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B2B marketing's sales enablement moment is now

Customer experience starts with the buying and sales experience



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Introduction

Sales enablement: a topic for our times



Joel Harrison,
editor-in-chief,
B2B Marketing

Sales enablement is nothing new, but it could just be a marketing activity whose time has come. As an industry, we've been talking about sales enablement now for 10 years (if not longer), but often in the context of it being something relatively simplistic, undynamic and therefore easy to outsource to agencies. Personally, I've never had a conversation with a CMO or marketing director where they'd expressed particular interest in or passion for sales enablement. Perhaps for that reason, it's typically seen as a background issue, never becoming top priority or taking centre stage.

But all that looks set to change in 2020, for a couple of key reasons. Firstly, the number of martech solutions in this area has grown steadily, and there are now a host of providers offering platforms to enable marketers to deploy sales materials more effectively – and for sales people to use them more effectively. Of course, the availability of technology doesn't solve all our problems overnight, or allow us to transcend to a higher plane of marketing success all by itself, but what tech vendors can do is raise the bar of what 'good' looks like, and open our eyes to what is possible.

The second reason why it might be time to reappraise sales enablement is (you guessed it) Covid-19. At the risk of regurgitating a host of clichés, the virus has turned both sales and marketing on their heads, ruling out face-to-face events and meetings, and generally making buyers harder to reach than ever (amongst many other things). As a consequence, salespeople are relying on marketers as never before, to provide them with the right materials and opportunities to re-engage their audiences, as well as providing the insight and messages to maximise traction, impact and opportunities. In other words, sales enablement.

So, in 2020, it seems that sales enablement has been transformed from a perhaps peripheral and unexciting aspect of B2B marketing, to one that is absolutely critical to success as companies struggle to rebuild. What's more, the explosion of technology means it is increasingly likely to remain a critical function, rather than something that shinks back to the margins as marketing returns to something like normal. Quite simply, sales enablement is now an activity that sales and marketing people dismiss or downplay at their peril.

In this report, we'll explore the state of sales enablement in 2020 and examine how these and other factors are influencing its ongoing evolution and what success will look like in the future. We'll also provide insight and guidance on how to make sales enablement work best for you in the coming months.

Section 1

Digital has changed the role of sales enablement



Peter O'Neill,
lead analyst,
B2B Marketing

There is now a clear drive by companies in most B2B sectors to optimise the customer experience, leading to digital content marketing processes such as customer intelligence and analytics, deeper persona research and personalisation, and interactive media. This improves the experience for both established customers and potential buyers.

However, even with these digital buying experiences, B2B still relies greatly on human interactions, particularly when salespeople meet buyers to discuss a complex purchase or project, or just routine orders for replenishment supplies. In addition to this, digital buying experiences also affect how sellers exchange information with buyers and have, more importantly, changed the expectations of buyers. Just as in the consumer world, B2B buyers now prefer to research products themselves rather than ask a vendor sales rep for information.

This new buying paradigm shifts the roles and focus of B2B marketing and sales. The balance of customer interaction has edged towards the former and the role of sellers has changed: they are part of the buyer journey dialogue instead of leading it. Instead of product features, they are often asked about how a product can be applied to a specific use case or other business-orientated questions. Or they are expected to explain or elaborate on some of the digital content that the buyer may have already researched.

The savvier marketers have already extended their digital marketing processes to directly support sellers with this information, bringing at least these vital benefits:

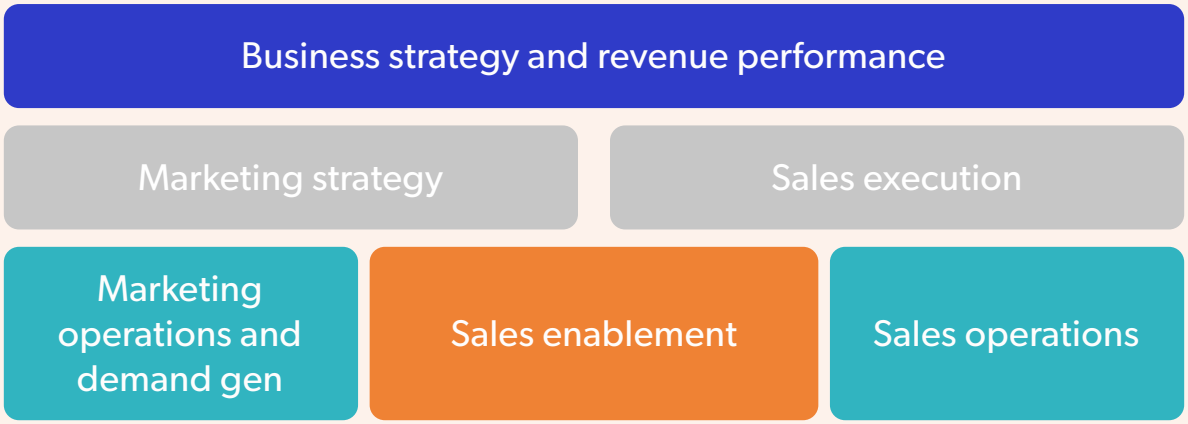
- **Productivity.** Both marketing and sales benefit. Sellers can leverage good digital content, provide value to their contacts, and be a channel for marketing messaging.
- **Brand/message management.** The governance process is automated, although some customisation must be allowed to enable sellers to personalise content.

But there is also much more that marketers can provide to sales. For example, customer intelligence on organisation, intent and research history; or content that can be finalised and tuned by the seller.

The sales enablement moment

Marketing now has an opportunity to cement its alignment with sales by providing those essential services in a digital form. Already, in many companies, the concept of sales enablement (SE) is expanding from its more historical function of organising sales training (usually by a department within the sales organisation), to a more ongoing, on-demand collection of services (including training) provided by many colleagues, but actually mostly by marketing staff. Depending on the organisational structure and business objectives, this emerging role is set up either within marketing or sales – sometimes both. Often, there is no dedicated resource however, and the work is spread across many shoulders. SE processes are also now supported by specific software platforms and there are around 30 SE specialised vendors active in the market, though many companies elect to provide some SE services through their existing marketing automation and CRM platforms.

The supply chain behind sales conversations



B2B Marketing surveyed 177 marketers to find out the state of sales enablement

In April and May, we surveyed 177 B2B marketers in companies of all sizes, small and large, and across all industries, about their SE programmes and challenges. The survey was truly international, reflecting the readership and following of B2B Marketing:

42%

of the companies surveyed are based in North America.

32%

in the UK.

16%

16% in the post-Brexit EU.

10%

in other countries.

78% of the respondents were B2B marketers by job description, while 11% even identified themselves as SE professionals (9% working within marketing).

We also collected similar data from 40 marketing agencies, 92% of whom offer SE services.

This report discusses what SE should consist of, and provides guidance on the organisational and process elements of managing SE effectively. It provides a snapshot of B2B's SE progress, including the most common platforms, plus an overview of some of the challenges faced by practitioners. While it will reveal some industry secrets, plenty of statistics and peer-to-peer advice, the main aim of this report is to ignite a conversation by providing actionable advice. The advice can, hopefully, help to open the debate in your company about the benefits of investing in a SE programme. In addition to staffing, there are now also many software platforms dedicated to SE process automation.

Definition of sales enablement:

'A role fulfilled by all business people involved in enabling their client-facing employees to have valuable conversations with various sets of customer stakeholders. It is the supply chain behind the conversations'

