Gartner for Sales

The Future of Sales

Transformational Strategies for B2B
Sales Organizations

Introduction

B2B buying behavior has grown even more unpredictable with COVID-19 and market volatility. One client told us their quarterly deal pipeline shrank to nearly zero in March 2020 when their prospects suspended all nonessential expenditures. Others report that without in-person meetings, their sellers don't achieve the level of engagement required to validate their pipeline predictions.

And these trends occurred on top of buying changes that were already disrupting B2B sales, and have since been compounded by the pandemic.

B2B buyers increasingly want to engage with suppliers through digital and self-service channels. To support this shift to multiexperience buying, and the associated growth in the number of touchpoints and interactions between buyers and suppliers, sellers will need additional skills and technology capabilities.

Our research suggests the future of sales will see a permanent transformation in strategy, processes and resource allocation that moves the sales organization from seller-centric to buyer-centric and from analog to hyperautomated, digital-first engagement with customers.

The opportunity is enormous — but only for progressive chief sales officers (CSOs) who act promptly to build adaptive systems to engage the "everywhere customer."

Gartner expects that by 2025 …

80%
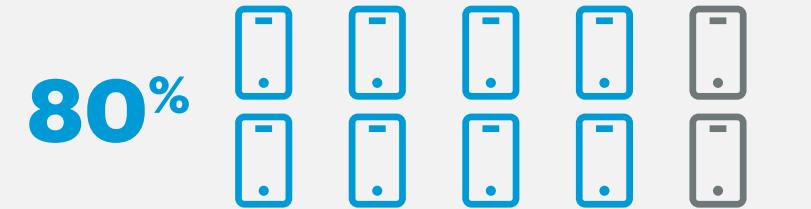
of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels

60%

of B2B sales organizations will transition from experience- and intuition-based selling to data-driven selling, merging their sales process, applications, data and analytics into a single operational practice

Source: The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report

Digital sales channels accelerate

Over the next five years, the number of digital interactions between buyers and suppliers will skyrocket. And this explosive growth will break traditional sales models. Already, CSOs face three lasting trends they can't afford to ignore:

1 **B2B customers radically discount the perceived value of sellers.** Gartner research shows that customers perceive little distinct value (beyond their own learning) from sales reps. Generational preferences are compounding the trend. Millennials, the first digital natives, are now decision makers and are far more skeptical of sales reps than their predecessors.

2 **Customers reward rich virtual buying experiences.** B2B organizations have fallen behind the seamless, easy and informative standard of B2C digital platforms. As business customers learn and buy more online, unflattering comparisons to advanced digital retail and media companies are unavoidable.

3 **Increased digital buying means more data.** Increased digital activity and information storage systems means more, and more detailed, data on customer behavior and product usage patterns. However, few sales organizations can yet capture, organize, clean and query that data systematically — or use it to deploy even rudimentary machine learning or artificial intelligence (AI).

Indexed percentage of customers, by generation, who report high skepticism of sales rep claims

Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
1x	1.4x	2.2x

44% of millennials prefer no sales rep interaction in a B2B purchase setting
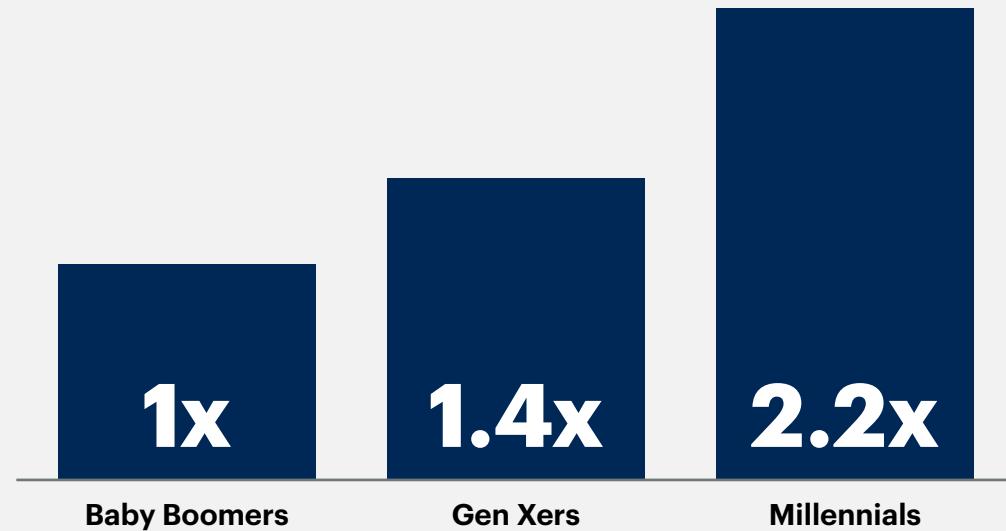
n = 809 B2B buyers
Source: 2018 Gartner B2B Buying Survey

