

20 TOP SALES LEADERS REVEAL THEIR BIGGEST PRODUCTIVITY SECRETS



Maximizing Sales Performance

Face the Changing Sales Landscape

A great salesperson has to be many things: a storyteller, a strategist, an influencer, and a facilitator. But today's buyers are more educated, more mobile and more social than ever. And salespeople are rising to embrace new roles as a result. Today's top sales professionals often double as marketers, thought leaders, social media experts and technologists. As all great sales professionals know, one must adapt in order to survive.

In order to gain insight into how the sales landscape has been shifting, we went to 20 of the top sales and lead generation experts in the world. We asked them each to answer a single question:

What is the most important shift in sales strategy, technology or process that you've implemented or observed in the past year?

The diverse range of responses we received is exciting. While some of the top sales experts revealed specific technological solutions that have radically improved sales processes, others affirmed the vitality of traditional sales skills like storytelling and the art of crafting a letter. Still other respondents were quick to point out that all the technology in the world can't help reps if their strategic approach to selling is inherently flawed.

While this ebook reveals a cross-section of divergent opinions, we want to make one thing clear: every man and woman we interviewed has achieved success and renown based on their sales strategies. This eBook is therefore testament to the fact that there is no single way to close deals and build successful businesses. Whether you are a sales rep looking to meet monthly quota or a CEO seeking to transform a startup into a billion-dollar enterprise, it's our sincere hope that this eBook inspires you to try something new. After all, few rewards can be realized without taking calculated risks. And that new solution or strategy you adopt might just be the engine that catapults you to new levels of success.

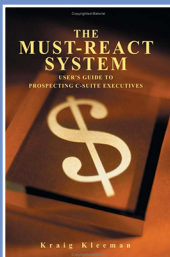


Win Meetings & Conduct Introductory Sales Discussions with Fact-Based Research

Many sales organizations simply do not deploy an authentic revenue capture model. In today's culture, most sellers wrongly apply value proposition and product benefit language at the introductory stage of the sales cycle. This ineffective activity is systemic, particularly in North America. It hinders sellers from achieving optimal conversion rates.

Buyers no longer think in terms of product benefit language, they think in terms of topics, trends, metrics, and outcomes.

The number one opportunity for sales teams to get smarter is to learn the power of leading with fact-based research, versus leading with value-proposition language. By offering short, concise presentations that are entitled analyst-briefings, executive-briefings, insights-briefings, and other tested, vetted titles, your ability to gain meetings with your target buyers increases dramatically. When structured properly, these briefings are an amalgamation of third-party, respectable research that offers a tactical (sometimes even strategic) narrative. The presentation itself should include techniques that will stimulate the buyer to open up deeply and profoundly about his/her environment, and will lead to depth of qualification and instant credibility. Briefing your target buyer on a topic that is relevant to his/her professional mandates, that ultimately ties into the strategic outcomes of your product or service is the most powerful way to get in, qualify, build credibility, and ultimately close profitable business.



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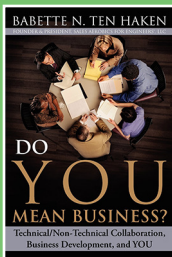
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The Importance of Cross-Functional Collaboration in Sales

The biggest shift in sales strategy I've implemented incorporates cross-functional collaboration. Revenue generation is part of everyone's job description, stated or not. Everyone sells. When sellers and buyers work across discipline-driven silos, everyone understands how money walks through their organizations and their customers' organizations as well. In order to achieve this outcome, sellers acknowledge that their data doesn't provide all the answers. Buyers admit they don't necessarily ask the right questions of sellers. When everyone seated around the business table suspends traditional role-playing, business is transacted.

My teams target sustainable strategies driving not only short-term revenue goals but long-term economic development. Everyone seated around that business table considers the total output of their collaborative efforts. How does their output impact the sustainability of their company and their customers' companies? How does everyone get to the finish line, together? Today's globally competitive economy demands nothing less.



