between sales teams and prospects. In fact, increasing in-person sales time (11%) and improving customer experience (11%) are the two biggest priorities for the respondents in our survey, significantly ahead of new uses of technology like AI (8%) and Augmented Reality (8%).

Note that our survey identified “in-person face time” as the top priority. With the unexpected shift to working and selling remotely, it’s important to clarify that the spirit of this word choice is not related to physical proximity. Rather, sales leaders are expressing a desire to maximize the time sellers spend communicating with prospects, understanding their needs and helping them succeed. Whether sales meetings are happening in-person or via online collaboration tools, B2B sellers spending time with prospects drives revenue.

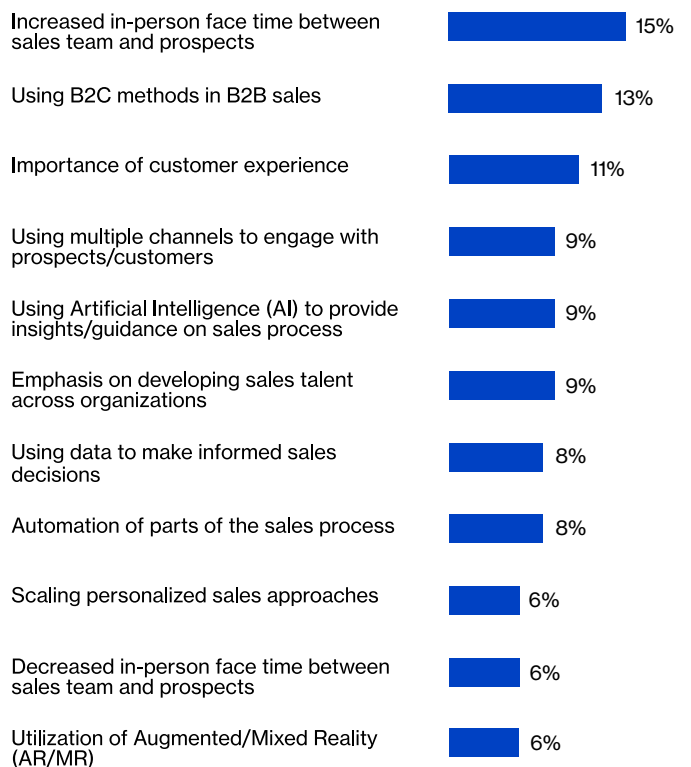
This is especially important for B2B sales teams that are looking to replace traditional in-person meetings with effective digital communications and agreements. Selling to remote prospects will require sales teams to effectively incorporate video and screen sharing tools to provide information. Buyers who desire a personal walkthrough of the product will expect a vendor to be able to provide that experience virtually. They’ll also need an agreement process that is easy to use and provides high levels of visibility. Sales organizations that don’t offer digital equivalents of in-person sales processes will immediately start losing these sales opportunities.

The importance of personal touch in the selling process is reinforced when respondents identify the most urgent sales topic at their organization. The need for more one-on-one selling time again tops the list (15%), followed by adapting business-to-consumer methods for business-to-business sales (13%) and the importance of customer experience (11%).

What is the most important sales topic?



What is the most urgent sales topic?



Opportunities for automation

One of the best ways to increase one-on-one sales opportunities is automating steps in the sales process. Sales teams can automate several parts of their current process to minimize effort spent on administrative tasks and reduce the likelihood of human error. This automation is not replacing human employees, it is simply a way to minimize manual work so employees can focus their individual time on parts of the selling process that require human touch and agile decision making.

Automated sales functions



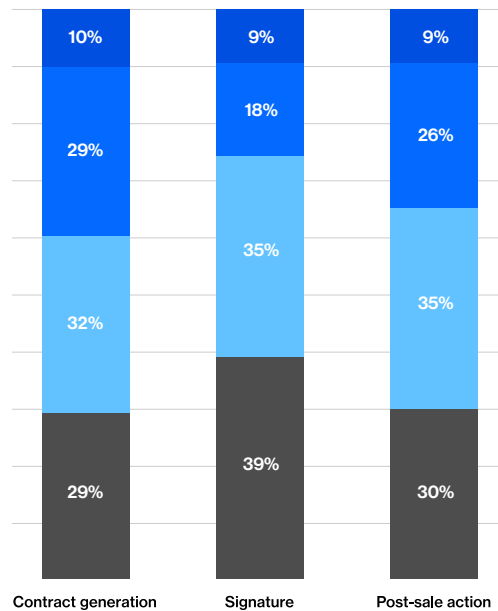
Respondents in our survey have already started to utilize automation in their sales process. In fact, every respondent has mostly automated at least one part of the sales process, but there's still a lot of room for improvement. The most common areas of automation today are data entry (41%), customer/prospect outreach (39%) and contract generation (39%). Reviewing the entire list of automated processes, it's clear that most organizations are focusing automation efforts on the early stages of the sales cycle.

