

Sales Enablement Grows Up:

The 2018 Sales Enablement Report



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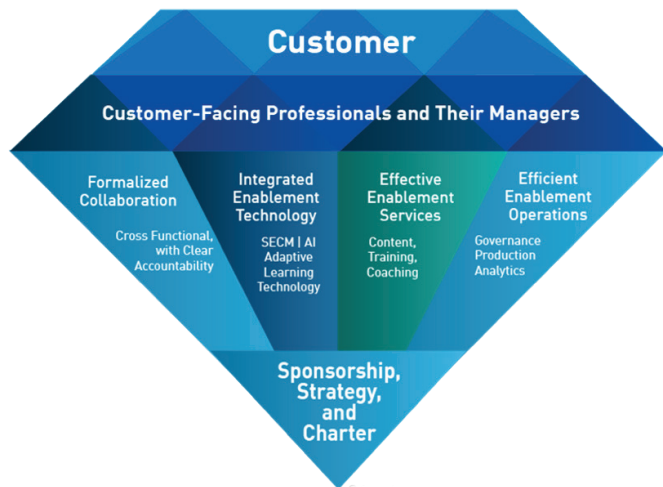
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In our fourth annual Sales Enablement Study, we find that sales enablement is no longer growing rapidly, but is maturing slowly and steadily. In some ways, this results in steady progress (more formal coaching, for example). In other cases, such as a lack of metrics and a lack of detailed alignment of services to customer path, slowing the pace holds the danger of becoming stagnation. For sales enablement to optimize impact and become permanently entrenched in the infrastructure of the sales organization, more growing up is urgently required.



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Using the CSO Insights Sales Enablement Clarity Model, here are some of the key study findings.

Customer: While most organizations align selling processes to the customer's path, significantly fewer took that alignment down to the level of enablement services. Further, most reported gaps in customer engagement practices.

Sponsorship, Strategy and Charter: Any kind of formality helps. But the real improvements kicked in when organizations added a charter to their formal approach to sales enablement, an approach that few undertake.

Customer-Facing Professionals and Their Managers: Audience needs are changing, and enablement teams made notable shifts to the services geared towards their key audiences. They took less of a driver role in sales process, but increased their focus on coaching, content and analytics for sales managers.

Formalized Collaboration: In some of the most dramatic progress in the survey, the percentage of enablement teams that applied a formal approach to cross-functional collaboration doubled, demonstrating the increasing breadth of enablement.

Effective Enablement Services: Given the focus on perspective to meet buyer expectations, deploying a content strategy took on new urgency and is linked to notable results. Training continues to be an impactful service with mixed effectiveness, depending on category. As a training type, onboarding is linked to drastic reductions in voluntary turnover. Finally, coaching continues to progress towards formality (and better results) though it has not reached critical mass.

Integrated Enablement Technology: Technology, including AI, is pervasive in sales organizations. Enablement has an ownership role in tools such as SECM (Sales Enablement Content Management) which render content more efficient and effective. While organizations moved towards including content in one repository, most did not have it centralized in SECM.

Efficient Enablement Operations: Maturation requires the ability to scale by installing production processes, governance and metrics. Most enablement organizations have not cemented these practices yet and they represent the next phase of evolution. Of particular concern is that most leave themselves vulnerable by not collecting, and holding themselves accountable to, metrics.

In the chapters that follow, we explore these findings in more detail and make recommendations for next steps.

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CHAPTER 1: Sales Enablement 2018 – Growing Up But Not Fast Enough

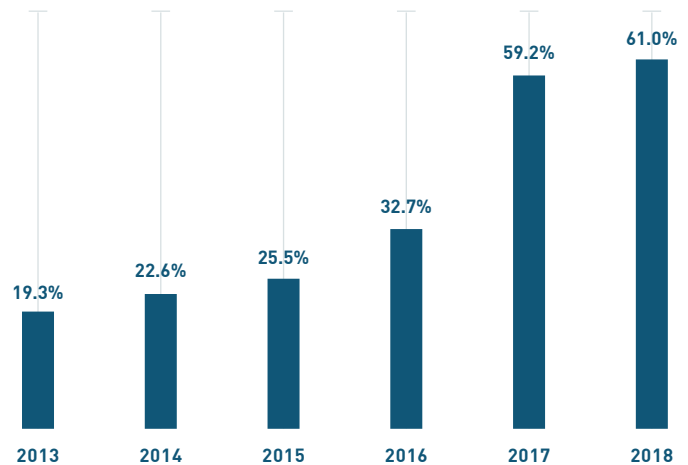
2017 was a breakthrough year for sales enablement. For the first time since CSO Insights started tracking this emerging area, more than half the study participants told us that this function was established within their company. As we pointed out in the *2017 Sales Enablement Optimization Study*, there was tremendous potential for sales enablement to take a leadership role in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of sales organizations, but it was not guaranteed. Like many new concepts in business, turning enthusiasm into tangible results requires maturation.

This year, we conducted our fourth annual sales enablement study, gathering input from over 500 participants worldwide (see Appendix for the survey demographics). We were interested to see how this discipline was evolving, what impact it was having on sales performance, and what areas organizations needed to focus on to optimize their sales enablement efforts. In this report, we will profile our findings in all three of these areas, as well as looking at the hidden costs of doing enablement poorly or not at all.

This chart summarizes how enablement has grown over the past six years. After two years of modest increases in companies moving towards formalizing sales enablement, 2016 saw a noticeable increase, followed by a significant uptick in 2017. The data for 2018 shows a leveling off in growth.

That figure of 61.0% is less than we expected, because 8.4% of organizations that responded to our

Organizations with a Dedicated Sales Enablement Person, Program, or Function



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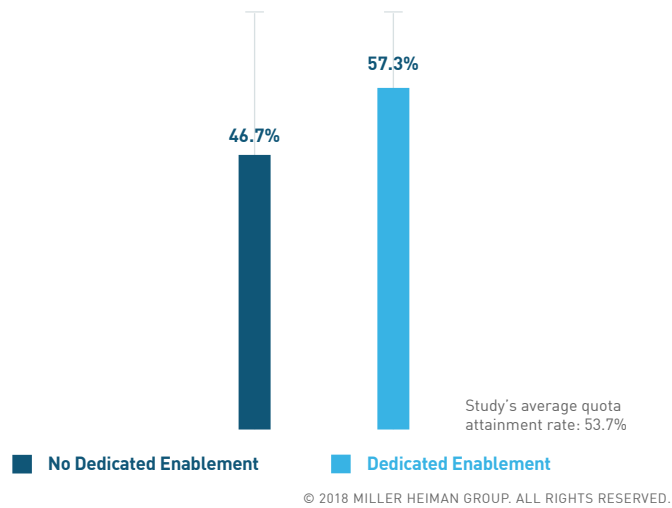
2017 study said they planned to implement a sales enablement function in the next 12 months. If that had happened, we would be looking at a figure closer to two-thirds of organizations. The key takeaway from this is that sales enablement as a discipline is not growing as fast as we (and those organizations that planned to add the function) anticipated. The slow growth and maturation of sales enablement as a function will be a recurring theme throughout this report as we analyze the data in depth.

Establishing an enablement function pays off

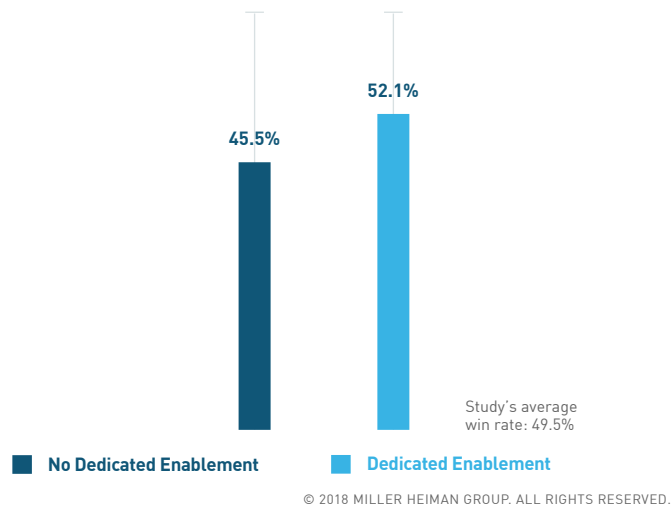
Having an enablement function leads to two-digit improvements for quota attainment and win rates for forecast deals compared to those organizations without enablement.

We compared key sales performance metrics, such as the percentage of salespeople achieving quota and win rate for forecasted deals, with the presence (or absence) of sales enablement. Organizations with enablement performed better for both metrics.

Dedicated Sales Enablement vs. Quota Attainment



Dedicated Sales Enablement vs. Win Rate

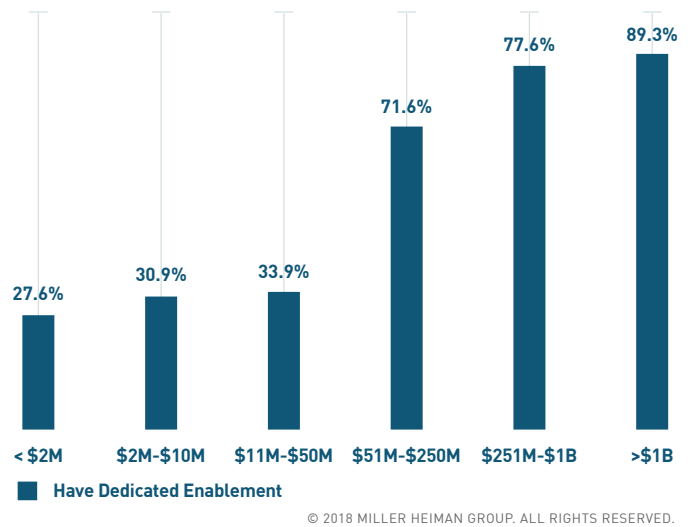


The percentage of salespeople achieving quota improved by 10.6 percentage points, which is an actual improvement of 22.7%. The win rates for forecast deals improved by 6.6 percentage points or 14.5%.

Sales enablement as a separate function is more relevant in larger organizations

The nature of sales enablement is to orchestrate enablement services (content, training, tools and coaching) across various functions to keep them consistent for the sales force so that they can be effective in every customer interaction. Very likely, that is one of the reasons sales enablement as an established function is found more often in larger organizations. Whereas a smaller organization may be able to get by with just a person or a program, there are more moving parts to orchestrate in enablement initiatives in larger organizations.

Organizations with Dedicated Sales Enablement by Company Size



Organizations larger than \$50M in revenues were much more likely to have dedicated sales enablement than smaller organizations. And, the larger the organization, the more likely it was to have enablement. At \$50M-\$250M, over two-thirds (71.6%) had dedicated enablement. This rose to greater than three-quarters (77.6%) for organizations between \$250-\$1B in revenues. The vast majority (89.3%) of the >\$1B organizations in our study had invested in dedicated enablement.

Dedicated sales enablement is more common in specific industries

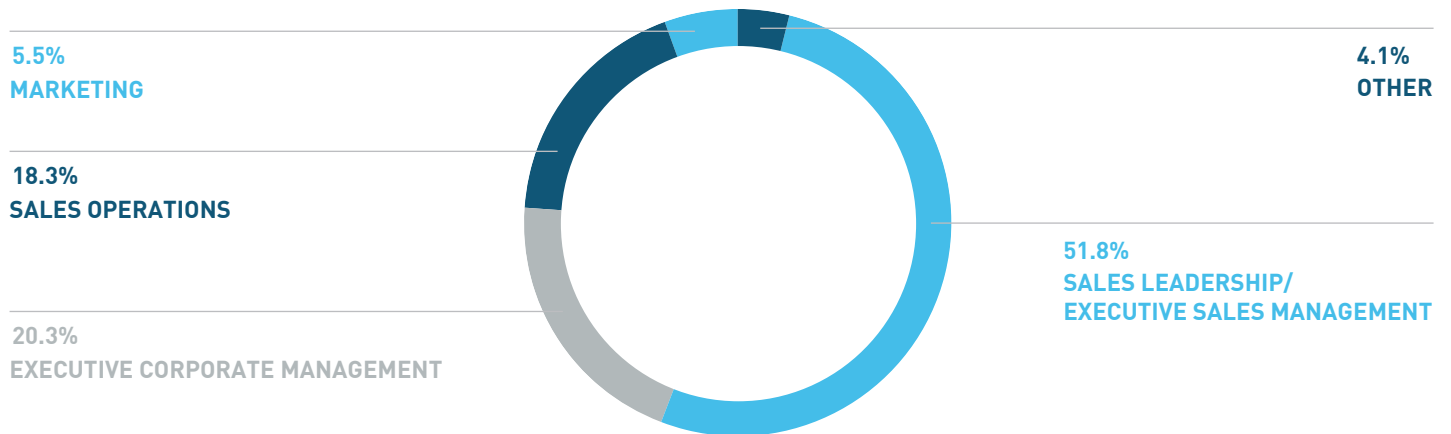
Study participants in specific industries also reported having a sales enablement function at higher than the average rate of 61.0%. Examples include telecommunications and technology (>90.0%), transportation, logistics and distribution (81.0%), media and publishing (78.6%), and banking (75.0%). These industries have experienced tremendous disruptions in markets and products, resulting in a selling landscape in constant flux. It is not surprising that enablement would be a key element to their sales transformation plans for succeeding in their new realities.

Industries with the lowest sales enablement rates included oil and gas (22.2%) and manufacturing (33.3%). Caution should be exercised here, however. No industries are immune to change. While some may experience less broad-scale turmoil than others, all are impacted by digital disruption and the changing expectations of today's B2B buyers. It is unlikely that any sales force will succeed in the future without dramatic changes to their sales process and methodology, requiring a closer look at enablement. For details regarding buyer behaviors, see our [2018 Buyer Preferences Study](#).

Sales enablement reports to the sales organization

As a relatively new function, there is a continuous question of how to structurally insert it into the sales organization. In most cases, the respondents to our study told us that sales enablement continues to report to executive sales management. In some organizations, enablement reports to the VP of sales, and in others to the CSO or the CRO.

Enablement Reporting Lines



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Based on feedback from our advisory board, we separated executive and corporate management from sales leadership/executive sales management. In over one-fifth of the organizations, sales enablement reported to the C-suite, which means a C-level role that is not the CSO or the CRO.

Enablement teams that report to the C-level were mostly found in organizations between \$50M and \$250M in annual revenues (31.6%). The larger the organization, the smaller this percentage became, decreasing to 11.1% for organizations with more than \$1B in annual revenues.