The future of sales is adaptive

The future of sales is the permanent transformation of organizations' sales strategies, processes and allocation of resources, moving from a seller-centric to a buyer-centric orientation. Also, it involves moving from analog sales processes to hyperautomated, digital-first engagement with customers and brings together the following capabilities:

- **Hyperautomation,** e.g., implementation of complementary sets of tools that automate and augment business processes

- **Digital scalability,** e.g., through new skills and digital tools, helps sellers become digital-first sellers and transform sales enablement practices

- **Artificial intelligence,** e.g., shift from highly analog decision making to automated, algorithm-based decision making, helping align sales process, channels and seller capabilities around customers

The future of B2B sales

The convergence of hyperautomation, digital scalability and artificial intelligence

Source: Gartner

4
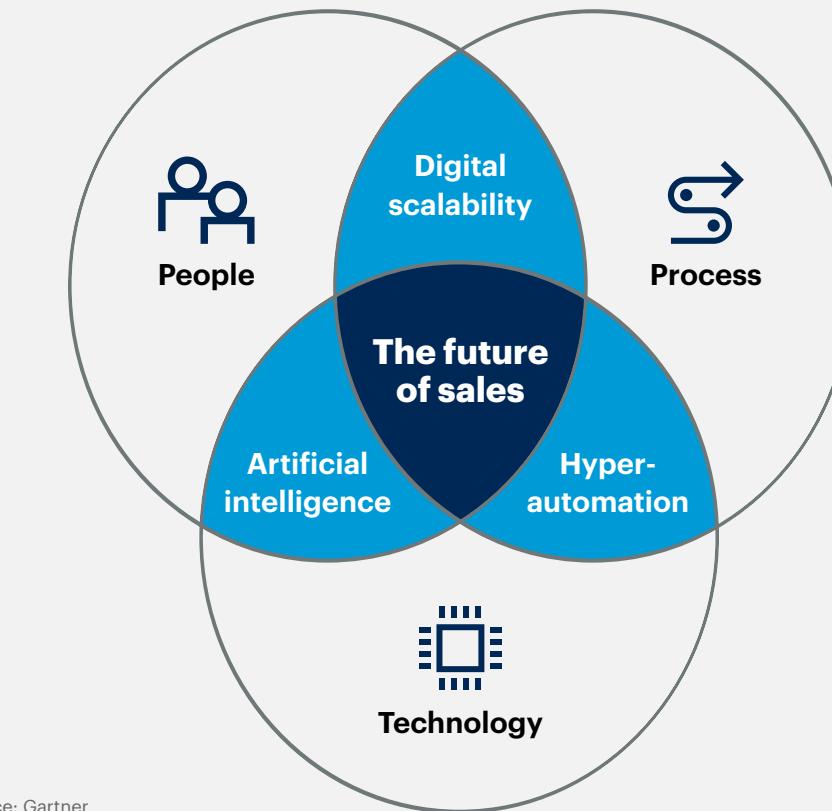
The future of CSOs: Leaders of selling, not sellers

Leading CSOs must become leaders of selling — wherever and whenever it happens — rather than leaders of sellers.

That requires a shift in the focus of the sales organization, away from sales professionals as the primary commercial channel and toward digital sales channels. In that digital paradigm, sellers' decision making is based on data, analytics and AI, not on intuition and experience.

The following four early actions will better position CSOs to align sales models, channels and capabilities around customers:

01
Be ready to engage the "everywhere customer"
A shift to buyer-oriented not product-oriented integrated commercial channels is critical to meet customers' changing expectations and preferences for digital and self-service channels.

02
Position sales to facilitate complex buying decisions
In a world of "everywhere customers," where it's even tougher to influence purchase decisions, sales needs to focus on helping buying groups feel more confident in their own decisions.

03
Increase digital skill sets in the sales organization
With increased digital skill sets, sellers can sell effectively along digital channels and dynamically adapt to changes in the buying environment.

04
Build a future-forward sales technology roadmap
Invest in technology to support hyperautomation objectives for using AI to execute basic sales tasks, detect buying signals and predict business outcomes.

01

Be ready to engage the "everywhere customer"

CSOs armed with the right strategy can enable the sales organization to sell everywhere the customer expects to engage, interact and transact with suppliers.

In many cases, CSOs will need to adjust to meet customers where they already are.