Looking more closely at contract generation, there is an opportunity for automation to help sales teams streamline the process further. While 29% of companies have evolved to be mostly automated, only 10% of respondents have fully automated contract generation, which could pull data and custom clauses from different systems into a defined template with a single click. On the other hand, 29% are lagging behind, generating contracts entirely by hand. These highly manual workflows are full of redundant effort and re-work.

However, once contacts are sent for signature, there's a dropoff in automation. While a small percentage (9%) of respondents have fully automated signature collection, a plurality of respondents (39%) are still signing all agreements on paper. With three out of four respondents still signing all of most of their agreements on paper, this is an easy opportunity for sales teams to add automation to their workflow.

Automation in contracting

Legend: Fully manual (Dark Grey), Mostly manual (Light Blue), Mostly automated (Medium Blue), Fully automated (Dark Blue)



4x Large companies with 50+ sales employees are over **4x more likely** than smaller companies with 1-20 sales employees to fully automate contract generation (14.7% vs. 3.5%) and post sale actions (14.4% vs. 3.5%)

2x Outside sales professionals and Sales managers are **twice as likely** as Sales ops professionals to describe contract generation and post-sale actions as fully automated

2.5x Sales managers are **2.5x more likely** than outside sales to describe signing agreements as fully automated

Enabling more personal sales interactions by leveraging automation

The overwhelming desire to provide sellers with one-on-one selling opportunities is one of the strongest takeaways from our survey. Even as companies indicate their willingness to involve technology in their sales process both now and in the future, it's clear that sales leaders still see a lot of value in the human element of a sale. In that regard, as sales processes become more technical, they should also become more personal.

Automation of manual workflows is the best way to increase one-on-one selling opportunities. Automation isn't going away, it will only expand. The challenges that organizations face with remote workforces will eventually result in new workflows that are faster, cheaper and less error prone. In the short term, B2B sales will be a race to adapt selling motions to remote buyers and sellers.

As automation becomes more ubiquitous, the teams that incorporate automation quickly will begin to pull ahead by creating more one-on-one time for their sellers. It's not enough to simply have a plan for adding more automation, organizations need to have a plan to use the efficiency gains from modernization to improve the customer experience and sell more effectively.

Forward-looking sales technology investments

Workflow improvements lead to more sales

Beyond automation, today's organizations see additional opportunities to benefit from new sales technology. Sales teams in our survey are responding to the larger trends they observe by investing in technology (74%) and updating their sales processes (67%). The majority of teams don't see a need to restructure, choosing instead to keep their personnel structure in place and modernize the way they use their sales tools.

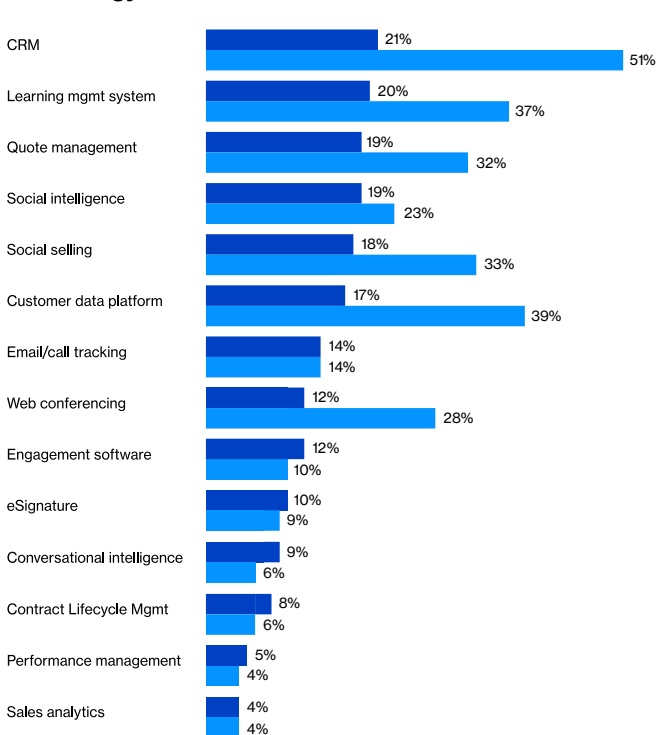
How is your organization responding to sales trends?



