



2023 STATE OF SALES ENABLEMENT:

Pumping Up Pipeline Through
Relationship-Building & AI Utilization

A photograph showing a business meeting. Several people are gathered around a table, looking at a tablet and documents. One person is pointing at the tablet screen. The documents on the table feature various charts, including a pie chart and a bar chart. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a window in the background.

INTRODUCTION

Modern sales reps are tasked with walking a tightrope between supplying self-service experiences and delivering personalized, perfectly timed outreach. Given B2B buyers' **increasing demands** for highly targeted, multichannel experiences, the pressure's on for sales to provide seamless transitions between each channel while maintaining relevance.

"Today's buyers are extremely clear about what they want, and it's more channels, more convenience and a more personalized experience," explained Julia McClatchy, a Partner at **McKinsey & Company**, in her **#B2BMX: Next-Level ABM keynote**. "In our research, we've seen that 72% of B2B companies that sell using seven or more channels grew faster than their peers, and we've seen customers engage across up to 10 channels. As an organization, you need to have a clear, unified view of your customer — offline and online — to engage them, create warm hand-offs and provide seamless multichannel experiences."

As buyers engage across more channels and demand higher levels of personalization, this special report will cover:

- The shift toward hybrid selling and what it means for organizations;
- The growing role of AI and automation to help streamline and automate key tasks so sales can focus on 1:1 prospect interactions;
- How to increase internal communications and strengthen sales and marketing alignment to track success; and
- The top strategies of identifying the tools and technologies to alleviate pressure from the sales teams.



EMBRACING A NEW ERA OF SALES STRATEGIES

Despite buyers' desires for **self-service experiences**, they still crave in-person interactions. In fact, a **McKinsey study** found that 40% of customers using a new supplier prefer to buy only if they've met the sales rep in person. With that in mind, it's no surprise that the **top four engagement channels** prospects rely on include:

- Email
- Account-based advertising
- In-person events
- Outbound teleprospecting

"Personalizing outreach online and offline must become the de facto way of engaging across all channels," said McClatchy. "Tailoring an interaction to a market of one — the holy grail of personalization — requires much greater prowess in terms of data and analytics to understand segments and micro-segments of your customers, and then be able to look at behavioral transactional and engagement trends."

But traditional forms of selling are out, as **88% of B2B buyers** only purchase when they see a salesperson as a "trusted advisor." At the **B2B Marketing Exchange**, **Roderick Jefferson**, a Sales Coach for Growth Companies and Author of "**Sales Enablement 3.0**", explained that this is because customers are savvier than ever and have greater access to information. As a result, they don't want a slick sales pitch — they want conversations that make them feel valued.

"Sales reps need to clearly communicate expectations, what's going to happen and what the prospect's roadmap looks like to give them a better understanding of the sales process and build a stronger relationship," said Jefferson. "Once you build trust, they'll start to rely on you and buy from you. For far too long, we've tried to go from A to Z and skipped all the letters in-between."



CAREFULLY DISCERNING TOOLS & TECHNOLOGIES FOR ADOPTION

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With **60% of buyers** indicating that they ultimately picked a vendor depending on response speed, it's clear that AI and automation will serve as essential components of modern sales strategies. McClatchy explained that this requires organizations to increase their agility and deploy resources dynamically depending on customer demands and expectations.

"The silver lining of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it gave rise to many excellent technology and tools that sales teams have deployed to their advantage," she explained. "However, the menu of choices is pretty overwhelming, and there's a real risk of overcomplicating the IT environment with bells and whistles that distract from core needs."

She continued that top-performing sales organizations need to thoughtfully adopt new technology, which includes asking questions such as:

- How does this solve the most critical pain points within our core sales process?
- Does this give us greater clarity on what our customers are doing or how they're reacting?
- How will its actions have an impact on generating deeper, more meaningful client conversations?

Jefferson added that he views AI as a productivity tool, putting in a similar category as Excel. He continued that while it can help sales teams work smarter, it can also confuse them and lead them down a "rabbit hole." The other valuable piece of AI, Jefferson said, is automating mundane tasks.

"Whenever I ask someone what they're doing with AI, they always point to Chat GPT first — that's good, but it doesn't answer what they're *really* doing with AI," he continued. "Instead, they need to focus on how they're using AI, and what they're not getting out of it. AI is out there, it's available and companies should utilize it — but they can't use it as a crutch. AI provides content; it will not provide context."



TRACKING SUCCESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY & INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

When it comes to tracking success, the most obvious indicators are monitoring metrics and measuring key performance indicators (KPIs). For sales, the (obvious) success metric revolves around revenue creation and contribution.

"Let's get back to measuring things that are going to be revenue-impacting only: What are we doing to accelerate speed to revenue, increase productivity and, ultimately, tie the front and back of the house together?" said Jefferson. "Tracking success starts in the beginning, all the way back to when a prospect was just a prospect and you were starting to plan for retention."

Additionally, both speakers stressed the value of internal communication and sharing best practices. McClatchy explained that organizations need to embrace qualitative insights to make quick and proactive decisions throughout the customer journey.

"You need to create an intentional feedback loop between sales and marketing," said McClatchy. "Any sales leader I talk to always says they're trying to figure out how they can help their sales teams management pipeline, opportunities and optimize their time, and marketers can help with that. Marketing can share the customers that have the most profit potential and propensity for growth to help focus sales' efforts. This combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses creates customer-backed insights that deliver a better experience."

She continued that while salespeople always have an "incredible" sense of what's working from the conversations they're having, marketing has thousands of touchpoints that they're constantly aggregating from online and offline interactions.

Jefferson also touched on the power of sales and marketing communicating constantly and working together, as it presents a unified front to prospects.

"If sales and marketing are disconnected, they're going to make up their own information and completely confuse the market," said Jefferson. "But if you come in together and say, 'we listened, we heard you and we built this co-jointly,' a few things happen. The first is that everyone's on the same page, then there's consistency and accountability and finally equal ownership on both sides."

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JULIA MCCLATCHY, MCKINSEY & CO.



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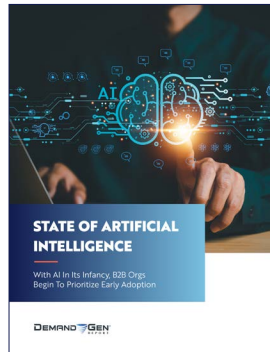
CONCLUSION

To achieve sales success in the modern world of B2B buying and selling, sales teams need to curb any lingering stereotypes — such as the slippery car salesman — and instead work with prospects and customers to build strong relationships.

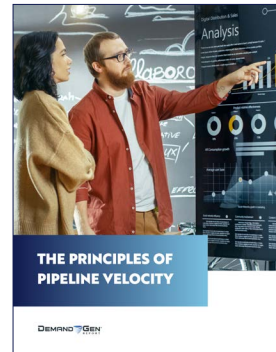
“Start every conversation with the same three-point question: Do you want me to listen? Do you want me to coach? Or do you want me to fix?” suggested Jefferson. “It’s so important that you’re telling that other individual that nothing else for this time that we’re together matters. But you tell me what set of ears to put on, and I will certainly do that.”



State Of Sales
Acceleration



State Of Artificial
Intelligence



The Principles Of
Pipeline Velocity



Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multichannel demand generation efforts.

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