A B2B digital commerce strategy is essential and includes a website positioned as a fully fledged, self-service sales channel integrated with and complementing other channels.

33% of all buyers desire a seller-free sales experience.

→ **Download "5 Ways the Future of B2B Buying Will Rewrite the Rules of Effective Selling."**

Source: 2019 Gartner Buyer Survey

Proportion of business customers using sales rep or website channels to complete a buying job

■ Supplier sales rep   ■ Supplier website

	Problem identification (n = 976)	Solution exploration (n = 1,073)	Requirements building (n = 994)	Supplier selection (n = 1,253)	Validation (n = 1,003)	Consensus creation (n = 643)
Supplier sales rep	82%	92%	85%	90%	87%	85%
Supplier website	79%	88%	82%	86%	79%	80%
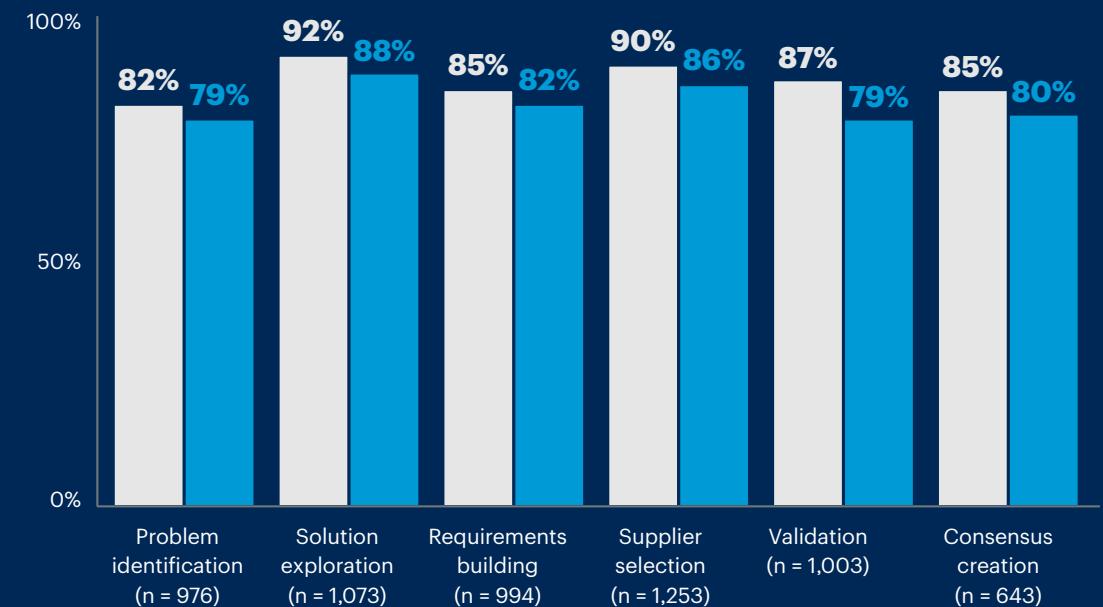
Q: Which information channels did you use to accomplish this activity set?
Source: 2019 Gartner B2B Buying Survey

02

Position sales to facilitate complex buying decisions

As face-to-face interactions with customers decline, suppliers still need to find ways to influence buying decisions. A good place to start is by understanding the reasons buyers make purchase decisions.

Gartner research shows it's critical to boost a buyer's confidence in their purchase decision. Otherwise, uncertainty pervades the purchase decision process — and uncertainty makes it less likely the customer will complete the purchase at all, let alone enter a high-quality deal (i.e., buying a premium offering).

To increase buyer confidence, don't position sellers as the source of information. Rather, position sellers as "sense makers" who help customers make sense of everything they're learning, irrespective of source or channel.

→ **Learn more about the Sense Making seller.**

B2B buyers' environmental uncertainty and purchase outcomes

Likelihood of purchase completion
By degree of buyer uncertainty (indexed)
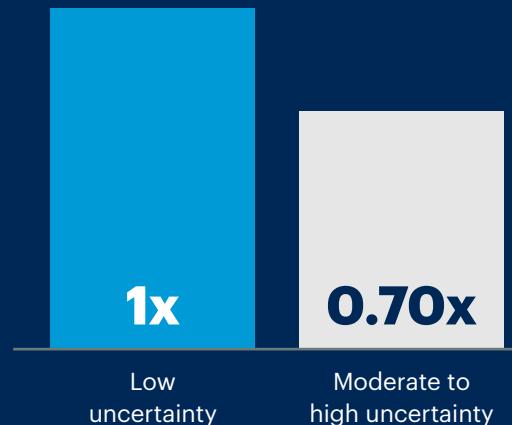
Likelihood of a high-quality deal
By degree of buyer uncertainty (indexed)