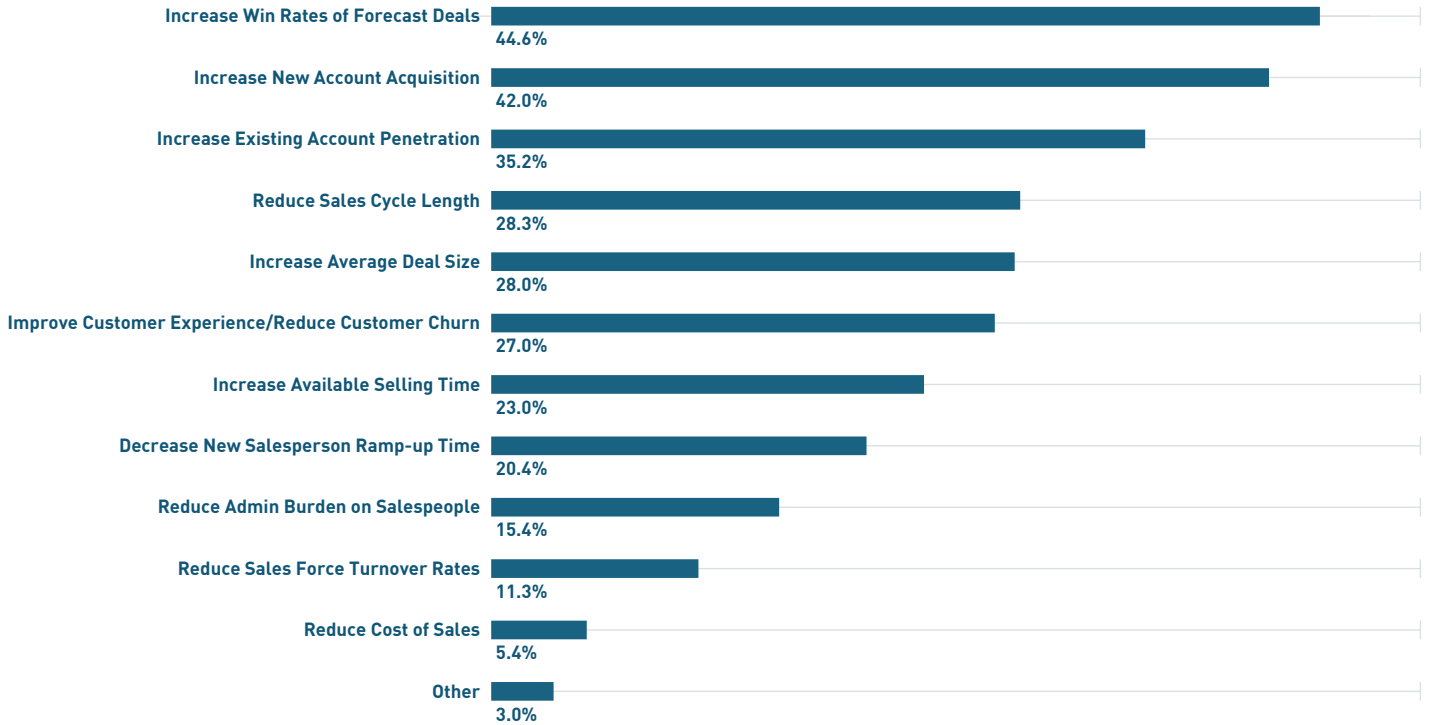
Looking at the data from the perspective of quota attainment, we observed another interesting detail: The most successful organizations (salespeople achieving quota greater than 80%), were more likely to have sales enablement report to executive management (increasing from 20.3% to 31.4%) and the less likely it was to have it report to sales management (dropping from 51.8% to 48.6%) or sales operations (dropping from 18.3 to 14.3%).

Here too, size is relevant. Larger organizations (>\$250M) were more likely to have sales enablement work within sales operations. This may be because sales operations is firmly established within the organization and enablement is newer. As sales enablement continues to mature and its role becomes clearer, we envision that even in large organizations sales operations and sales enablement will be treated as distinct working functions in parallel, rather than one fitting inside the other. For more on sales operations, please see our [2018 Sales Operations Optimization Study](#).

Sales enablement goals are aligned to sales organizations' goals

In looking at what organizations expect sales enablement to accomplish (in addition to the usual revenue focus) we see tight alignment to sales leadership.

Top Sales Enablement Goals (in addition to Optimizing Revenues)



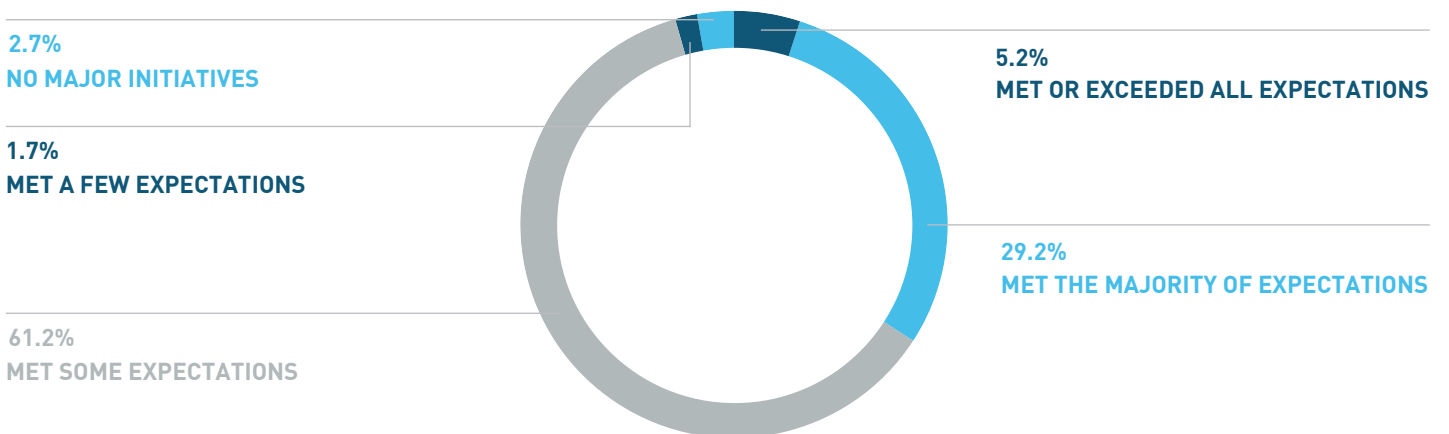
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Specifically, three of the top four goals noted (increasing win rates, new account acquisition and improving existing account penetration) were three of the top four goals cited by sales leaders in the [2018-2019 Sales Performance Study](#) (membership required) as the overriding goals for the sales organization as a whole.

Enablement is maturing, slowly, but steadily

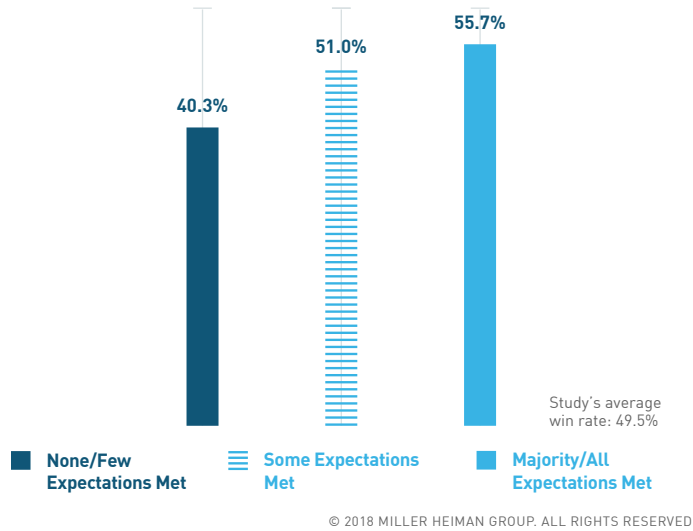
Next, we looked at the specific outcomes of enablement initiatives. The data offers both good news and challenges. Fortunately, almost all organizations with an enablement function are seeing achievements of some kind. In fact, 95.6% met at least some of their

Outcome of Enablement Initiatives



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Meeting Enablement Expectations vs. Win Rate



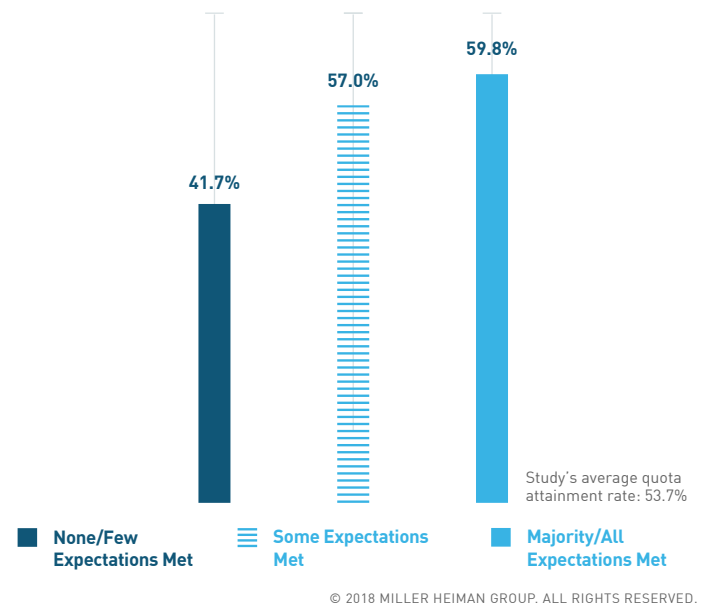
expectations. The most notable improvement came from those who said their organization met only a few expectations: 8.0% in 2017 as compared to 1.7% this year. Percentage-wise, that shift created an increase in those that met some expectations (61.2%). The group of organizations that met or exceeded the majority or all of their expectations remains at one-third (34.4%), similar to last year's results.

Now, let's have a look at the related performance data. We compared how achieving enablement expectations impacted the percentage of salespeople achieving quota and the win rates for forecast deals.

Both charts show that the more expectations are met, the better the measurable results. The one-third of highly effective enablement teams achieved significantly better results for both metrics.

The big group of organizations (61.2%) that only achieved some of their expectations saw mixed results: quota attainment was higher than average but win rates were just average. This group is in a

Meeting Enablement Expectations vs. Quota Attainment



precarious position. They are achieving some results, but not much above average, if at all. This could lead senior leadership to question the need for a dedicated enablement function. We will talk more about enablement metrics in Chapter 10 and why we recommend setting up a dashboard with both leading and lagging indicators to measure the impact of sales enablement.

Data makes the case for enablement done right

The very small group (4.5%) that achieved none or only a few expectations may find it even more difficult to justify their existence. In fact, the data from our study shows that having an enablement function, program or person, but implementing it poorly and only meeting a few of the expectations, is worse than not having enablement at all. Let's take the performance numbers we shared before and compare them to those organizations that only met a few of their expectations.

Sales Performance Results as Related to Having Sales Enablement Yes/No	Have Sales Enablement	Do Not Have Sales Enablement	Having enablement but only meeting few expectations
Percentage of salespeople meeting quota (average: 53.7%)	57.3%	46.7%	41.7%
Win rate of forecast deals (average: 49.5%)	52.1%	45.5%	40.3%
Revenue plan attainment (average: 94.9%)	96.8%	91.1%	89.3%

Organizations in which enablement met only a few expectations performed worse than those with no enablement at all.

As the table shows, those organizations that said they had enablement, but met few expectations, performed not only worse than average across every major sales performance KPI, but also worse than those with no enablement at all.

This chart should be kept handy by every sales or enablement leader arguing for the importance of a strategic enablement discipline over one-off initiatives and random cross-functional efforts. It's better to do enablement well or not at all.

Throughout the rest of the report, we'll take a look at what "doing enablement well" looks like and provide additional ammunition to help you make the business case in the form of data that shows the impact of a formal enablement function on results.

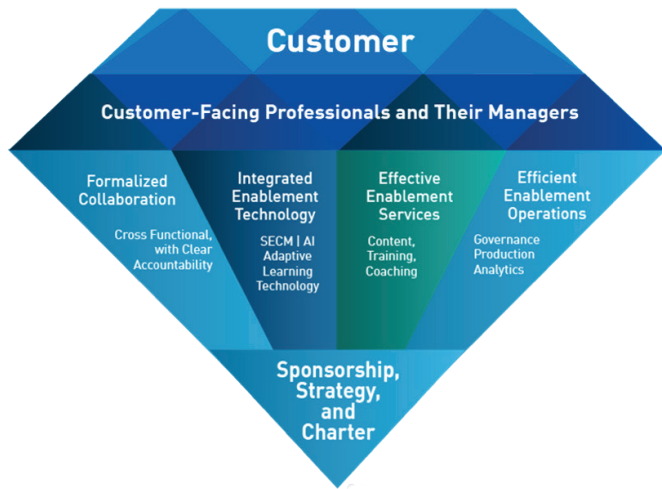
Essential tools for your journey

Enablement looks different in every organization, but the one thing all best-in-class sales enablement functions have in common is that their approach to implementing the function is highly organized, formalized, strategic and collaborative in nature, and always aligned to the organization's main strategic initiatives.

Two tools can help you join this illustrious group: a definition and a framework.

Definitions are important because they help ensure everyone has the same understanding of what we mean by "sales enablement." After years of working with world-class enablement organizations (as well as those who are trying to get there), we've crafted a definition that works well for our clients:

A strategic, collaborative discipline designed to increase predictable sales results by providing consistent, scalable enablement services that allow customer-facing professionals and their managers to add value in every customer interaction.



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A definition makes sure everyone is “on the same page,” but more is needed. Frameworks or models give your efforts structure. They help you assess where you are today and create a vision for where you want to be. Like a roadmap you might use while planning a trip, they help you plan your enablement journey.