Although this survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems likely that the present remote sales environment would echo the same sentiment. As businesses adapt to the disruption, our research mirrors what we're seeing today as full teams of at-home sellers are an opportunity to modernize existing sales processes rather than spend time reinventing the wheel. This remote structure amplifies reliance on technology to successfully connect individuals internally and externally.

It's helpful to know that leading sales teams are investing in technology, but it's significantly more helpful to pinpoint the specific solutions those teams are purchasing. To explore this topic further, our respondents identified the tools that are a part of their current stack and those that they anticipate will play a critical role in five years.

Technology in use now and in the future



Why some technologies are so important

“We use it to track everything. It’s how we run reports, shows lead conversion time, who you talked to and what you said.”

CRM

“It eliminates manual quoting and simplifies business complexity so your reps have more time to sell.”

Quote management

“This helps improve business productivity, efficiency and streamlines the work process.”

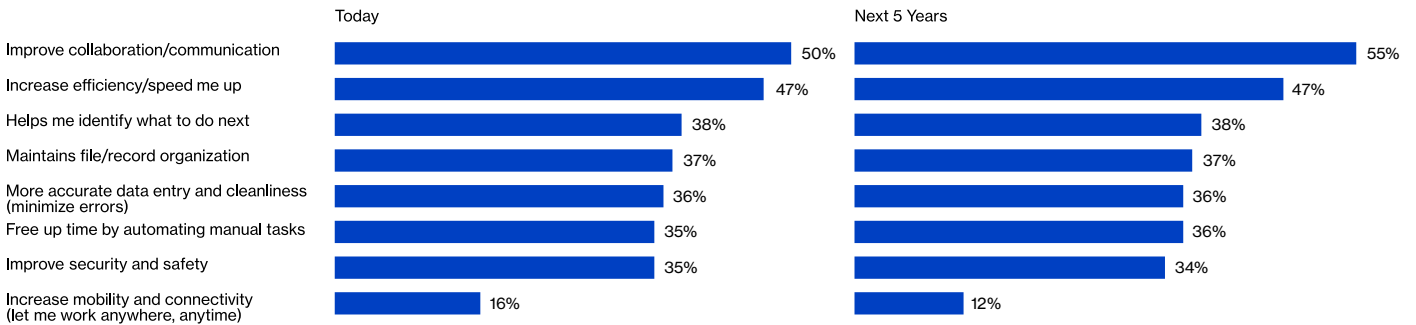
eSignature

“It’s critical because all the data of customers and clients are kept in one place, which helps to gather knowledge and make work more efficient.”

CDP

Looking into the future, sales teams are expecting to succeed by utilizing technology that helps them better understand their customers and prospects. The solutions that respondents anticipate increasing most in importance by 2025 are customer relationship management (+30%) and customer data platform (+22%) tools. It's clear from these responses that sales teams intend to increase their effectiveness by using data about customers to improve experience and sell more effectively.

Benefits of sales technology



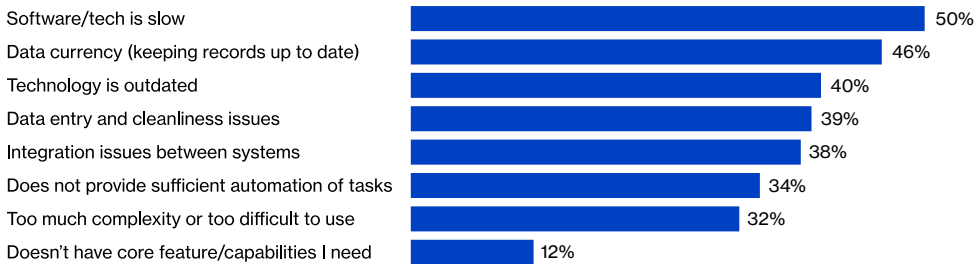
The picture for the future is ambitious, but clear: Today's investments in technology will result in more personal sales interactions and more effective selling by 2025. However, when that larger strategy is broken down to more tactical steps for individual sales professionals, it becomes less clear. When asked about specific parts of their individual workflow, respondents don't anticipate many improvements due to technology in five years. Except for an increase in collaboration/communication (this trend is extremely important for sales teams that don't share a physical office), sales professionals are expecting their technology benefits to remain static across the next five years. While most teams didn't anticipate many new benefits from technology, the current landscape is providing an example of just how fast businesses can change tooling to provide sales teams with new resources.