1x	0.70x
Low uncertainty	Moderate to high uncertainty

1x	0.58x
Low uncertainty	Moderate to high uncertainty
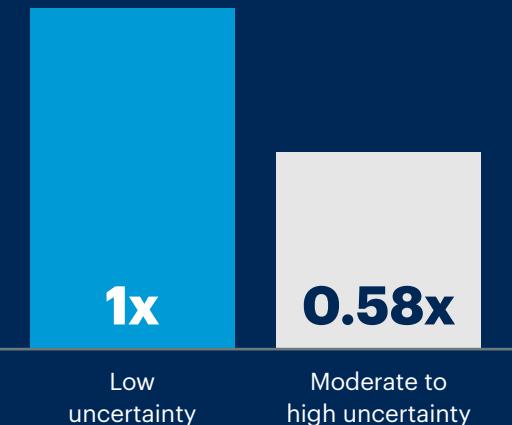
B2B buyers with moderate to high uncertainty are 30% less likely to complete a purchase at all and 42% less likely to complete a high-quality deal.

n = 1,049 B2B buyers; 517 B2B buyers
Source: 2019 Gartner B2B Buying Survey

03

Increase digital skill sets in the sales organization

CSOs can rapidly increase the ability of sellers to master the digital-first selling behaviors required to succeed today and in the future.

Start by building two key capabilities:

1. **Virtual customer engagement.** This includes tactics for presales call planning and preparation and in-meeting practices for ensuring a productive and engaging dialogue with customers during virtual sales interactions.

2. **Virtual seller enablement.** This includes actions for sales enablement in areas such as sales skills, training delivery and onboarding to support sellers in a virtual sales environment and equip them to effectively sell in a remote setting.

Sales organizations will need to adjust their existing investments and reallocate resources among people, processes and technology to support digital and virtual selling.

→ **Download "Framework to Enable Effective Virtual Selling."**

Key sales technology enabling virtual selling

Collaboration

Content sharing/ engagement analysis

Emotional analysis

Digital sales room

Sales enablement

Video- conferencing

Microsites
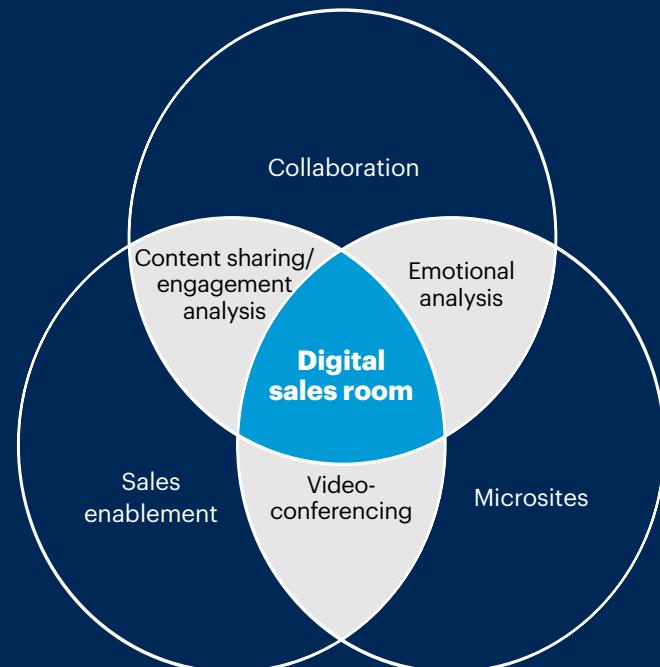
An average of **11 individual stakeholders** are involved in a B2B purchase; that number can occasionally flex up to nearly 20.

Source: 2019 Gartner Buyer Survey

04

Build a future-forward sales technology roadmap

CSOs' technology investments should aim to maximize the potential of AI-based solutions for the sales organization.

First, sales leaders must identify parts of the sales value chain where AI offers improvement potential for processes. For example, replacing sellers' educated guesses around what to do next on a complex B2B deal with AI solutions that can reliably detect buyer signals and actions.

CSOs must also invest in digital technology that improves the buyer experience. For example, equipping sellers with high-quality audio and video hardware and reliable remote meeting platforms to enable productive customer interactions.

Installing future-forward technology also helps CSOs attract top Gen Z talent — a demographic that values remote work opportunities and digital collaboration.

Gartner expects that within five years, there will be no separation between sales process, applications, data and analytics. Instead there will be one single concept: AI for sales.