In this report, we’ll be using the sales enablement clarity model we introduced in our book, [*Sales Enablement: A Master Framework to Engage, Equip, and Empower a World-Class Sales Force.*](#)

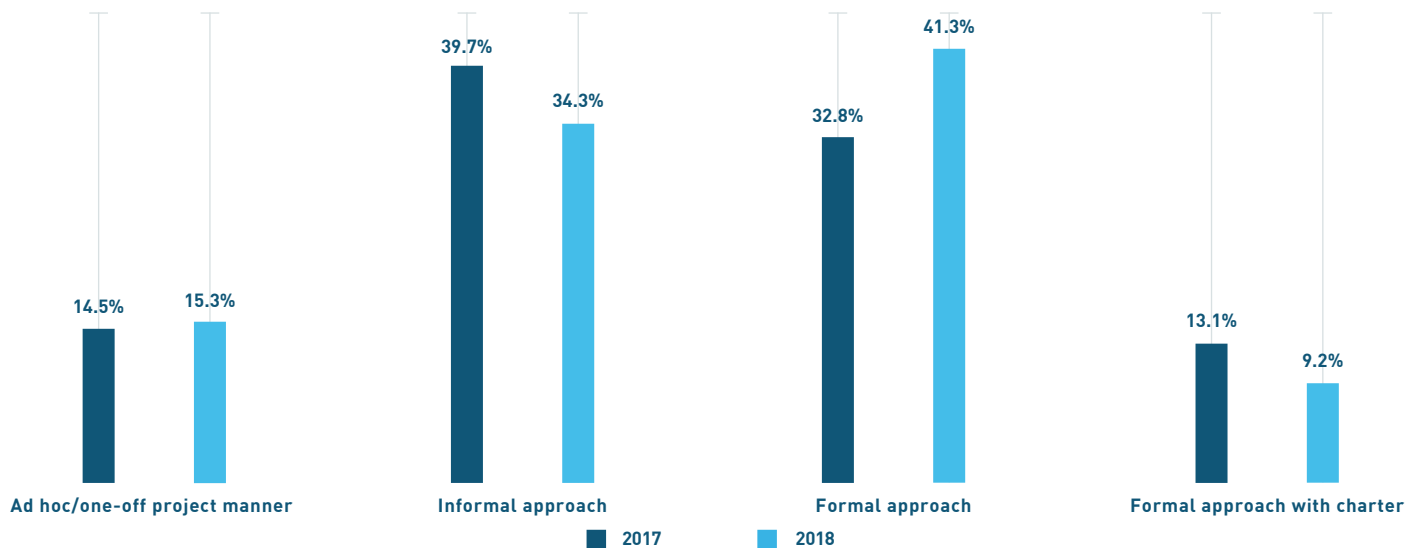
Don’t worry if this is the first time you’ve seen the clarity model. We’ll give you what you need to know as we go along. To help you keep track of where we are, each chapter will also start with icons that show which facets of enablement the data supports.



CHAPTER 2: Setting Up for Success: Sponsorship, Strategy and Charter

As outlined in the first chapter, how organizations approach sales enablement can make or break their business case. In this section, we'll look at how taking a formal approach that includes setting a strategy and creating an enablement charter affects your enablement team's ability to meet expectations and impact performance.

How Sales Enablement Priorities Are Set



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For the first time since we began researching sales enablement, the percentage of organizations that run sales enablement in a formal way (with or without a charter) represents more than half of the study's population (50.5%). The good news is that the percentage of organizations taking a formal approach (without a charter) increased 8.5 points, while the percentage of organizations that follow an informal approach decreased 5.4 points. The percentage of those organizations that run sales enablement in a formal way and with a dedicated charter also decreased slightly, from 13.1% to 9.2%.

Charters are most common in larger organizations

Just as larger organizations are more likely to have an enablement function, they are also more likely to follow a formal approach with an enablement charter. In the group of organizations with more than \$1B in annual revenues, more than half of organizations (52.3%) follow a formal approach and 17.1% follow a formal approach and have a charter.

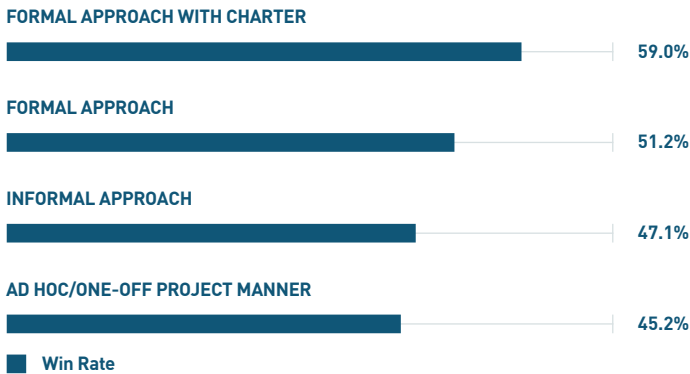
Interestingly, reporting structure did not have a significant impact on whether enablement was approached in a formal way, with or without a charter. What mattered most was the size of the organization.

In large, and usually complex, environments, enablement leaders have no other choice but to do the work of engaging their executive sponsors and aligning their enablement approach to their strategic initiatives.

Formality is linked to sales success

Our study found positive linkages between how sales enablement priorities are set and the three main sales performance indicators: quota attainment, win rates for forecast deals and revenue plan attainment.

Sales Enablement Approach vs. Win Rate



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Narrowing in on win rate as an example, we found that while a formal approach to enablement had a slightly positive relationship on win rates, adding a charter magnified that impact to 59%, an additional 7.8% points versus formal.

This is a crucial finding for enablement leaders. Just having a formal approach is not enough to achieve significantly better results. Only a formal approach with a charter ensures the necessary executive alignment and the biggest impact on win rates as visualized. Those who took a formal-but-no-charter approach saw only a slight improvement of 1.7 percentage points compared to the average.

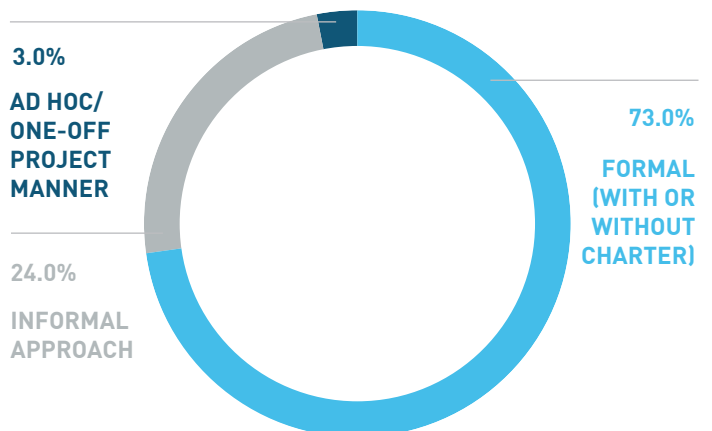
Enablement in these organizations often lacks executive sponsorship and is perceived as an operational initiative to get things done rather than as an engine to drive sales force transformation. Those that approached sales enablement in a tactical or ad hoc/one-off project manner did not achieve even average performance results. We see similar results for quota attainment as well.

Our 2018 study also took a close look at how the organization’s approach to enablement impacted the perception of how well the function met expectations.

The most successful sales enablement functions follow a formal approach.

Win rates and quota attainment are one way to measure success, and another is to look at achievements. In Chapter 1, we saw that organizations where enablement met or exceeded their expectations outperformed the average: by 6.2 points for win rates and 6.1 points for quota attainment. Taking a closer look at the 34.4% of organizations that said their sales enablement efforts met or exceeded all or the

Sales Enablement Approach of Organizations that Meet/Exceed Enablement Expectations



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majority of their expectations, we see that more than two-thirds (73.0%) follow a formal approach to sales enablement, with or without a charter. This makes sense. A formal approach leads to results, and when results are met, the perception that enablement meets or exceeds expectations increases.

Creating your charter

As the data shows, having a formal approach is linked to better results, but having a charter leads to even better results. A formal approach may also be easier to implement when you take the time to create a charter that outlines your approach and to gain buy-in from executive management and relevant stakeholders. Very likely, this is one of the reasons those organizations with a charter outperformed those without. Trying to implement a formal enablement discipline without a charter is like trying to execute a plan (one that involves many contributors) without writing anything down.

In our book [*Sales Enablement: A Master Framework to Engage, Equip, and Empower a World-Class Sales Force*](#) we shared the process for achieving a formal approach and an enablement charter. We included a template for a charter as an example.

As we've said before, you can't underestimate the need to quickly establish a formal approach to sales enablement. Many sectors are experiencing relatively good conditions, but as soon as there are a few bad quarters, financially driven executives might ask their sales enablement leaders: Why do we need sales enablement? With a formal approach to sales enablement that is connected to the organization's strategy, a formal charter that captures the details, and a quarterly report on progress, you will be well prepared.



CHAPTER 3: Aligning to the Customer's Path to Drive Customer Engagement

Now that we've talked about the importance of your approach to sales enablement, it's time to drop down into some of the details. For that, we turn to the facet at the top of the sales enablement clarity model: *Customer*. More precisely, this is the customer's path, the process the customer follows to approach a challenge or opportunity, gather information, make a decision and implement the solution.

Customer's Path – The process the customer follows to approach a challenge or opportunity, gather information, make a decision and implement the solution.

The customer's path is at the top of the diamond because it serves as the "design point" for all other



facets of enablement. To be successful, all customer-facing roles have to be equipped to have relevant, valuable and differentiating interactions at each phase. Customer's path alignment means that all internal selling processes reflect the steps and gates the buyers go through along their customer's path.

In this study, we wanted to see how tightly organizations align their internal sales processes to the customer's path and explore how customer's path alignment impacts performance.

For those of you who are new to our classifications, here is a quick description of what each of the categories looks like in practical terms:

Random: There is very little consideration given to the customer's path. Funnel review discussions almost always center around the internally defined sales process, and progress is seen in terms of sales activities: customer meetings, demonstrations, proposals and so on.

Informal: The customer's path is acknowledged, but there is no focused effort to align to it. The

salesperson may discuss how the customer will make the decision, but progress is still measured in terms of the internally defined sales process.

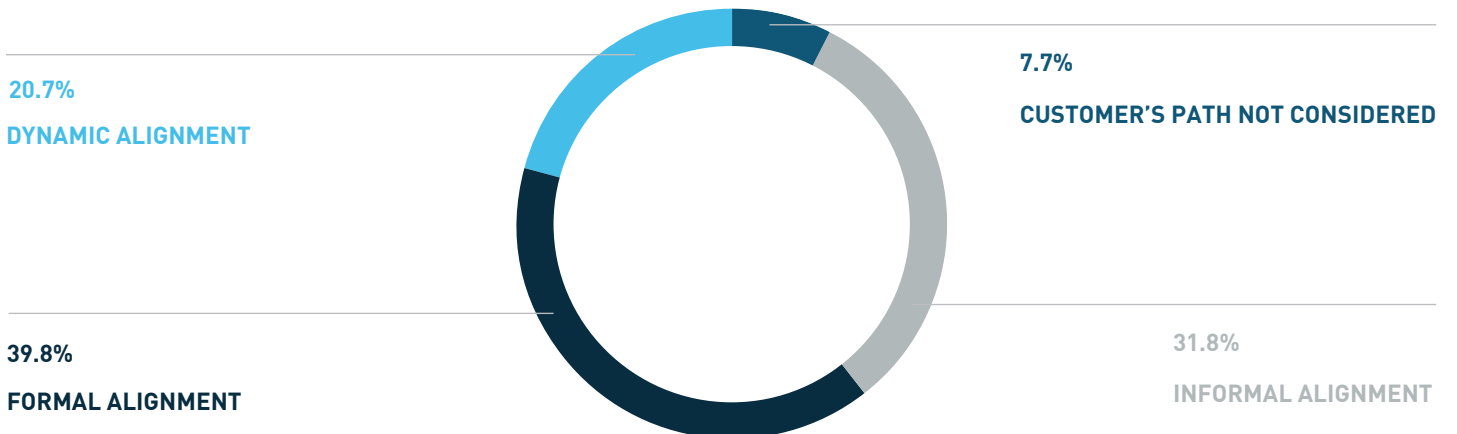
Formal: The sales process has been mapped to the customer's path, and during one-on-one opportunity reviews, the discussion focuses more on where customers are on their paths and less on the sales cycle.

Dynamic: The sales process is derived from the customer's path. Using technology and analytics, changes along the customer's path can be detected early on, and selling processes evolve as the market or customer behaviors change.

Customer's path alignment sets the foundation for improved performance

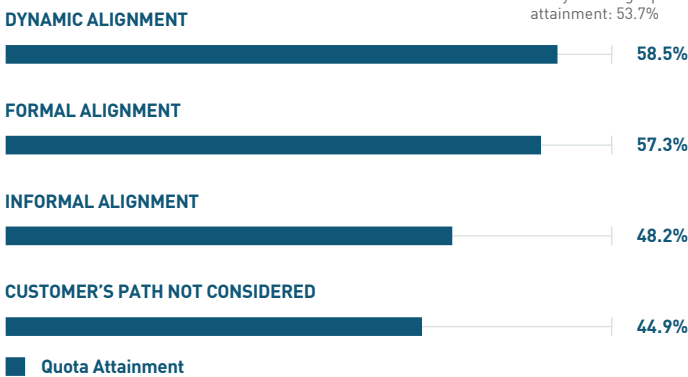
For the first time since we began monitoring this data point, more than 60% of organizations (the formal and dynamic segments of the chart) reported a *purposeful* alignment of their selling processes to the customer's path.

Sales Process Alignment with Customer's Path



Aligning internal selling processes to the customer’s path pays off. Compared to the “customer’s path not considered” category, organizations that practiced formal alignment saw quota attainment rates 12.4 percentage points higher, while those with dynamic alignment were 13.6 percentage points higher. We saw similar results when we looked at win rates.

Sales Process/Customer’s Path Alignment vs. Quota Attainment



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Even more dramatic is the cost of NOT aligning sales processes to the customer’s path. As you can see from the chart, those organizations in which alignment to the customer’s path was informal or not considered at all underperformed the average. The key takeaway from this is that alignment must be purposeful for it to create an advantage.

Taking the next step: aligning enablement services to the customer’s path

Aligning sales processes to the customer’s path is a first step, but enablement must continue the alignment at the services level, aligning content, training and coaching along with underlying value messaging. As an example, effective customer engagement at the interaction level requires a sales team to be equipped with tailored, customer-focused content assets, related value messages and the ability to deliver them in compelling conversations at all stages of the customer path. Such content and delivery must be consistent with the messages customers receive via the organization’s website and social media as well as the messaging delivered in the implementation phase of the customer path.

While 60.5% align their **selling processes** to the customer’s path, only 42.0% of all respondents said they strongly agree that they align their **enablement services** (training, tools, content, and coaching) to the customer’s path as well.