Section 2

The state of sales enablement in B2B marketing

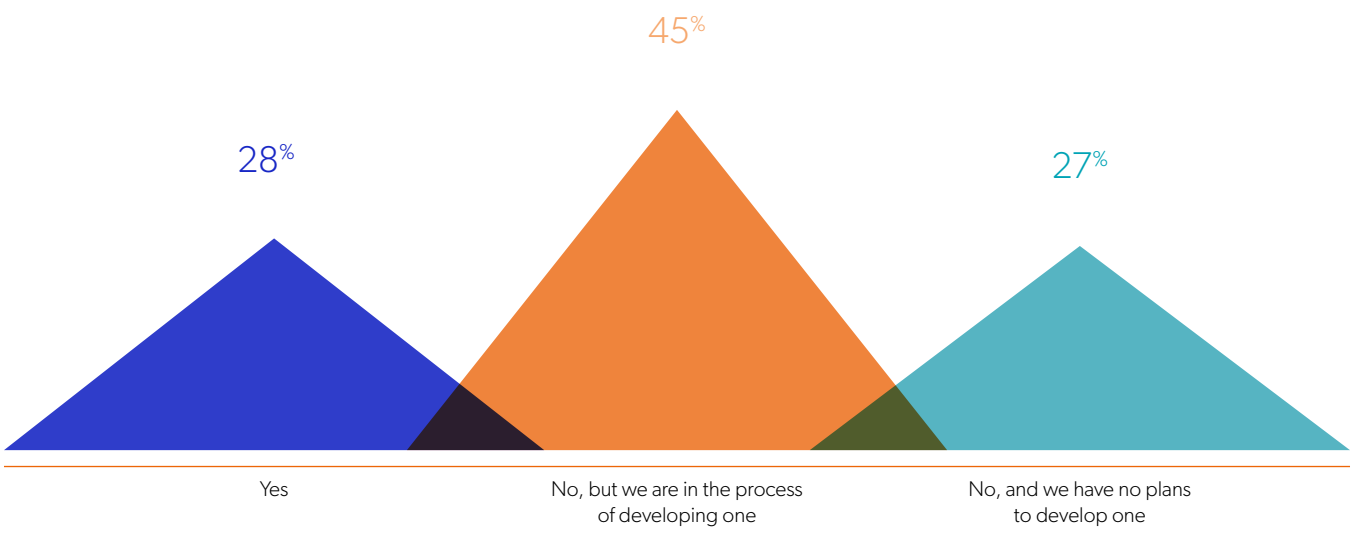
We fielded a series of questions to assess the progress or maturity of SE programmes in B2B, and also collected input about the most important influences or drivers for the programme, as well as the most significant challenges.

Most companies are developing a sales enablement programme

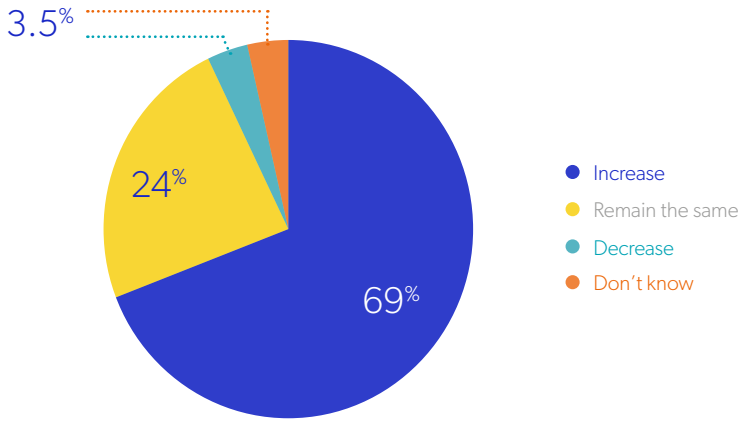
When asked about SE, 28% of the respondents claim that their company has an agreed and documented SE programme, and another 45% report that they are in the process of putting one together. The remaining 27% of respondents have no plans for an SE strategy, citing reasons such as 'company too small' and 'sales force too small'. These are probably the SMEs that replied to the survey with revenues under £1 million (20% of the UK respondents), under $1 million (18% of North American respondents) or €1 million (10% of the EU respondents).

The vast majority (69%) of companies expect to increase their team's SE deployment in the next 12 months. Other, even more recent, research carried out by B2B Marketing indicates that the Covid-19 health and economic crisis is changing the buying process even more radically than assumed, and the changes will probably be permanent, so there is now an increased sense of urgency in SE.

Do you have an agreed and documented sales enablement programme?



In the next 12 months, do you expect your team's deployment of sales enablement to...