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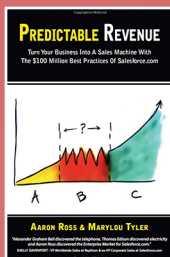
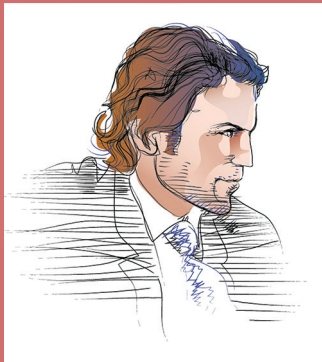
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Salespeople Should Stop Prospecting and Start Specializing

Salespeople shouldn't prospect! When a company relies on salespeople to do all their own prospecting and fill their own sales funnels, they can't get off the revenue roller coaster and create predictable revenue. Why? Salespeople aren't good at prospecting; they don't like it and it's not sustainable or consistent. By breaking responsibilities into four separate, focused roles, as Salesforce.com did very early, every single person in the sales team becomes an expert in their practice, executives see exactly how each function works or doesn't, and you create a limitless sales organization.

If you don't specialize, you WILL struggle to scale. The four key roles in a sales organization are 1) dedicated prospectors, 2) market response reps, 3) closers/Account Executives and 4) account managers. I've heard from countless people who read my book & specialized their salespeople say "it transformed my business."

The most common mistake in specializing is not going far enough: having your outbound prospectors handle inbound leads, or being afraid to take the painful but important step to separate your "hunter" salespeople closing new customers from "farmer" account managers working with current customers. It's scary for salespeople who used to depend on a book of business to lose it, so make it up to them by investing big in lead generation and overpaying them while you transition to the new system.



Aaron Ross

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Return to the Fundamentals of Sales

Salespeople have spent the last few years learning how to understand, embed and use technology in their process for engaging prospects. And this is a good thing. But the biggest shift I see is that ever so slowly, salespeople are coming back to the fundamentals of what makes great salespeople great.

Here's an example: Many salespeople I know have started (or re-started) the small act of writing thank you notes. With their hand. With a pen. On paper. We have tons of ways to reach prospects and customers now, and these methods are hugely powerful. But think about the ways we have to “thank” someone. We can tweet a thanks, make a quick call, or write an email.

Email is by far the most commonly used method to thank someone, but email is more like spam than it is like gratitude.

If you really want to thank someone, write them a note. I routinely get calls from executives thanking me for my thank you note.

It's simple, but it makes a big impact.



Craig Wortmann

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Build Deeper Relationships with Customers

There is no doubt that the shift in sales is being driven by customer expectations. Salespeople must deeply understand how to add value to their customers' business to help them drive revenue. Businesses today, however, have an unprecedented opportunity to develop real relationships with clients that go beyond the traditional boundaries of meeting rooms and sales pitches. The best sales people have been doing this for years, but now it is essential that 100% of the team is providing real revenue-driving value. Nearly every day, something happens in the world that will affect your customers. But are you there to see it? Do you have the right tools that give you real-time insights to solve the business problems your customers have? It's no longer about breaking down the doors—it's all about customer intimacy between the buyer and seller on the same journey; it's about year-round value creation. It's the new world, and we see many of the top Fortune 500 enterprises equipping their teams to be successful in it.



Penny Herscher

CEO, FirstRain

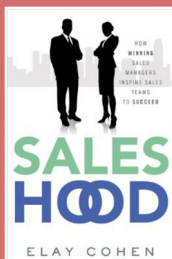
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Create a Community of Sales Mentors at Your Company

Sales managers who inspire salespeople to learn from each other, and share best practices in weekly sales meetings, end up on the beach in Hawaii. Likewise, companies that anchor their sales processes in values, nurtured from top performers and best practices, experience better results and stickier adoption.