Putting these two findings into perspective shows that organizations are paying more attention to getting the foundation right (aligning their selling processes to the customer’s path) but only 42.0% of organizations are following through by completely aligning their enablement services to the customer’s

We Align Our Enablement Services With the Customer’s Path

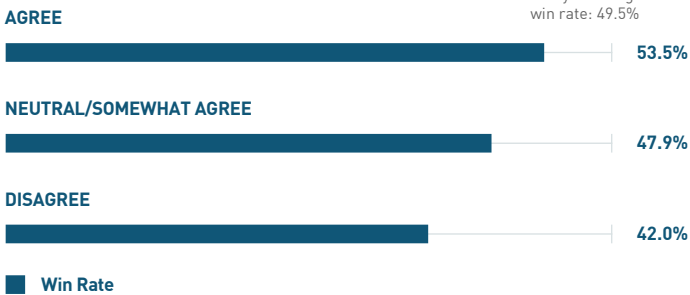


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path. Combined, these data points also add evidence that enablement is maturing, but not necessarily to the extent and at the rate most sales leaders would like to see, and this has an impact on results.

Organizations that aligned their enablement services to the customer's path saw win rates 4.0 percentage points higher than average.

Enablement/Customer's Path Alignment vs. Win Rate



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Optimizing customer experience (CX) is of increasing importance in sales. For the first time, two CX-related practices made the list of the top 12 practices that show the highest impact on sales performance in our [2017 World-Class Practices Report](#). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that those who aligned their enablement services to the customer's path to drive CX saw win rates 11.5 percentage points higher than those who did not.

Achieving alignment: four customer engagement best practices

Next, let's drill down into customer engagement by looking at four specific best practices that require the alignment of enablement services to the customer's path. These data points should give a better feel for what alignment looks like at a very practical level.

Customer Engagement Practices

WE EFFECTIVELY TAILOR CONTENT TO OUR CUSTOMER'S INDUSTRY



WE EFFECTIVELY TAILOR CONTENT TO OUR CUSTOMER'S PATH



WE EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE CONTENT



WE EFFECTIVELY TAILOR CONTENT TO ROLE



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The data shows that slightly more than one-third of organizations effectively tailor their content to the industries they target (34.1%). For all other practices, roughly one-quarter of organizations agreed that they effectively apply the practice. The high percentages that were either neutral or somewhat agreed tells us that even though an organization may attempt to follow these practices, they aren't doing it effectively. The only statement that did not have a majority of respondents in the neutral/somewhat agree camp was the practice that asked about leveraging social media to effectively engage customers. However, this wasn't because respondents were using social media well, but because a greater percentage (29.8%) knew they were not.

These findings put the lack of follow-through into higher focus. If 42.0% of organizations are attempting to optimize their customers' experiences by aligning their enablement services to the customer's path, it is only a subset who consistently and effectively demonstrate the practices that create the buying experiences customers are looking for.

Let's look at some of these engagement practices in more detail, starting with tailoring value messaging. Tailoring value messages to the customer's path and to buyer roles both had an impact on win rates. Organizations that effectively tailored messages to the customer's path outperformed the average win rates by 5.7 points; those that did not underperformed by 7.5 points. Likewise, organizations that effectively tailored value messages to buyer roles also did better than average, outperforming the population as a whole by 4.4 points; whereas those that did not underperformed by 8.2 points.

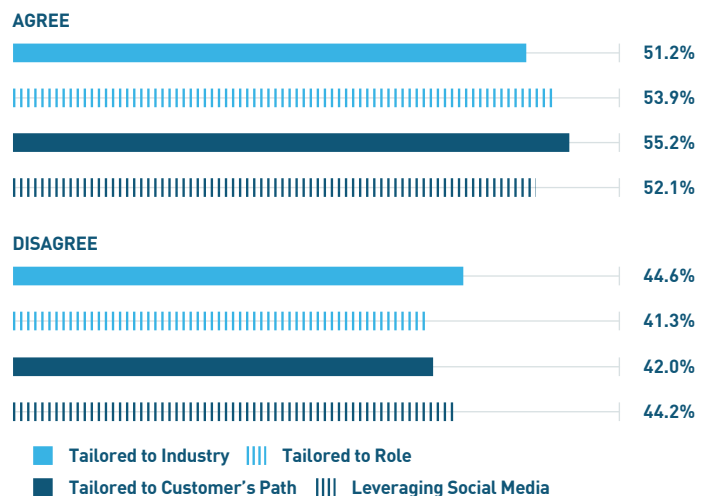
However not all tailoring yielded big gains in win rates. While still a positive impact, tailoring content

to industries showed smaller movement in win rates than the three other customer engagement practices. That's not to say that such tailoring should be ignored. However, in the inevitable case of limited resources, consideration should be given to the time required. Sales enablement leaders might wish to first prioritize aligning their core content (pitch decks, proposal language, product sheets, etc.) to the customer's path rather than to industries, especially if an industry focus is not a core part of their segmentation strategy. Sales enablement content management solutions can also help by creating options for salespeople to easily customize and verticalize existing content when needed in the field.

The final customer engagement practice, leveraging social media, also showed an impact reflecting that selling starts well before the sales process within the customer path. For more about social selling, refer to our [blog site](#).

As the chart shows, sales enablement leaders should take these customer engagement practices seriously, because just doing it a little bit won't produce meaningful results.

Customer Engagement Practices vs. Win Rate



How to apply the data

Data points are only useful when they are applied. Here's how we suggest enablement and sales leaders apply these customer engagement data points in their organizations.

The first step in any transformation is always to conduct a thorough assessment of where you are today. How would you answer the questions we asked in the survey? The data presented in this chapter was provided by all the organizations in our survey, not just the ones with a dedicated sales enablement function, so even if you don't yet have a dedicated team, you can assess your current state.

Weigh the practices with your business model in mind. For example, less emphasis should be placed on the practice that is focused on verticalizing content and messages if you don't provide services and products designed for specific verticals. Instead, place the emphasis on value messages tailored to buyer roles.

We have provided a series of [blog posts](#) on the subject of dynamic value messaging that covers tailoring messages both to the customer's path and to different buyer roles. As both challenges require an overarching value messaging approach, ideally orchestrated by sales enablement, it's important to get marketing, third-party providers and product management on the same page. Then, a plan can be developed and implemented.

This chapter focused on aligning messaging and content to the customer's path, but that's only the beginning. Customers now feel less dependent on salespeople than they did before information on products, services and solutions became freely available online. As a result, buyers often make their first contact with sellers later than they used to, and that's a problem for sales. In the next chapter, we'll examine the growing buyer/seller gap.



CHAPTER 4: Bridging the Growing Buyer-Seller Gap

In Chapter 3, we discussed the importance of aligning the internal selling processes and enablement services to the customer’s path to establish a solid foundation for effective customer engagement and improved performance.

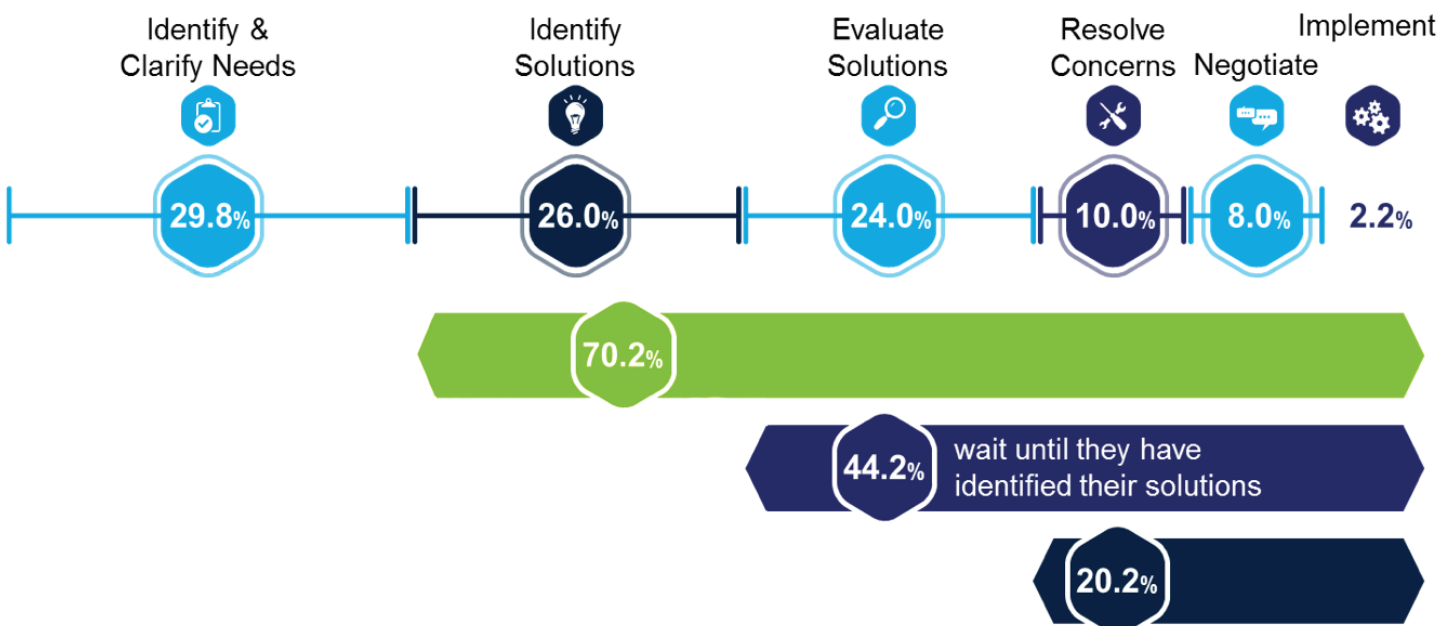
In this chapter, we look again at the facet *Customer*, but based on first-hand data from our [2018 Buyer Preferences Study](#). A note to those of you who may be new to this research: For the sake of simplicity, we use the terms customers and buyers synonymously.

For many years, our clients have been telling us that their buyers are relying on salespeople less and engaging them later in their buying cycle, giving their sales teams less opportunity to influence outcomes. We’ve seen evidence of this in our research over the

years as well. In our *2018 Buyer Preferences Study*, we explored this trend by analyzing current buyer behaviors, perceptions of salespeople and buying preferences.

Salespeople are perceived as vendors, not problem solvers

One key finding was that salespeople ranked ninth when buyers were asked for their top three preferred resources for solving a business problem. In fact, only 23% of the more than 500 buyers said that one of their top three resources would be a salesperson. The majority cited eight other resources they preferred over salespeople, including subject matter experts, peers, networks, communities, web searches, vendor websites, and industry events.



SOURCE: 2018 Buyer Preferences Study.

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Buyers know that much of the information they previously received from salespeople can be gathered online. The majority (70.2%) of buyers said they prefer to define their business issues, needs and requirements before choosing to engage a salesperson. A little less than half (44.2%) said they also defined the solution before talking to salespeople, while 20.2% said they would prefer to engage with salespeople only to lock down the details just before making their buying decision.

Buyers are willing to engage early in certain conditions

90% of buyers are willing to engage salespeople earlier in specific buying situations.

Although buyers can do a lot on their own, an overwhelming majority of buyers, 90%, are willing to engage salespeople earlier in specific buying situations. These situations involve complex business problems that require cross-functional buying decisions, buying scenarios that are new to them, and buying scenarios that are risky for their organization or risky for their own career. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing selling environments, one or more of these criteria could be applied to many of the leads or opportunities salespeople typically have in their pipeline.

The question becomes: If 90% of buyers are willing to engage salespeople earlier, why are they not doing so more often? Our study suggests it's because they are not satisfied with the way salespeople are engaging them. We asked buyers to tell us what they wished salespeople would do more consistently or more often. Four practices emerged as clear winners:

Understand My Business and Role



Preparation is mandatory

Communicate Exceptionally Well



Communication skills matter

Focus on Post-Sale



Developing the established relationships

Provide Insights and Perspective



The hard part: Perspective

Understand my business and my role: Preparation matters. Buyers don't want to waste time answering general questions about their industry, their role and their challenges. All this is available online, and they expect sellers to prepare for the call.

Communicate exceptionally well: It sounds simple, but it isn't. Today, many more communication channels exist, and buyers expect salespeople to master all these channels. In today's context, there are no casual check-ins. Every single interaction has to be compelling, concise and impactful, requiring a level of preparation that used to be reserved only for large proposal presentations.

Focus on post-sale: For buyers, a buying decision is just a milestone to what's really important to them: creating the business value they have bought. Before, during and after the sales process, sellers must keep their focus, not on the selling milestones in their internal selling process, but on the business results the customer is trying to achieve. Buyers must perceive that a salesperson's goal is not to close the sale, but to help the customer solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity.

Provide insights and perspective: Without any doubt, this is the hardest part. Providing insights and

perspectives requires salespeople to understand the business context of the buyers' problems to be solved. It also requires salespeople to map these challenges against their portfolio of products and services to come up with a unique perspective, enriched with insights and expertise that demonstrates how the solution can lead to the desired results.

Integrated enablement services that drive customer engagement are the missing link

Sales enablement is charged with helping salespeople meet and exceed these ever-increasing expectations and earn the right to engage earlier and more effectively. Specifically, the services provided by enablement must equip all customer-facing roles with the materials and knowledge they need to have relevant, valuable and differentiating interactions. When enablement services are aligned to the customer's path, sales professionals just naturally exhibit more of the engagement behaviors that customers look for.

In the next four chapters, we're going to dig deeply into the results of our study to look at how enablement services, including content, training and coaching as well as technology, are evolving and helping to bridge this buyer-seller gap.



CHAPTER 5: Enablement Services Are Evolving

Now, as we have set the foundation from the customer's perspective, we continue our journey into the research using the sales enablement clarity model as our guide, focusing on two very important facets: *Customer-Facing Professionals and Their Managers* and *Effective Enablement Services*.

Customer-Facing Professionals and Their Managers: This is the secondary design point of enablement and defines enablement's ideal "customers." If you're just starting out, your primary audience may be salespeople only, but your objective should ultimately be to serve all customer-facing professionals as well as their managers, even if it takes you a while to get there.

Using the customer's path as the primary design point, enablement leaders must then assess the needs and challenges of the sales force at each stage of that path and decide how best to address those challenges. Mapping the sales force's challenges and solutions to the customer's path allows enablement

to create a high-level plan for the strategic initiatives as well as the specifically designed enablement services the organization needs to reach its sales goals.