The need for digital transformation

While today's sales teams are investing in technology, individuals on sales teams aren't clear about how that technology will help them achieve their goals. The current sales landscape is going through an enormous tectonic shift, but it's important to emphasize that the best outcome is not simply replacing face-to-face processes with digital equivalents. The best strategy is to think big about how the entire sales process can improve by moving to a system of interconnected tools with automation at every step. This digital transformation will optimize the amount of time sellers have to spend with prospects.

The first step in getting the most value out of technology investments is identifying current challenges. The biggest obstacles, according to our respondents, are that software/tech is too slow (50%) and data is not current (46%). The list of current technology problems further surfaces the need for modern sales tools that connect to other systems, automate tasks and provide an easy-to-use experience for sellers.

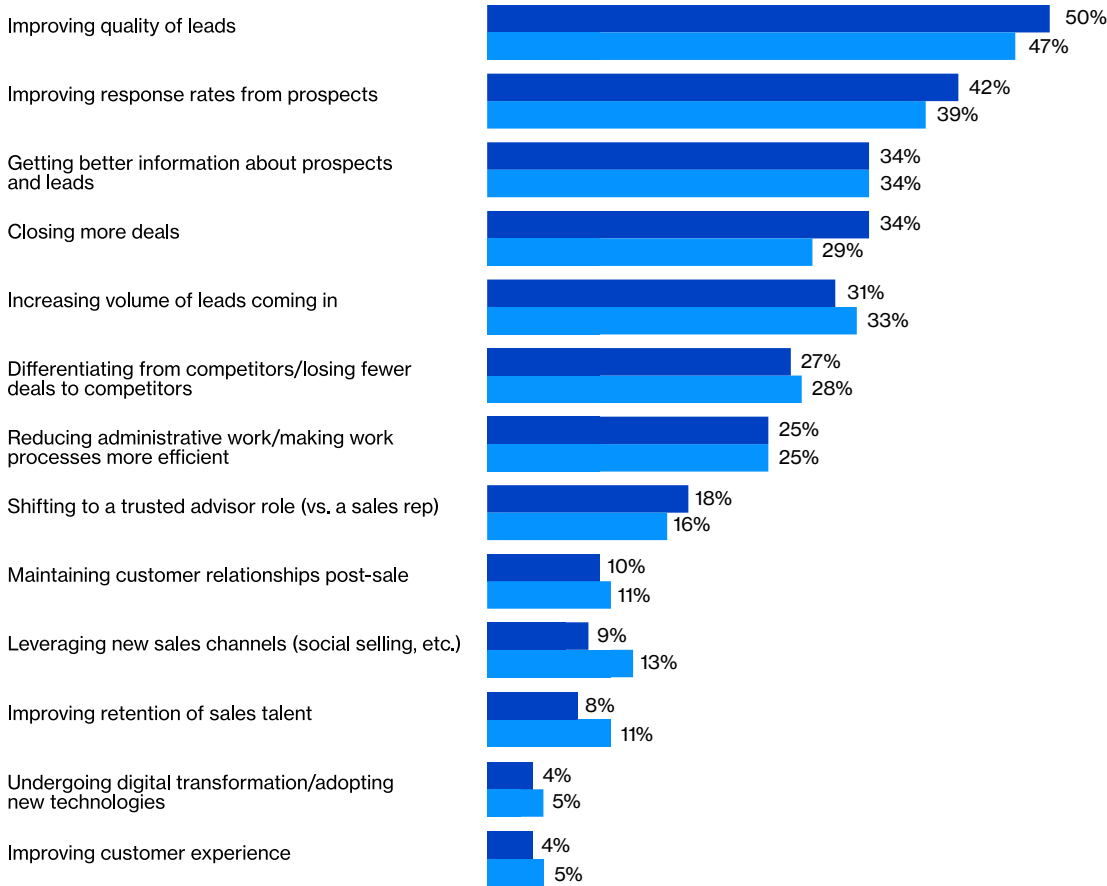
Challenges with current technology



Committing the entire sales function to a digital transformation would solve a wide range of technology problems. However, the desire to embark on that digital transformation is listed by respondents as a low priority both today and five years into the future.