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The Importance of Qualifying Sales Prospects

The top sales teams we work with have combined strategy, technology, and process seamlessly to create a true “sales enablement” infrastructure for their sales teams. They’ve planned, purchased, and designed systems that put the onus on the company to do the heavy lifting at the top of the funnel and focus on freeing sales people up from administrative and prospecting duties to focus on what they were hired to do: talk live to qualified prospects. These companies have smaller sales team stacked with reps of the highest caliber and all they ask is that they take the ball across the goal line. The company has already gained the first 99 yards.



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Your Best Sales Reps are Your Customers

The most important shift B2B companies are making is empowering their customers to sell for them.

It is probably not news to anyone reading this, but buyers don't always trust your salespeople. They do trust your current customers, however, to give them the real scoop on your product or service -- the good and the bad.

That's why the smartest sales leaders are forming strategic partnerships with their colleagues in marketing and customer success. Together, this revenue-generating trinity is enlisting happy customers and mobilizing them to flood the marketplace with advocacy.

The result? More high-quality leads referred by customers, shorter sales cycles, lower customer acquisition costs and higher customer lifetime values. Before long, their customers are virtually out-selling their best sales reps.



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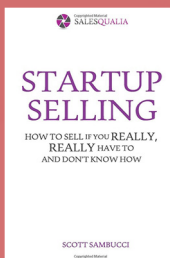
The Importance of Alignment During Implementation

Losing a customer sucks. It really sucks. It hurts revenue and kills morale.

When you reach the end of the sales process, and your prospect says - “Okay, let’s get started” - make sure that you and everyone in your company knows what happens next in...

- ...the first minute
- ...the first hour
- ...the first day
- ...the first week
- ...the first month
- ...the first quarter
- ...the first year

You need to figure this out for your business, then make sure everyone from engineering to sales to marketing to customer service knows where each customer is in this cycle and that everyone adheres to your Implementation Plan.



Scott Sambucci

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Hire Sales Reps That Can Write

Without a doubt, it's writing. Not communication skills in general, that's too vague. And frankly, it would be difficult to find a great communicator who also isn't a great writer (or that has a great writer behind them). But for most sales & marketing professionals who don't have the luxury of a ghost or speech writer, your writing skills are critically important.

Mark Twain once said that if he was given more time to write something, he'd have made it shorter. That's because great writing helps get precisely to the matter at hand, turns complicated topics into something you can understand, and gets right to the what the audience cares about most.

Great writing is visceral. It tugs at your intellect and heart often at the same time. Great salespeople write shorter follow-up emails that drive response, vs. throwing everything they know at the prospect and hoping they can sort it out. Verbatim sales scripts rarely work, but well-prepared sales professionals still enumerate (first in writing, then in person or via phone) crisp questions and value propositions that get the prospect's attention quickly, driving urgency and velocity in the deal. If you're looking to invest in the growth & skills of your sales or marketing team, make them better writers first.



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Align Marketing And Sales To Maximize Customer Engagement Through The Buying Process

The major shift going on in sales and marketing is realigning our customer engagement process around dramatic changes in the way our customers buy. This is driving major changes in our marketing and sales processes, more closely integrating each, eliminating the “Chinese wall” that has existed. Overlay this with leveraging marketing automation, analytics and other technologies that enable us to refine our communications with customers and prospects over time, getting them the right information addressing the right issues at the right time. We have a long way to go, but leading organizations are seeing profound results. This integrated engagement process will be the key differentiator in moving forward.



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Use Sales Automation Tools that Let You Test and Track Results

I have very limited time to prospect, so I need to make my process efficient while still focusing on quality and relevance. Leveraging technology to create an efficient process for high quality prospecting is essential. One thing I look for is tools that help me track my results to understand which approaches work, and which ones don't.