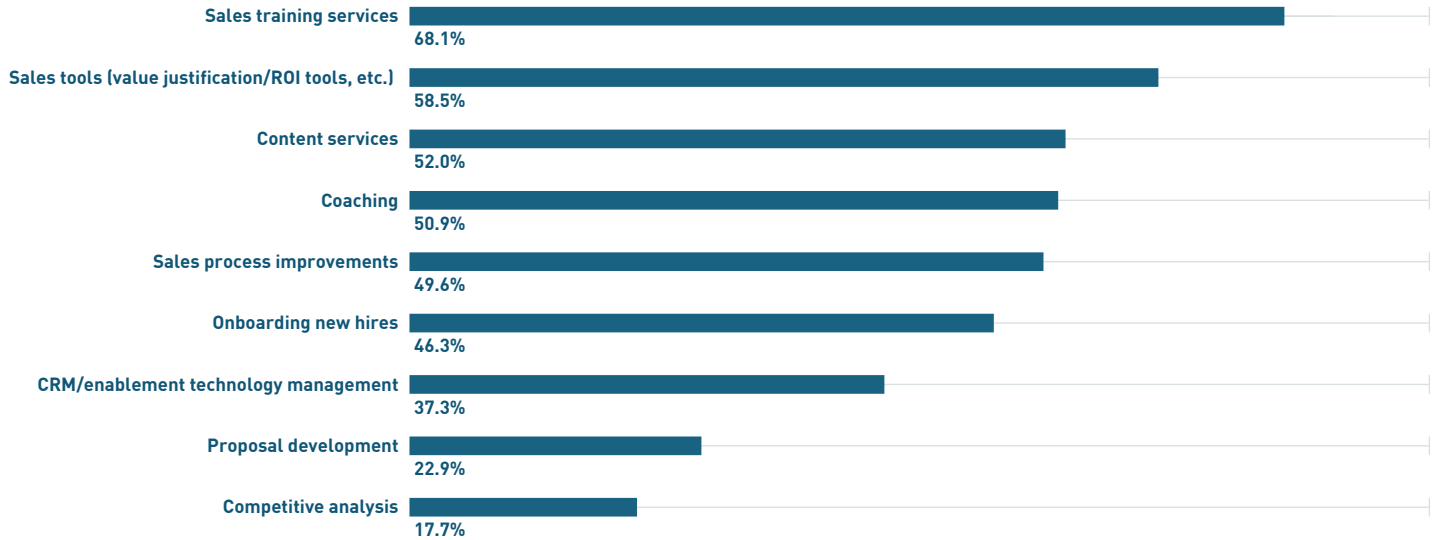
Effective Enablement Services: These are the services enablement provides to its audience. We've broken them down into three primary categories: content, training and coaching services. Technology is another facet of the model addressed later in this report. As we work through these enablement services in subsequent chapters, you'll often see a big difference in results when technology is applied.

With this understanding in place, let's take a closer look at where respondents to our study are choosing to focus their efforts.

Enablement services: a shakeup at the top

For the first time since we began conducting this study, the top three enablement services for salespeople have changed.

Primary Enablement Services for Salespeople



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Fewer organizations chose sales process improvements as a primary enablement service, causing it to drop to position five among all services. That does not mean that a solid sales process foundation is not important. Indeed, it is very important, as we can see in greater detail in our [2018-2019 Sales Performance Study](#) (membership required). However, as sales enablement and sales operations functions mature, they become more specialized, and increasingly, sales process is owned by sales operations.

Content services made it into the top three enablement services for the first time this year, right after sales training services and sales tools. The relevance of

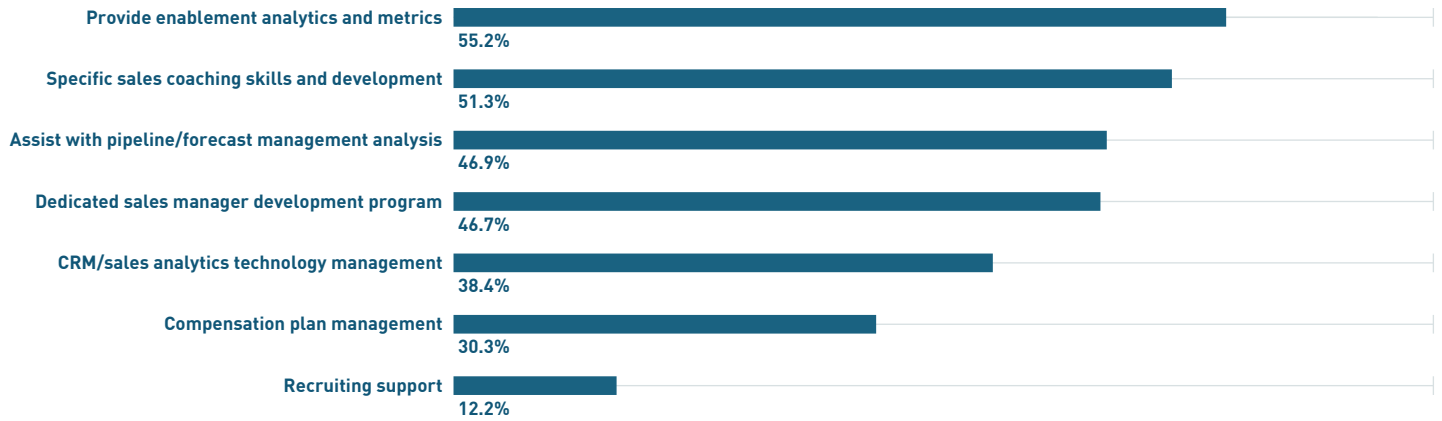
content (customer-facing as well as internal content) for sales enablement is increasing as we'll discuss later in Chapter 6 of this report.

Sales coaching services rose to position number four from number five last year, with almost the same percentage. Onboarding services are now in position number six (seventh last year) with a slightly increased percentage. These services are usually more relevant than this position might suggest, but in some organizations, onboarding services are perceived as a subset of training services and are included in training, helping to drive that service to position number one.

Sales managers' needs reassessed

The change in priorities for enabling sales managers are even more remarkable. For the first time, providing enablement analytics and metrics was deemed more important than developing sales coaching skills

Primary Enablement Services for Sales Managers



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It's an interesting change in priorities that we need to pay close attention to. With the rise of AI-powered technology, a tremendous amount of data is available to sales managers. It's understandable that managers would request these analytics and metrics to help them make better decisions. However, without a deep understanding of the data (what precisely do

these metrics mean?), and without highly developed coaching skills, changing sales behaviors will remain difficult if not impossible. In the following chapters, we'll share what our research tells us about the impact of specific services on results, starting with content and following on with training and coaching.



CHAPTER 6: Content Strategy Matters as Much as Content Details

In this year’s study, we looked not just at the connection between content quality/quantity and results, but also the importance of a content strategy. As you go through this chapter, we think you’ll be as intrigued by the results as we were.

Who creates content?

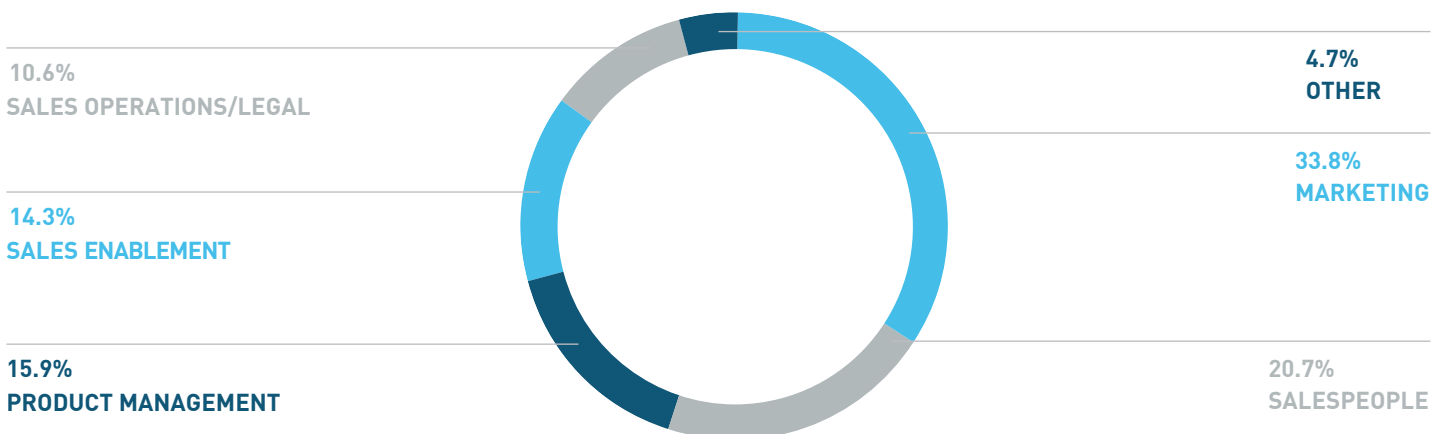
We reported last year that the content (customer-facing and internal enablement content) salespeople need along the entire customer’s path is created by a diverse group of functions. While marketing is often seen as the source of the majority of content, they only created 39.0% of the content used by salespeople last year. This year, that percentage dropped to 33.8%.

According to the data, more content is coming from sales operations and legal (10.6% compared to 5.6% last year). All other sources of content show only slightly different results than last year.

It’s again important to note that salespeople still create one-fifth of their required content on their own. That shouldn’t be the case. Our [2018-2019 Sales Performance Study](#) (membership required) shows that salespeople only spend 32% of their time selling. They cannot afford to spend so much time on content creation, instead they should invest their limited time in tailoring or customizing only.

With so many content contributors providing different content types (such as presentations, case studies, references, white papers, contracting templates) in various formats (such as pdf, pptx, video, online forms) for salespeople along the customer’s path, a strategy to ensure consistency and effectiveness is necessary. Among other elements, this strategy must include a formal collaboration model that defines, on a role-by-role basis, who is doing what at each stage of a defined production process. We will discuss the production process in Chapter 10 when we talk about enablement operations.

Who Creates the Content Salespeople Need?



Having a content strategy impacts results

A content strategy defines the purpose of content, what goals content should help to achieve, and how content is designed, created and managed to support the strategy.

Given the challenges of designing and implementing various content services in accordance with buyer preferences, the one-third (32.7%) of study participants who reported having a content strategy seems quite small. Another 45.3% were neutral or agreed somewhat, and 22.0% disagreed.

We Have Implemented and Developed a Content Strategy for All Enablement Content

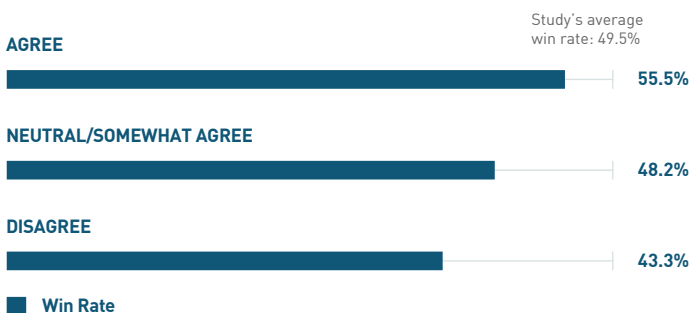


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This is an area of hidden potential for performance improvement. In our study, we saw markedly better performance (+12.2 points in win rates) from organizations highly confident in their content strategy versus those who saw this as a gap in their organization. Quota attainment (not shown here) showed similar results.

As shown in the chart, those with higher confidence in their content strategy were much more likely to have deeper relationships with their customers (solutions consultant, strategic contributor/trusted partner) than those who were neutral or felt like content strategy was a gap.

Content Implementation Strategy vs. Win Rate

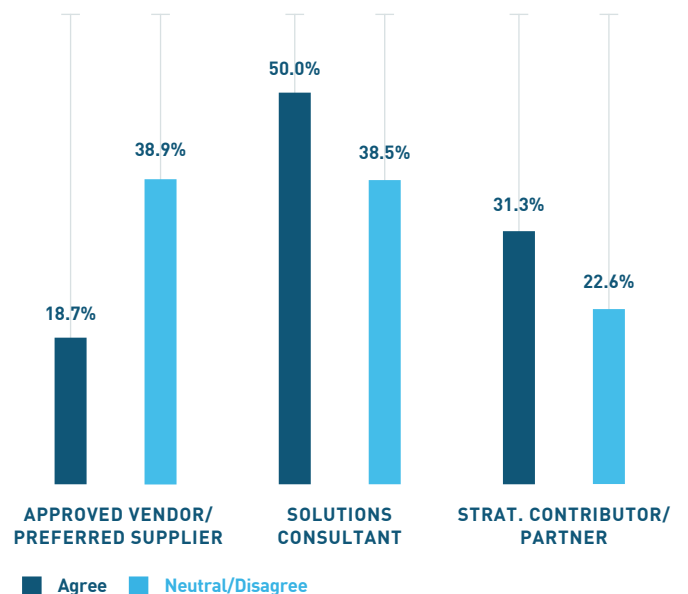


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Content strategy is linked to customer relationship strength (and ultimately results)

Even more intriguing were the findings from our study that showed a relationship between content strategy and customer relationships.

Content Strategy Implementation vs. Relationship Levels



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Those organizations with a weaker content strategy were more likely to be seen at lower levels of customer relationship (approved vendor/preferred supplier). Put another way, organizations without a content strategy are three times more likely to end up as an approved vendor only, and almost two times more likely to be perceived as a preferred supplier only. In a B2B complex sale, most sales leaders would agree that the status of “solutions consultant” is the minimum relationship that is acceptable. At that level and above, you find more organizations with a content strategy than without.

Do you remember the four buyer expectations we discussed in Chapter 5? Of those, *providing insights and perspective* is the one many salespeople find most difficult to achieve, yet it is the behavior that can help deepen relationships the fastest. Strategic contributors/partners provide perspectives. Approved vendors and preferred suppliers usually don't.

Content plays a crucial role when it comes to improving a salesperson's ability to provide perspectives. Content tailored to the buyer role and the customer's path can offer the right messages and insights so that salespeople can offer unique perspectives at the

right time and to the right buyers. It's hard to achieve that level of content and messaging precision without an overarching strategy that provides direction and a collaboration model for cross-functional content creation.

The last word on content

Without a strategy, content (and the messages contained therein) can often be disconnected and fall short of expectations. This year's enablement study also gives us an excellent opportunity to cross-reference our findings with the data from our [2018-2019 Sales Performance Study](#) (membership required).