Across both time periods, sales teams are prioritizing the same three areas: lead quality, prospect response rate and information about prospects. These improvements on their own are incredibly important, but without a digital transformation to enable a major shift in workflow and time allocation, they're incredibly difficult to achieve. Increases in lead quality and response rate are the end result of that transformation rather than simply an outcome that improves with additional focus.

Sales team priorities ■ Current ■ In 5 Years



What challenges does your sales team face when it comes to digitizing sales processes?

43%

Technical complexity

37%

Difficulty identifying opportunities for digitization

33%

Legal and compliance risks

With new tools and new processes, sales improvements are certainly on the way. However, it's critical to make the right moves in the correct order. Today's teams want to support a nimble organization with all the benefits of the digital transformation, but they've acted out of order in failing to build the infrastructure to accommodate those improvements.

Expectations of sales technology investments

40% Efficiency/Speed

"I think technology will play a huge role with helping to make everything easier and faster, especially with closing deals."

24% Increase sales/Revenue

"Technology helps to utilize business and effectiveness of their sales pitches, resulting in higher closing rates and a better customer experience."

20% Collaboration/Communication

"Make communication more accessible and convenient."

17% Automation

"Technology will help me reduce administrative work and facilitate efficiency of my work."

The DocuSign vision for B2B sales

Modern B2B sales teams are in the midst of a major transformation. Sellers are adapting processes to meet their new at-home working conditions. Prospects also have greater access to information than ever before and have higher B2B expectations based on highly convenient and personalized consumer experiences with companies like Amazon, Uber and Airbnb. The result of these shifts is longer sales cycles with larger buying teams that ultimately lead to more complex deals.

Sales teams have responded to these challenges by investing in technology to get ahead of their competition and hit sales goals. Their investments have an ambitious scope, which has led early adopters to experience growing pains with data issues, slow adoption and lack of necessary integrations. The result of these struggles is that the impact of new tools isn't yet being seen by individual team members. As sellers move out of physical offices into an all-remote workplace, the effects of inefficient technology are felt even more intensely.

The solution to these early struggles is for organizations to step back and take a strategic look at the way they're building their sales technology stack. These teams want to achieve all the benefits of a streamlined digital selling processes, but they're taking a flawed approach, isolating individual processes to improve rather than holistically modernizing their tools and processes for the new digital landscape.

Our survey clearly illustrates that high-performing sales teams build strong partnerships with IT to support their digital transformation. With the right technology in place, these teams will take advantage of CRM and CDP solutions to gather more information about prospects and use the additional one-on-one time created by automation to engage in highly personalized sales interactions. By focusing on this holistic digital transformation, today's best sales teams are taking the steps needed to improve top sales priorities – lead quality, response rate and revenue growth.

Technology like the DocuSign Agreement Cloud fits the transformation sales teams need to undergo to automate manual processes and maximize personal time spent with customers. It streamlines one of the most manual and painful (yet critical) processes in sales – the agreement process. With the Agreement Cloud, reps can generate custom contracts in a single click, collect signatures digitally and take action to store a contract, update an opportunity or initiate billing. Most critically, it integrates fluidly with the tools sales already uses like CRM and CPQ solutions. By building a platform to manage every step of the agreement process – preparing, signing, acting on and managing – DocuSign removes unnecessary administrative work, giving individual sales professionals the most time to focus on what they do best: personalizing sales interactions and closing deals.

A modern sales tech stack with the right technology like the DocuSign Agreement Cloud can give sellers the tools they need to win more deals both now and in an increasingly competitive and complex future. With the right infrastructure in place, sales can create a premium experience for prospects, resulting in more leads and a better chance of converting leads into revenue.

About DocuSign

DocuSign helps organizations connect and automate how they prepare, sign, act on and manage agreements. As part of the DocuSign Agreement Cloud, DocuSign offers eSignature: the world's #1 way to sign electronically on practically any device, from almost anywhere, at any time. Today, more than 500,000 customers and hundreds of millions of users in over 180 countries use DocuSign to accelerate the process of doing business and to simplify people's lives.

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