With tools like Google Alerts and InsideView, I can track my target accounts on specific criteria ("triggers") and receive e-mail alerts when something relevant is happening. When I see a trigger, I can then develop a message that connects the value of my solution to it and send an e-mail to a target executive. My value prop to each trigger is usually the same, so I create e-mail templates based on each trigger and put them into tools like TourApp and YesWare. These tools allow me to track the response rates and measure to see which message is resonating and producing the highest return. By automating the information flow and tracking the results, I now have a highly effective process for quality prospecting that produces consistent results.



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Build a Team of Sales Specialists

By breaking up sales teams into specialists, I've seen companies achieve aggressive sales goals. For example, email marketing software company WhatCounts increased pipeline 435% by breaking their sales org into two teams: Business Development Associates (prospectors), and Business Development Managers (closers).

Their prospecting team is measured down to the number of emails they send each day. They capture the most accurate data on their idea customer profiles with little time and waste in the research process. They operate a routine process of “7 touches in 7 days” to each prospect, and qualified leads have increased between 30-70% quarter-over-quarter since Q4, 2012.

The prospector's goal is to qualify first, then convince prospects to take a demo with their closers, who are highly skilled at bringing in deals. The prospector role is often looked down upon. If you treat it that way, you'll get weak results. WhatCounts and other companies employing this strategy treat their prospectors with the same level of respect as the closers, and always hire strong fits for their corporate culture.



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Are you selling or facilitating the buying decision? How many of your prospects are you certain will close? Who from the complete Buying Decision Team is at your appointment? Why is someone with a need a prospect? What's causing the extended sales cycle?

The sales model merely manages the solution placement portion of the buying decision journey. Because you are outside the system, you cannot manage or influence the idiosyncratic, hidden, management, and non-solution issues buyers must address before they can buy.

A buying decision – from first idea to solution/vendor choice – is 13 steps including assembling and getting buy-in from everyone who will touch the final solution. Since the sales model ignores the crucial consensus issues buyers must address, you miss the central problem to finding the right prospects or closing a sale: a purchase is a change management problem. Stabilize systems issues first; choose a solution last.

Buying Facilitation® facilitates change and buy-in. It works with sales to first expedite the non-solution end of the buy path to make sure you work with and follow only those who will close, get the whole Buying Decision Team at your first appointment, and shorten the sales cycle. Do you want to sell? Or have someone buy? You need both.



Sharon Drew Morgen

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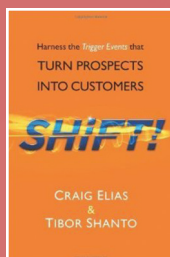
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Reach Decision Makers Early in the Buying Cycle

For me, the single most important shift in sales strategy is reaching out to decision makers earlier in the sales cycle, when they are considering making changes, rather than when they've already clearly defined a need for change.

Research from CEB shows that by the time a B2B prospect calls a supplier, their solution decision is already 57% complete. Without the proper nurturing, only 16% of these “sales-ready opportunities” actually close according to a study from the Aberdeen Group.

But a Forrester study shows that you can get your close ratio as high as 74% by simply reaching out to decision makers earlier in the buying process and providing lead nurturing in order to help shape their buying process. In fact, a Genius.com DemandGen Report revealed that almost 95% of recent B2B purchasers said that their solution provider “provided ample content to help them navigate through each stage of the buying process.”



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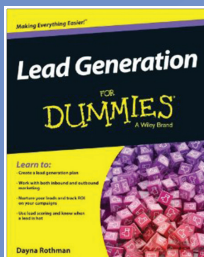
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Position Your Sales Teams as Thought Leaders

Your sales teams are on the front line with prospects every day. They should not only be armed to become an expert resource for their prospects, but you should also position them as thought leaders in your industry. Buyers today are making purchases based on trust and thought leadership, so why shouldn't your sales teams be educators? Have them blog regularly, work with them to create content, and make sure they are leveraging social media to build their personal brands. At Marketo, we recently introduced a company-wide blog contribution initiative. I have found the sales team to be not only one of our biggest contributors, but one of the best contributors. Imagine how much more powerful your company can be if your sales executives can point to their own thought leadership to answer a prospect's question? This increases trust and relationship building. And in today's new buying landscape, thought leadership can give you a huge competitive advantage.