That study found a more than 20-percentage-point spread in win rates across the relationship hierarchy. This compares to an eight-percentage-point spread when we looked at levels of sales process as a standalone metric. So as we recommended in that study, while both sales processes and customer relationships are essential to overall sales success, if the primary focus is on increasing win rates, invest in deepening relationships. The sales enablement study results show creating a content strategy to be a practical way to apply the finding from the sales performance study.



CHAPTER 7: Training Services Impact Performance

We continue to explore the facet of *Effective Enablement Services* by focusing on sales training. Sales training covers areas like skills, product, process methodologies, messaging and customer insights. Too often, enablement teams will focus more heavily on one type of training, such as product training, over others. As you'll see from the results of our study, these organizations may be able to improve their overall outcomes by broadening their efforts.

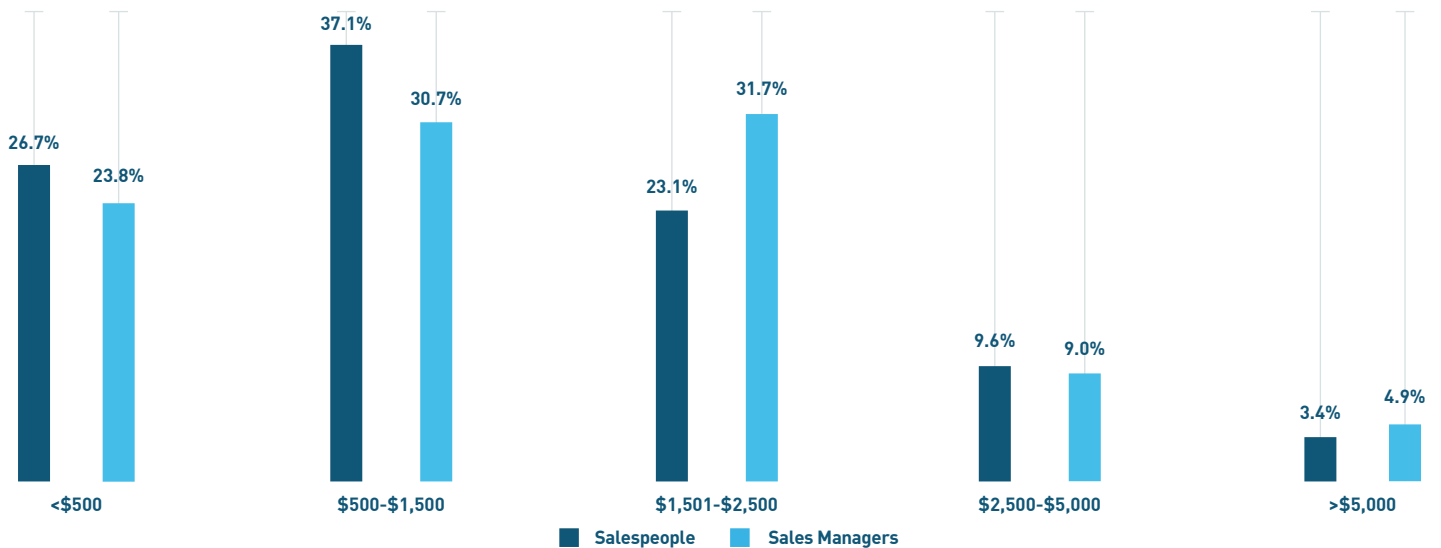
Investments in sales training

Investments in salespeople and their managers reflect patterns similar to last year's. The majority of organizations (86.9%) invest less than \$2,500 per

person per year in their salespeople. The percentage for sales managers is almost the same: 86.2%.

When we drop below \$2,500 per person per year, we see a more marked difference in investments in salespeople and their managers. While 63.8% invest up to \$1,500 in salespeople, the equivalent percentage for managers is 54.5%. But when it comes to the next range, of \$1,500 - \$2,500, the priority flips, with more organizations investing in their sales managers than in their salespeople. For ranges larger than \$2,500 per person per year, investments in salespeople and sales managers were similar.

Investments in Sales Training for Salespeople and Sales Managers Per Person/Year



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Sales training effectiveness also shows results similar to last year's: Skills training, methodology, process and product training services were ranked most effective. Value messaging and onboarding training were ranked in the middle, and all customer-related training services, such as customer's marketplace, business value justification and social selling training, were ranked least effective.

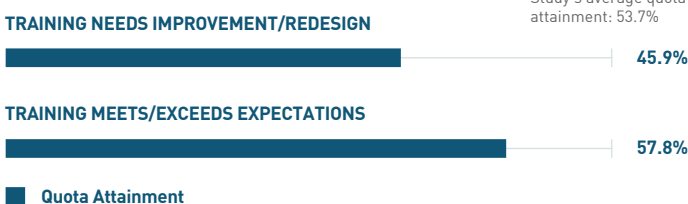
Based on that initial ranking, we analyzed how these sales training services impact quota attainment.

Training services impact quota attainment

To assess the performance impact of training services, we looked at the study participants who ranked specific training services as "meets/exceeds expectations." Then, we looked at their performance results. Then, we did the same for those study participants who reported a specific training service as needing improvement or major redesign.

Training is usually seen as meeting or exceeding expectations when it addresses an urgent need and provides easy ways to apply the newly learned skills in the daily workflow. Comparing the results on the charts below, you can see that how well training met expectations had a marked impact on performance. In our previous chapters, we've used win rates as a barometer for success. For this analysis which looks at the productivity of the overall sales force, we

Sales Methodology/Process Training vs. Quota Attainment



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used quota attainment, the percentage of the overall salesforce who met/exceeded their goals as the performance metric.

When sales methodology and process training services met or exceeded expectations, organizations performed 4.1 points above average. When ranked as needing improvement or redesign, quota attainment fell to 7.8 points below average for an actual decrease of 14.5% from average.

Selling skills training had an equally notable impact on quota attainment. When selling skills met expectations, organizations saw quota attainment rates at 4.8 points above average or an actual improvement of 8.9%. When selling skills training didn't meet expectations, quota attainment dropped to 44.7%, 9.0 points below average for a drop of 16.8%.

Selling Skills Training vs. Quota Attainment



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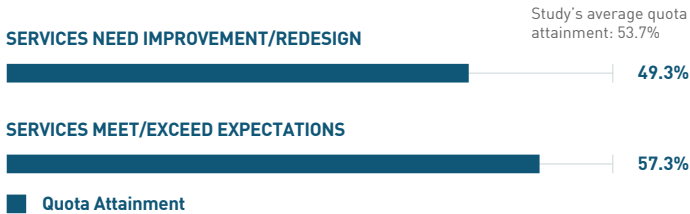
Onboarding training services can improve quota attainment by 6.7%

For organizations with ambitious growth targets, sales onboarding services are often the most important training or enablement service.

It's not uncommon for more than 20% of an overall sales force to be new to the organization, and when that's the case, results at the end of the year will depend heavily on the quality of sales onboarding as

well as on the performance of the established high performers. So, a balance between a high-quality sales onboarding program and equally high-quality enablement services for the established sales force is key to success.

Onboarding Services vs. Quota Attainment



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Effective onboarding services are also crucial to managing the voluntary turnover rate. When onboarding services are ranked as “needs major redesign,” the voluntary turnover rate jumped from the average of 7.9% up to 14.2%. This creates a vicious circle in which onboarding becomes even more important because a greater percentage of the sales force is new.

Give it time

It’s tempting to look for immediate performance results when improving training services. Yet, most enablement services, especially training services,

need time to take effect before an organization can measure their impact. One factor is that the average sales cycle in a complex B2B sales can take several months and sometimes more than a year.

To ensure training services are headed in the right direction and will eventually create the performance improvements you’re looking for, be thoughtful with the initial set-up and gather salespeople’s and the sales managers’ feedback on the provided training services. Integrating their feedback, in line with the enablement strategy and the main lagging indicators such as win rates, quota attainment or revenue, is important. Additionally, to achieve that goal, measure leading indicators so that enablement teams can see early on whether their newly implemented initiative is going in the right direction or not. Leading indicators, such as conversion rates, follow-up call rates, and many more, can show that the desired changes are happening in the early phases of the customer’s path.

Also, the sales managers’ coaching practice should be designed and implemented to drive reinforcement and adoption of the initial enablement services for salespeople. The state of sales coaching will be discussed in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 8: Sales Coaching Is a “Must Have” Enablement Service

Sales coaching is a term that is discussed in many different ways in the industry, yet often misunderstood. Sales coaching isn't a matter of managing activities or telling salespeople what to do based on the manager's own past selling experience. Instead, sales coaching is the process by which sales managers and others use a defined approach and specific communication skills, combined with domain expertise, to facilitate structured conversations with team members to uncover improvement areas and opportunities for new levels of sales success.

Sales coaching - the process by which sales managers and others use a defined approach and specific communication skills, combined with domain expertise, to facilitate conversations with team members to uncover improvement areas and opportunities for new levels of sales success.

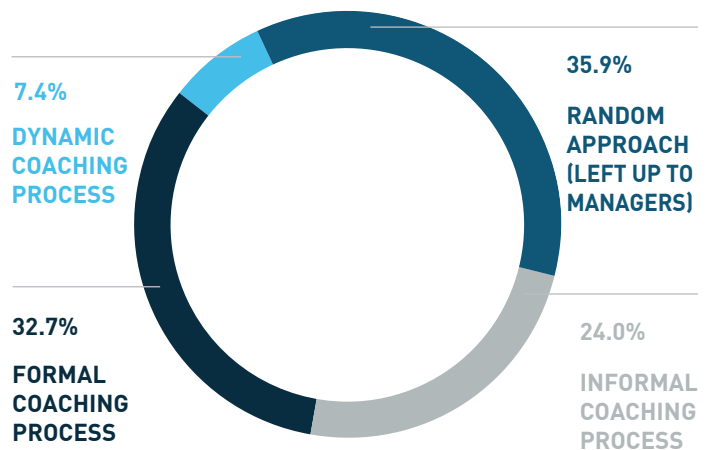
Sales coaching is one of the most effective enablement services for driving the sustained adoption and reinforcement of the initial enablement services as well as sales performance, but it's also one of the areas in which most sales organizations have serious challenges. Narrow or incorrect interpretations of what sales coaching is (e.g., limiting sales coaching to discussions on opportunities or a funnel review) is often combined with a lack of coaching skills and processes as well as the misconception that sales coaching would take too much time.

Organizations continue to formalize their sales coaching approaches

If you consider coaching as a process, a “random” approach means that sales coaching is left up to each manager. An “informal” coaching process means that there are guidelines but they are not completely implemented. A “formal” coaching process is one that is defined and implemented, and sales managers are required to use it. “Dynamic” goes a step further by connecting the coaching process to the enablement framework, and often, measuring managers by their coaching impact.

Last year, we saw a marked shift toward a formal approach, with notable movements from random to informal and from informal to formal. We are pleased to say that shift continued this year. In 2018, the percentage of organizations with a formal sales coaching approach increased to 32.7%, while at the

Sales Coaching Approach



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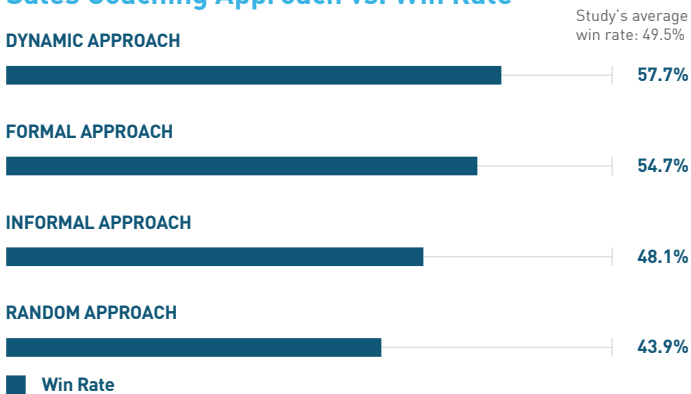
same time the percentage that followed an informal coaching approach decreased to 24.0%. That's a very desirable development, as only formal and dynamic approaches to sales coaching led to a notable performance impact. As we have seen throughout this report, this is another signal that sales enablement is growing up, even if not with the speed we might wish.

Although the group of organizations that followed a dynamic coaching process declined from 11.3% to 7.4%, the overall percentage of organizations with a formal or dynamic approach has never been larger: 40.1% this year compared to 30.3% in 2017. Year over year, these two approaches are the only approaches that show a notable improvement in sales performance, and the 2018 study was no exception. Of course, the downside is that over half (59.9%) of organizations still are not achieving these more rigorous levels of coaching.

Formal coaching matters, but dynamic sales coaching has the greatest impact

There are two key findings in this year's performance analysis. First, consistent with last year's data, sales coaching is a highly effective sales enablement

Sales Coaching Approach vs. Win Rate



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service when implemented in a formal or dynamic way. Dynamic sales coaching showed the greatest results, coming in at 57.7%, 8.2 points above the 49.5% average or an actual improvement of 16.6%. Though not quite as remarkable, a formal approach still showed 5.2 percentage points above average performance, or two-digit (10.5%) improvement. On the other end of the spectrum, random sales coaching (where how and when to coach is left up to the sales managers) led to win rates that were 5.6 percentage points below average. Also, with sales coaching it's important to get started and to quickly get to at least a formal approach to see results that justify the investments.

To put this in perspective, sales leaders know that win rate improvements of just one or two percentage points can make or break a fiscal year. Given that our study shows double-digit improvements with coaching, this is one area of enablement that enablement leaders would do well to address.

Formalizing your coaching approach

For many sales enablement leaders, the question becomes, "Where do I start with sales coaching?" We recommend focusing on coaching services that are designed to drive reinforcement and adoption of your initial sales enablement services for salespeople.

In many organizations, the development of managers and leaders is led by an academy or by a separate L&D team outside of the sales organization. As a result, these programs are not designed to serve the challenging role of sales managers. Taking over the entire sales manager development program and designing and implementing a coaching process in one step would be a "boil the ocean" approach that

could be risky. Instead, enablement leaders should focus on a step-by-step approach.

The first step towards effective sales coaching could be implementing specific coaching services that are designed to support the enablement services for salespeople. For example, imagine you are rolling out a new value messaging program that covers new customer-facing content assets, a new playbook, and new training services for salespeople and their managers. Now, develop a coaching process that helps sales managers coach this specific behavior

to reinforce your initial efforts and ensure that this enablement initiative will be highly effective. Ideally, such an approach could be piloted first with one or two sales teams. By showcasing early results, enablement leaders open the door for further investments in sales managers and sales coaching.