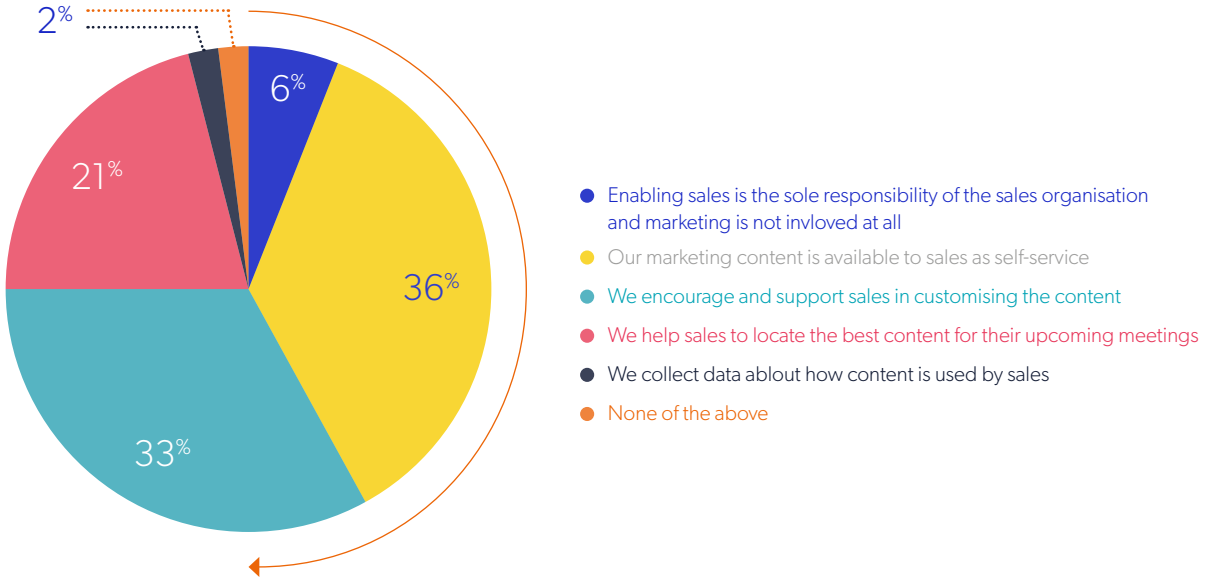
Providing content to sales is now almost routine

Providing digital content to and through sales is usually the first marketing activity of SE, and most respondents reported some experience with this process. The options listed in the question below form a higher-level maturity model, from no activity at all (6%), through to the most mature state of collecting data on sales' deployment of the content (2%).

The response therefore shows that B2B overall is at the mid-stage of maturity – perhaps a little lower even, because more detailed responses reveal that many companies offer content to sales as a self-service via Microsoft SharePoint, not the most sophisticated CMS, let alone SE technology available.

Supporting seller customisation of the provided content, or collecting data on content usage by sellers, or even consumption by buyers, is now also possible with a dedicated SE platform.

Which of the following best describes your organisation's current sales enablement status?