→ **Learn how to use AI to improve B2B sales revenue and optimize costs.**

The four primary components of AI-based guided selling

Four components

- Correlation models
- Execute sales process steps
- Collect and detect buyer signals
- Measure business outcomes

Source: Gartner

How Gartner for Sales helps you adapt and stay ahead …

Management research, case studies and best practices

- Proprietary methodologies that produce leading-edge business and technology insights to inform your decisions

- Exclusive peer briefings on the freshest findings and insights from our practitioner research

Benchmarks and diagnostics

- Guidance on the most important performance metrics in your function

- Relevant, quantitative data and analysis to allocate resources and focus improvement on areas with the biggest impact

Access to experts

- On-call analysts and advisors with the experience and knowledge to provide specific guidance for your role and your critical priorities

- A high-touch, one-on-one consultative approach that leaves you with not only ideas but also the skills to implement them

Events and peer connection

- Broader perspective and larger network from virtual executive events with true peers

- Access to live and on-demand webinars for convenient, ongoing insight presentations

Toolkits and guides

- Practical toolkits and guides that save time, empower your teams, and help you effectively upgrade your processes

- Best-practice templates and step-by-step work plans that address common challenges across all major functions

Objective technology research and insights

- Access to expert Gartner technology research, including system selection and enablement, Gartner Magic Quadrants, Critical Capabilities, and Market Guides to help you select and secure value from your technology investments

| Diagnostics and benchmarks | Guides and toolkits | Expert inquiry | Expert research | Case studies and best practices | Peer connections | Live events | Live webinars and online learning events | Document reviews |

... with comprehensive support across your critical priorities

Sales Strategy and Operations	Sales Effectiveness and Enablement	Account Management and Growth	New Customer Acquisition	Internal Communications	CRM Strategy and Customer Experience	CRM Sales Technology
Leading and Managing the Sales Function	Attracting and Retaining Sales Talent	Account Planning and Management	Early Pipeline and Lead Management	Aligning Employees With Company Strategy	CX Processes and Methodologies	Quote-to-Cash
Leading and Managing the Sales Operations Function	Enablement Strategy, Tools and Resource Management	Key Account Management	Sales Development	Change Communications	CX Project Planning, Prioritization, Execution and Measurement	Sales Enablement
Sales Analytics, Process and Systems	Frontline Talent Development			Culture, Employee Engagement and Performance Communications	Understanding Customer Needs, Expectations and Perceptions	Sales Execution
Sales Compensation				Leader, Manager, and Peer-to-Peer Communication		Sales Performance Management
Sales Force Design and Go-to-Market Strategy						Sales Technology Strategy

Gartner experts support you and your team

CSO and Sales Leaders

Maria Boulden | VP, Executive Partner
- Sales Strategy
- Sales Leadership

Brent Adamson | Distinguished VP, Advisory
- Sales Strategy
- Challenger
- Buyer Enablement

Nick Toman | Distinguished VP, Research
- Sales Effectiveness
- Value Proposition
- Sales Service and Talent Management

Rick Karlton | Managing Vice President
- Account Management and Growth
- Sales Effectiveness and Enablement

Cristina Gomez | Managing Vice President
- Sales Talent Management
- Sales Effectiveness and Enablement
- Buyer Enablement

Sales Operations

Steve Herz | Senior Director Analyst
- Sales Compensation
- Sales Analytics
- Sales Operations and Strategy

Steve Rietberg | Senior Director Analyst
- Sales Operations
- Sales Strategy and Design

Dave Egloff | VP Analyst
- Sales Operations
- Sales Force Design and Deployment
- Sales Performance Optimization

Craig Riley | Senior Principal Analyst
- Sales Operations
- New Customer Acquisition

Melissa Hilbert | Senior Director Analyst
- Sales Performance Management
- Quota and Territory Management, Sales Incentives

Sales Enablement

Doug Bushee | Senior Director Analyst
- Sales Effectiveness and Enablement
- Sales Enablement Design, Sales Communication
- Digital Pitchbooks, Virtual Demos

Shayne Jackson | Senior Director Analyst
- Sales Enablement
- Sales Messaging, Sales Communication
- Sales Skills
- Sales Coaching

Tad Travis | VP Analyst
- CRM Sales Technology
- CRM Strategy and Customer Experience
- Application Leaders

Michele Buckley | VP Analyst
- Planning and Segmentation
- Sales Effectiveness and Enablement

Scott Collins | VP, Team Manager
- Sales Talent Management
- Sales Strategy and Design
- Sales Effectiveness and Enablement

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