Aligning coaching to enablement services

We asked our study participants how well they align their coaching services to the initial enablement services for salespeople to drive reinforcement and adoption.

We Align Our Coaching Services to Our Enablement Services for Salespeople

RANDOM OR INFORMAL COACHING APPROACH



FORMAL AND DYNAMIC COACHING APPROACH



■ Disagree ■ Neutral/Somewhat Agree ■ Agree

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As you might expect, those more rigorous in their coaching process are much more likely to align it to training and other seller-focused services. Greater than 90% of those following a formal or dynamic coaching approach are confident in their alignment. On the flip-side, only 14.3% of organizations that follow a random or informal approach are confident that they align their coaching services to their enablement services

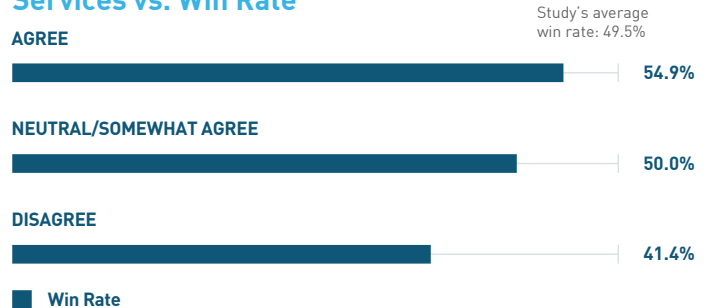
for salespeople. We then analyzed the performance impact of this practice on win rates alone, without considering the overall coaching approach.

Organizations that said they focus on aligning their coaching services to their enablement services for salespeople (irrespective of their coaching approach) saw 13.5 percentage points higher win rates compared to those that disagreed.

Those who were neutral or somewhat agreed only achieved slightly better-than-average results, which shows that this practice makes a positive difference only if it is fully implemented.

However, organizations need to start somewhere. If you haven't offered coaching services in the past or haven't aligned them to your enablement services for salespeople, pilot projects can help you show quick results and make the business case for additional resources and budget.

Coaching Services Alignment to Enablement Services vs. Win Rate



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CHAPTER 9: Technology Enables Sales Enablement

With this chapter, we turn to the facet *Integrated Enablement Technology*, which is becoming more important with the impact of AI-based technology on selling.

In the [2018 Sales Operations Optimization Study](#), we found that in addition to implementing core CRM systems (Salesforce, Dynamics, SAP, Oracle, etc.), survey participants noted an additional 25 solution categories they were considering implementing to augment their sales technology stack. Sales technology management, in general, often falls under the purview of sales operations, but there are several areas where sales enablement is taking a very active or leadership role.

In this chapter, we will explore one highly relevant sales technology category, sales enablement content management systems (SECMs), and then look at emerging AI solutions that will be of vital interest to sales enablement going forward.

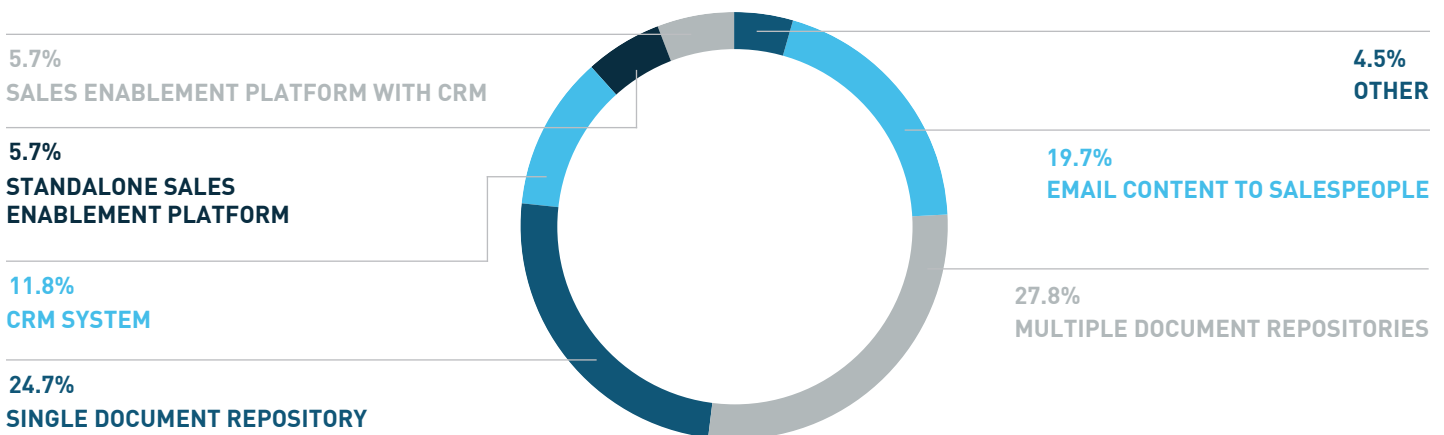
Getting content into the hands and minds of the sales teams

Content includes all customer-facing and internal enablement content that salespeople need and use all along the customer’s path. The first thing we wanted to assess in the 2018 study was how content is being shared with sales teams. The chart summarizes the various methods in use today.

Here we see that 19.7% of organizations are emailing content out to salespeople and leaving it up to them to manage those files on their computers. An additional 27.8% are storing content assets in multiple repositories, which again places some of the management burden on salespeople: They need to remember what is where.

Of note is that the use of email has decreased noticeably from the 29.0% figure reported in 2017, while the multiple repositories figure has increased from 22.6% a year ago. So organizations are doing a better job of archiving content, just not centrally.

Primary Method Used to Share Content with Sales Teams



Sharing sales content on one platform can improve win rates

We looked for sales performance differences based on the method of content sharing used. Assuming the reason enablement provides content to sales teams is to help them close opportunities, we examined the outcome of forecast deals. Performance fell into two categories: those who emailed content out or stored it in multiple repositories and those who managed content via one location (including a single document repository, in the CRM system or in sales enablement platform).

The chart summarizes the results of that analysis and supports a solid business case for formalizing enablement content management.

Tracking content utilization is not yet an established practice in most organizations

In numerous case study reviews of content management related sales enablement initiatives,

Enablement Tracking of Content and Tools

WE REGULARLY ASSESS FEEDBACK FROM SALESPEOPLE REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTENT AND TOOLS



WE CONSISTENTLY TRACK WHICH CONTENT/TOOLS SALESPEOPLE ARE USING



WE CONSISTENTLY TRACK WHICH CONTENT/TOOLS BUYERS ARE CONSUMING/USING

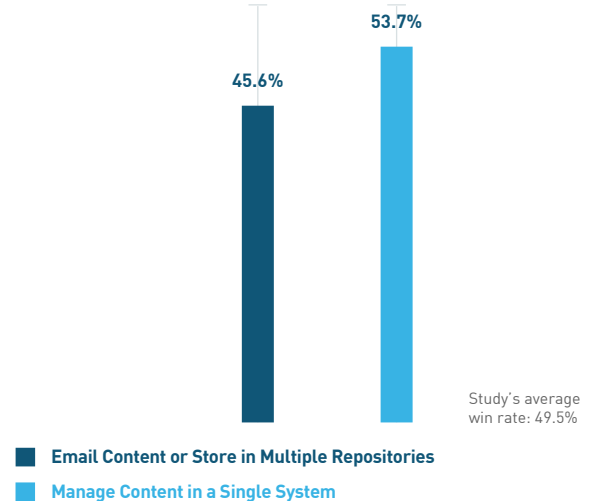


WE CONSISTENTLY TRACK WHICH CONTENT/TOOLS CONTRIBUTE TO HIGHER WIN RATES



■ Disagree ■ Neutral/Somewhat Agree ■ Agree

Content Management Approach vs Win Rate



we've consistently found that how well you take advantage of a technology's capabilities matters more than which technology you choose. Most modern content platforms include the kinds of capabilities we looked at in our study. But most organizations only use a fraction of the capabilities of the technology they implement.

One area we have been monitoring is the ability of companies to track content and tool utilization, which is critical if companies are going to maintain content quality. The chart summarizes participant responses regarding the ability of their organization to track salespeople’s feedback on content effectiveness, which content they were using, which content buyers were consuming, and which content leads to higher win rates.

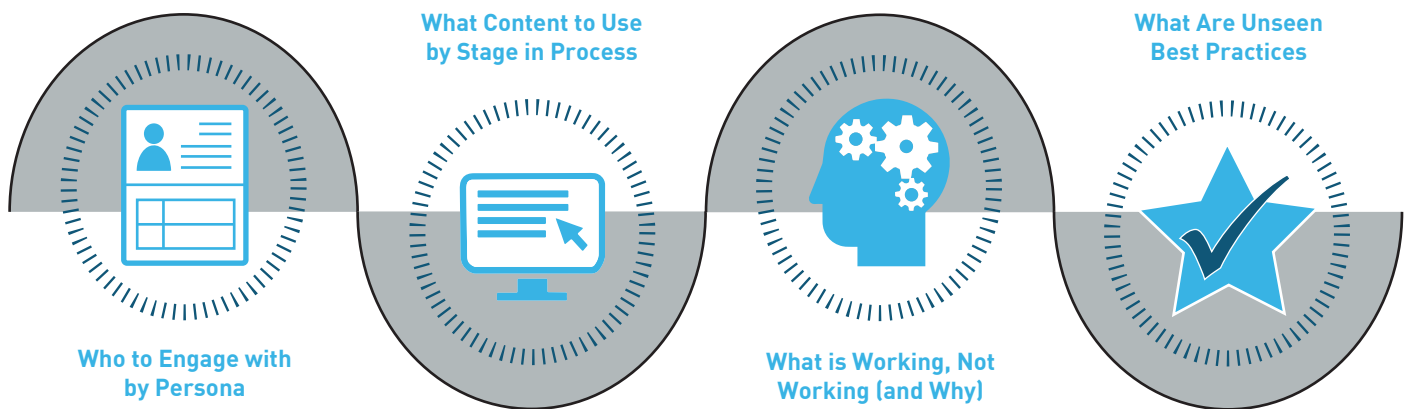
Few respondents agreed that these aspects of content management were core competencies within their company. In comparing outcomes of forecast deals analysis, we found differences in win rates for all four of these areas. The most pronounced of these was related to getting regular feedback from salespeople on the effectiveness of content.

The analysis found that organizations that agreed they were effective at this task had an average win rate of forecast deals of 54.1%. That metric dropped to 49.5% for organizations that said they somewhat agreed or were neutral with the statement and eroded further to 39.9% for firms that disagreed. These numbers bolster the case for implementing a sales enablement platform to support content distribution and management, as tracking content in all four of the areas covered in the previous chart are normally standard capabilities in these solutions.

AI will transform sales content management

This past year we have been actively tracking advances in AI technology to support sales transformation. Many of the 80+ solutions we have reviewed will be of clear value to sales enablement. As related specifically to content management, we see AI providing the following four key capabilities to enhance content usage.

AI-Enabled Content Management Services



- **Who to Engage:** When AI is given access to data on which prospect accounts salespeople are focusing on and the products they plan to sell, we are seeing field-tested examples of AI providing insights into which specific individuals inside those accounts they should engage with and the role those stakeholders will likely be playing in the buying process.
- **What Content to Use and When:** As opposed to having salespeople dig through the system to find the content they need, AI is now starting to proactively push content to them. Suggestions for which content to use are targeted to the personas salespeople will be engaging, with recommendations as to when in the sales process specific content should be used.
- **What is Working/Not Working:** AI will also be useful in assessing buyer engagement. It will provide sales teams with feedback on what content is being consumed by which stakeholders, and also do an analysis of wins, losses and no decisions to identify which content is effective at moving deals forward and which needs to be modified or enhanced based on changes in the marketplace.
- **Surfacing Best Practices:** Over time, AI will be able to provide suggestions on best practices to increase sales effectiveness, such as the right time to bring up pricing, which references should be used and when in the sales process, identifying which stakeholders are crucial to selling and which are not, etc.

These capabilities and more will make sales teams more effective as AI provides real-time coaching throughout the sales process.

Ensure You Make the Right Technology Choices

As we mentioned throughout this report, solid processes are required to maximize the value that technology can deliver. We recommend the following approach towards making sales enablement technology decisions:

- Do a full assessment of all aspects of the customer path to determine areas where you need improvement.
- Next, calculate what the projected payback would be for successfully dealing with each of the challenges you have identified and assess your ability to effectively deal with each issue.

Once you have your list of high value/high confidence of success issues, you are now in a position to sit down with technology solution providers and have discussions around how their platforms specifically address those challenges. But remember, it's equally important to have a rollout plan that details how you will get the new technologies in the hands of your customer-facing professionals and, using enablement services like training, coaching and content, ensure they are using them effectively.



CHAPTER 10: The Inner Workings: Cross-Functional Collaboration, Enablement Operations and Metrics

In this report, we have covered all facets of the sales enablement clarity model, except for our final two: *Formalized Collaboration* and *Efficient Enablement Operations*. These two facets hold our enablement clarity model together and are required for enablement to be scalable.

The question these facets address is this: How should sales enablement leaders work across the organization, and how should sales enablement itself be managed to be cost-efficient and effective in achieving the goals that have been defined in the sales enablement charter?

First, let's have a look at *Formalized Collaboration*. We reported last year on the state of cross-functional collaboration in greater detail. This year, let's focus on the highlights and changes only.