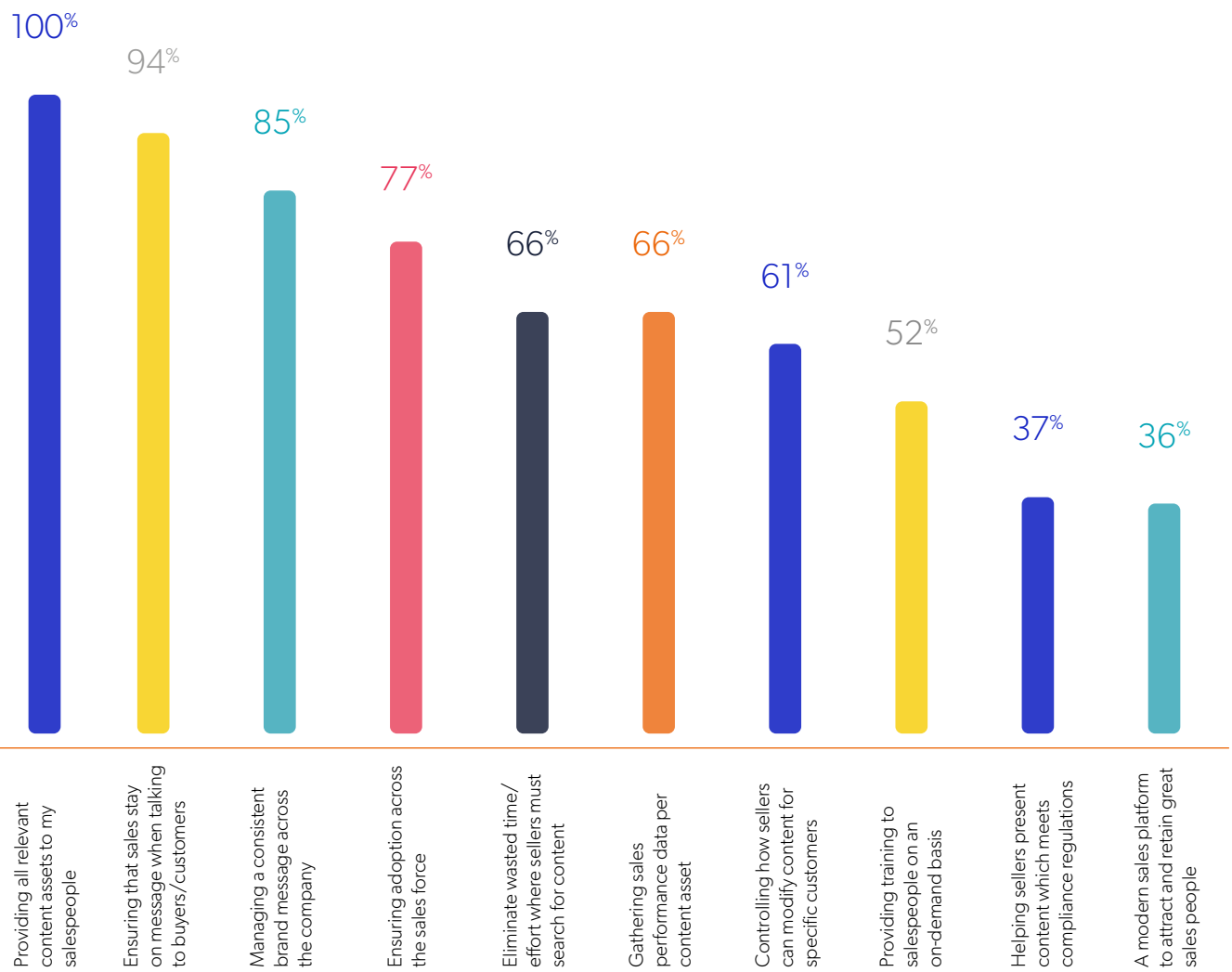


Brand and content management is the major driver for sales enablement

When asked which factors are most taken into account when developing an SE programme, the respondents assigned a priority list of influences or drivers. Every respondent selected 'providing content assets to my salespeople' and 94% of them selected 'ensuring that sales stay on message'. Third in the priority list, with 85%, was 'managing a consistent brand message'.

There were some interesting 'other' influence factors also named, spanning from 'it's throwing spaghetti at the wall' to 'quality of customer experience'. Some of the comments reflect conflict and dissatisfaction between marketing and sales which is disturbing – 'tracking seller performance on MQLs' seems a little subjective and not conducive to the commonly-agreed alignment goal in B2B marketing.

Which of these 10 factors influence your sales enablement programme? Please rank the ones you work to with 1 being the most important influence factor.



The biggest barrier to success is adoption

The survey asked about the most significant barriers faced in adopting an SE programme. The response indicates that sales continues to be the most challenging cohort in businesses in terms of agreeing to use business tools: a phenomenon which began with the launch of CRM projects decades ago. 42% of respondents cited 'adoption with the sales organisation'.