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The Importance of Telling Effective Sales Stories

Catch yourself before you tell your customer or prospect what they need to do. Even if you are an expert, and you are right, bite your tongue instead of pushing that buyer away.

At that point, instead offer your prospect a story. It could be a story about the journey of one of their peers. Add some personal background about that person's emotional state at the beginning of the journey. Then, add a complication your listener can relate to. Again, describe the evolving emotional state. Then, add your customer's new insight (which includes your offering's capabilities), and finally resolve the story with the results achieved. Then it's time to ask your prospect, "What's going on with you?"



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The Importance of CRM-Based Sales Tools

The change in sales processes that has had the greatest impact on how Endiem sells is the ability to integrate sales methodology software with CRM. Though we have plenty of expertise helping our clients integrate sales technology, we found it more difficult to find sales solutions that accelerated our own sales processes. We saw a clear need for a system that streamlined sales methodologies, quoting processes and client on-boarding. We also needed the solution to fully integrate with our Salesforce CRM in order to maximize our visibility into key sales metrics.

After trying several technologies, we adopted Axiom which helps effectively manage our opportunities and accounts, and TaskRay, which provides us with a slick but simple project management tool. By helping us streamline our sales and delivery methodologies, the tools enable us to engage clients more effectively while providing real-time visibility in our Salesforce CRM.

Adopting end-to-end integrated solutions for ourselves allows us to lead by example. And the increases in productivity and visibility have made it easier than ever for us to provide our clients with innovative, superlative solutions.



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Sales Reps Need Real-Time Access to Marketing Data

When working with my customers, I always stress that aligning sales with marketing is the best way to shorten sales cycles. To that end, I've been noticing increased adoption of solutions that can automatically share marketing data with sales reps in real time. For example, marketing automation tools are increasingly used to alert sales reps when prospects are most qualified. Sales reps can gain a real-time view of when prospects download eBooks, fill out forms and engage in other activities that warrant immediate follow-up.

Sales and marketing alignment doesn't only help reps prioritize prospects, but also enables more successful sales conversations. Sales reps need to be able to quickly access marketing materials such as blogs, articles and statistics that help them prove their expertise.



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If You Really Want to Optimize Sales Performance, Bring the Phone into your Sales and Marketing Automation Systems

Sales and marketing automation involves using technology to organize, automate and synchronize efforts across an entire business. Yet when these technologies intersect with traditional phone systems, these processes grind to a halt.

Why should we care? Because phone calls are not only getting more important, but companies can also expect more of them.

We know that for many industries, inbound calls from marketing campaigns are 10X more likely to close than web leads. And don't think for a moment that phone calls are dying, because the data from Google, BIA/Kelsey and others suggests the exact opposite. There are 30 billion inbound sales calls every year, and that number is projected to grow to 70 billion by 2016. Businesses will be making more outbound calls too, as inside sales hiring are outpacing traditional sales hiring by 15 to 1.

The best companies understand these statistics and are already taking the next step, which is bringing the telephone - the most important and yet most ignored piece of technology - into their automation strategies.

These companies are automating manual phone-related sales tasks such as outbound dialing, call logging and recording, call tracking, intelligent routing, voicemail and more. And as an end result, they are experiencing exponential improvements in sales productivity and topline revenue growth.



Howard Brown

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About RingDNA

RingDNA maximizes sales performance for inside sales teams by transforming one of the most important and yet most neglected technologies - the phone.

- Outbound sales teams make more calls to the best leads
- Inbound sales teams optimize incoming call conversions
- Marketers discover which campaigns drive the most valuable calls

RingDNA is the only inside sales & marketing platform made 100% for Salesforce customers by Salesforce experts, providing the industry's best and easiest CRM integration.

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Find us on the [Salesforce AppExchange](#)

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