When collaboration gets formal, results improve

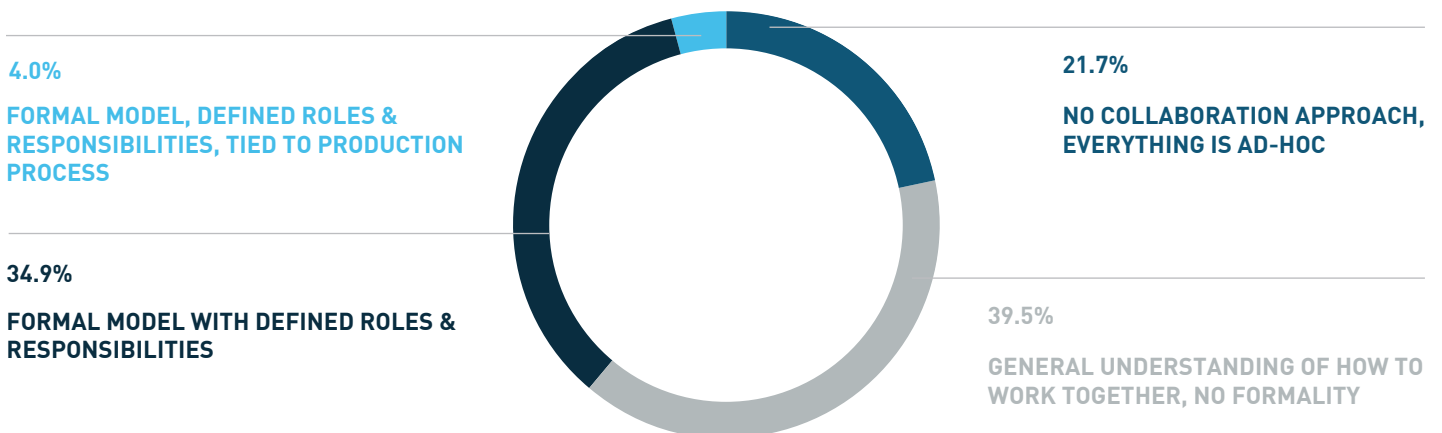
The percentage of enablement teams that applied

a formal approach to cross-functional collaboration doubled from 19.4% last year to 38.9% this year, and that is excellent news!

As often discussed, sales enablement teams have to collaborate with almost every other function in the organization. Enablement is definitely not, and never was, a sales and marketing issue only. Given the orchestrating character of enablement and the numerous functions contributing to the creation of effective and scalable enablement services, collaboration itself has to be formalized.

A formal approach to collaboration requires enablement to define which cross-functional roles are responsible for the different aspects of production for each enablement service. Many organizations use the well-known RACI model, which defines the **responsible** and the **accountable** roles per enablement service (e.g., playbooks or value messaging training), as well as the roles to be

Sales Enablement Collaboration Across Company



consulted and those to be **informed**. Moving from a formal to a dynamic approach requires the addition of a production process, which we will discuss when we get to our next facet, *Efficient Enablement Operations*.

As more organizations followed a formal approach this year, fewer are in an informal stage: 52.4% last year vs. 39.5% this year. As mentioned throughout the report, enablement is maturing. However, slightly more than one-fifth of organizations still follow a random approach, so again, not as fast as we might like.

If formalized collaboration is part of the inner workings of an enablement team, there is a noticeable impact on sales performance. The better enablement teams are set up, the better the position they're in to engage, equip and empower their sales forces to be effective in front of the customer. Quota attainment improved 9.5% when organizations took a formal approach to collaboration.

Efficient Enablement Operations: governance, production process and metrics

This facet is a structural prerequisite to creating an efficient, scalable and effective enablement team that can easily adapt to a company's changing and growing business needs. It builds on the solid foundation that comes with a well-constructed, approved and implemented sales enablement charter and covers three primary areas:

Governance supports decision-making, conflict-resolution and executive sponsor engagement.

The term "governance" is often perceived as an unpopular word, but to ensure a functioning enablement team, robust enablement governance is mandatory. A vital element of a governance model is a

cadence with the top executive sponsors to keep them on track and engaged. In addition, advisory boards are a good way to keep executive management engaged.

Because enablement involves the orchestration of contributions from so many functions across the organization (sales, marketing, product management, L&D, etc.) it isn't enough to have merely a cross-functional collaboration model. A governance model is also needed to ensure everyone is moving in the same direction and to smooth the inevitable conflicts that arise whenever diverse teams are brought together to achieve a goal. Other functions may be able to get by without a governance model. Sales enablement cannot.

A stable production process ensures quality, effectiveness and scalability.

Content services, as well as training services, have to be created and, in the case of sales content salespeople need along the customer's path, only 33.8% is generated by marketing. This data point shows why, in addition to the collaboration model, an enablement production process is a fundamental prerequisite to ensure the quality and scalability of sales enablement services. Such a production process covers all the steps: definition, design, creation, localization, deployment and tracking. This production process will also be used when you create your cross-functional collaboration model as different roles may get involved at different stages of production for any given enablement service.

Organizations that effectively produced and managed their enablement services based on a process achieved 10.1% higher win rates.

We Use a Formal Production/Management Process for Enablement Services



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Only a quarter (25.0%) of respondents to our survey agreed/strongly agreed that they used a formal production process for their enablement services. Yet, this smaller group had much higher win rates (5.0%) than the study average. Those who disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement (27.2% of respondents) reported significantly lower (6.0%) win rates than the overall survey population.

To be effective, sales enablement leaders have to focus on setting up a solid foundation for an efficient enablement production, not only so they can be more cost-efficient, but also because defined and assigned process steps ensure the expected quality and scalability of services.

Using analytics to measure your success

Depending on the enablement maturity in an organization, different metrics can be used to

measure progress and impact. Ideally, enablement leaders will create a metrics dashboard for their senior executive sponsors, for themselves, and for the collaboration partners they are working with. Metrics should cover milestones, productivity (e.g., search time for content, available selling time) and performance indicators (e.g., win rates, average deal size), as well as leading (all sorts of conversation rates) and lagging indicators (e.g., revenue plan, quota attainment, win rates).

Of all the practices we looked at in this year’s study, metrics were the area that needed the biggest improvement. Less than one-fifth of organizations worked with leading and lagging indicators, were able to determine the ROI of their enablement investments, or were able to measure milestones or productivity metrics. All three practices, if applied consistently, set a foundation for better win rates.

Measuring Enablement Impact

WE CONSISTENTLY USE LEADING AND LAGGING INDICATORS



WE CONSISTENTLY USE TAILORED METRICS THAT ALLOW US TO DETERMINE ROI



WE CONSISTENTLY USE MILESTONES AND PRODUCTIVITY METRICS



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Those that agreed they followed all three practices achieved a win rate of 61.4%, while those who disagreed that they followed any of the practices only achieved 40.4%.

Investing in enablement without a meaningful framework of metrics is dangerous. If you can't communicate progress and success to the senior executive stakeholders in metrics that matter to them, you run the very real risk of being seen as a tactical initiative that can easily be canceled the next time budgets need to be cut. To be clear, leading indicators are just as important as performance metrics like win rates and quota attainment as enablement initiatives are usually not about improving the current quarter, but the following one – or even later if your average sales cycle is longer than three months, as many are in complex B2B selling.

Conclusion: Getting through the growing pains

Although we see numerous signs that enablement as a discipline is maturing and growing up, we have to keep in mind that only one-third (34.4%) of enablement teams meet all or the majority of their expectations (Chapter 1). Even worse, more than

60% of enablement teams are in a dangerous place, meeting only some of their expectations; achieving average results. There is only one way out: investing in a strategic and formal approach to sales enablement, as outlined throughout the report, which leverages a framework such as our clarity model to make this happen. To do anything less means enablement takes the risk that with the next economic low cycle they will not be able to justify their existence, and the enablement function will be broken apart and shoved back under sales operations, L&D and marketing.

This problem can only be fixed by addressing the basics: developing a vision of where you want to be with sales enablement and a related strategy that defines all necessary steps and actions to get there, ideally captured in a formal enablement charter that is approved by the senior executive sponsors.

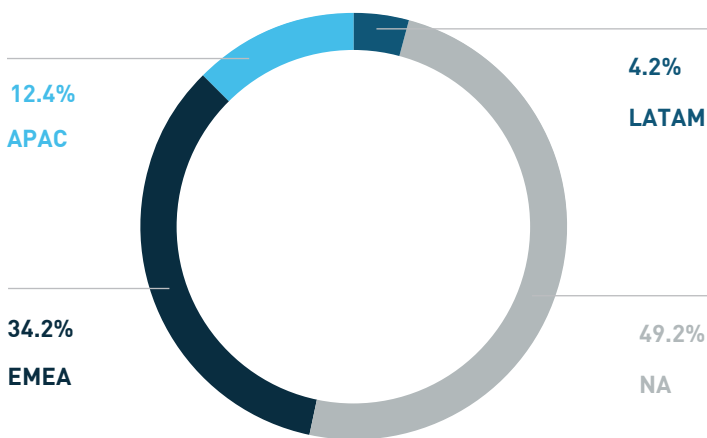
For more information, especially regarding your “how to” questions, please ask your CSO Insights analyst. And, of course, if you haven't done it already, check out our sales enablement book [*Sales Enablement – A Master Framework to Engage, Equip and Empower a World-Class Sales Force.*](#)

APPENDIX: Demographics

The data collection for the 2018 Sales Enablement Study took place from June until mid of August 2018. Respondents were sales executives, sales enablement leaders, sales operations leaders, sales managers and sales professionals representing 513 organizations.

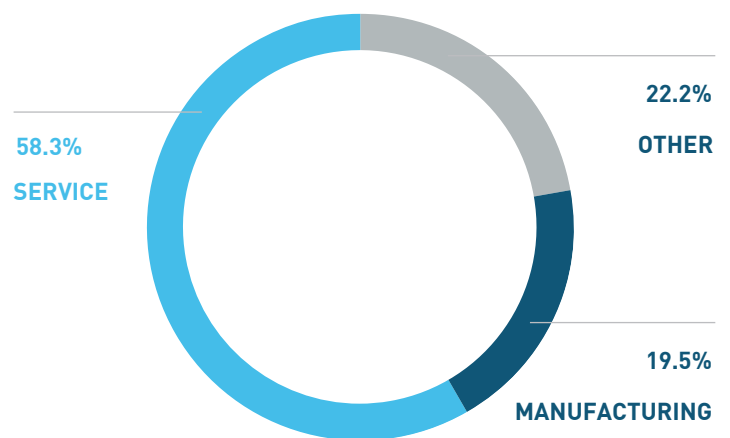
The study represents again perspectives from various regions and industries.

Survey Participants by Region



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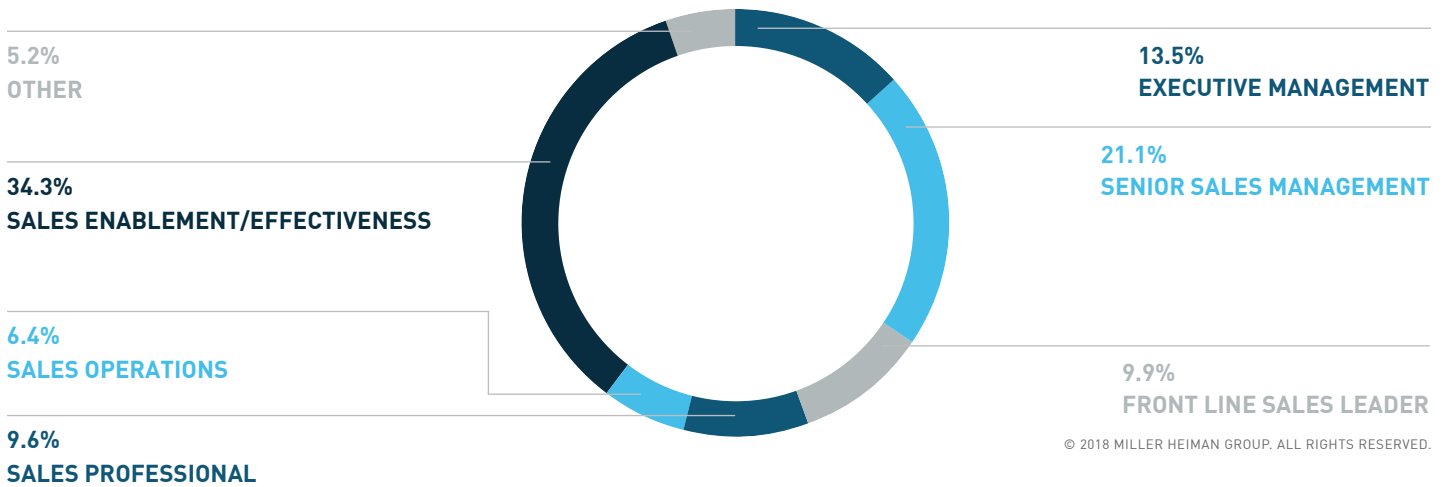
Survey Participants by Industry



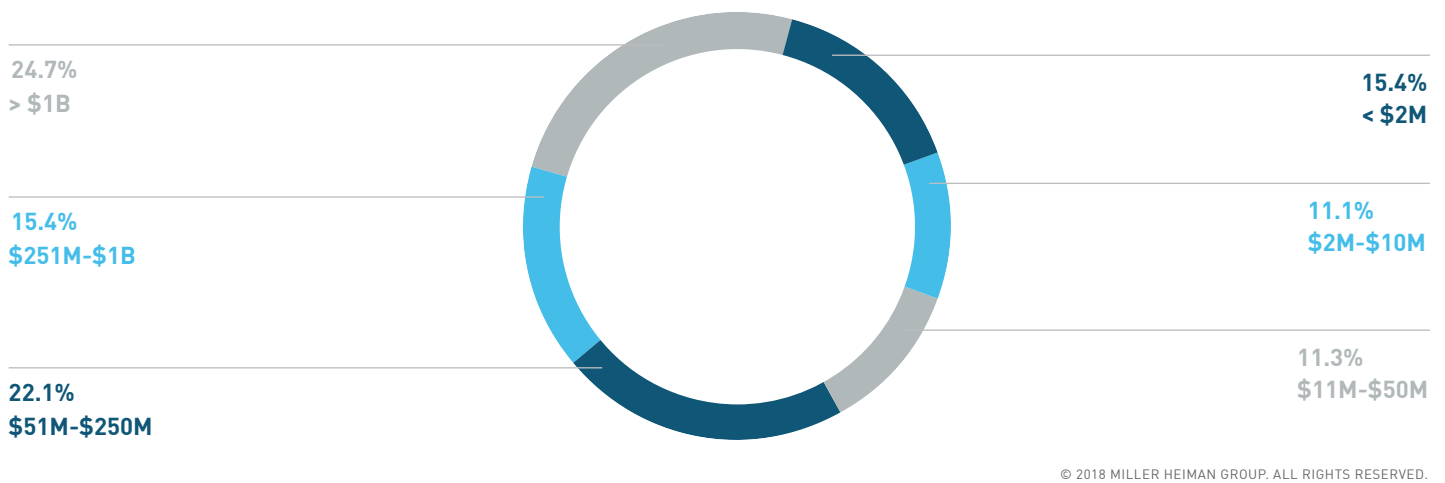
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Regarding roles, the study represents perspectives from different sales roles and hierarchies. And the study participants represent various company sizes.

Survey Participants by Role



Survey Participants by Company Revenue





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