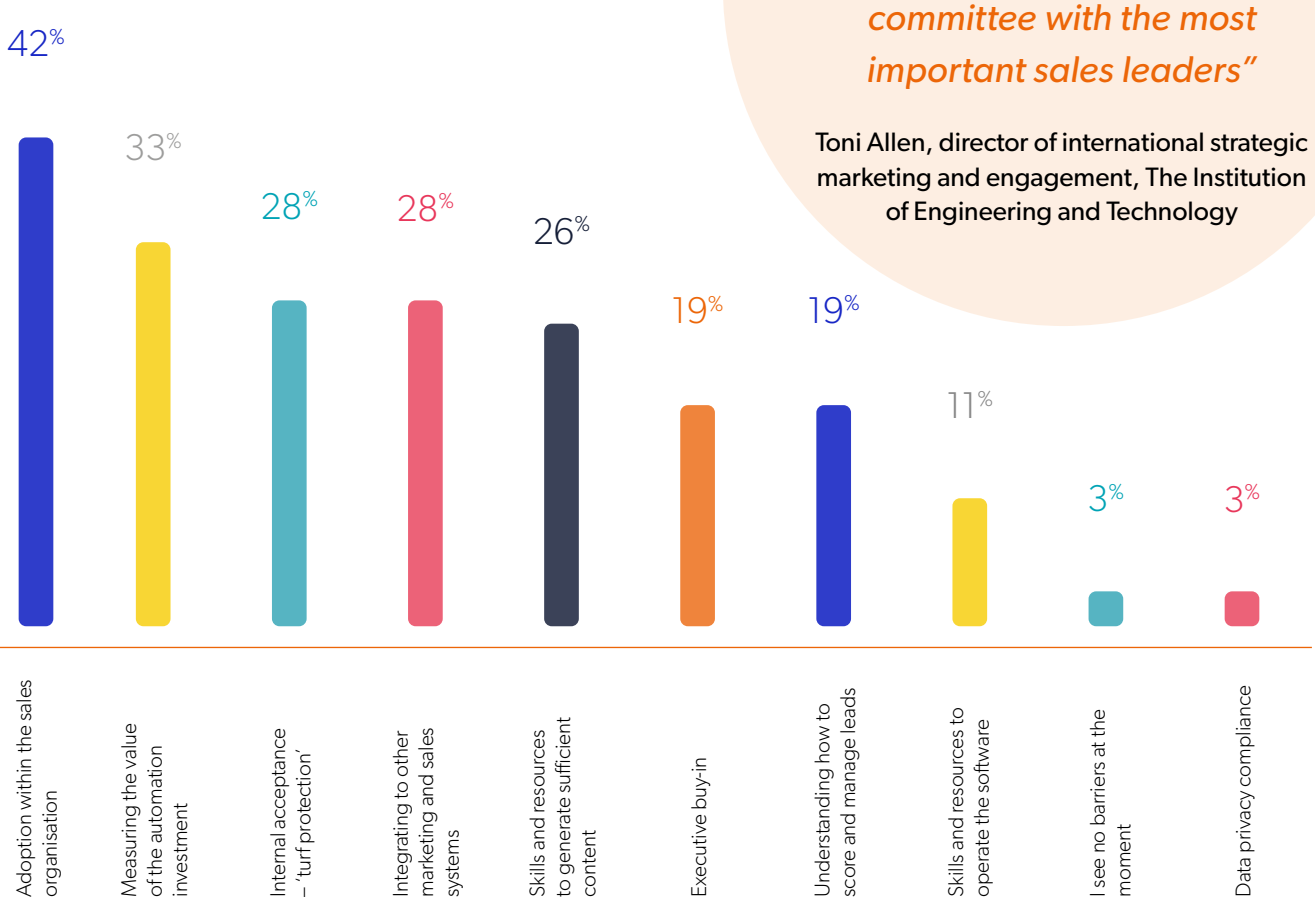
This is not necessarily sellers resisting technology progress – many of them even have their own digital tools for SE and would be reluctant to replace it with a company-supplied system, especially as the company's system implies monitoring and control. Another challenge, partly behind the adoption challenge, and highlighted separately by the 'turf protection' barrier (28%), is the resistance of sales executives to allow marketing so much access to their teams.

The hurdle of 'measuring the value', named as the #2 barrier (33%) is surmountable. Most SE projects can be financially justified through a simple time and motion study of how much effort sellers expend to search for suitable content on their own.

"When I led the sales enablement project at BSI, I immediately co-opted a steering group called the sales and marketing excellence committee with the most important sales leaders"

Toni Allen, director of international strategic marketing and engagement, The Institution of Engineering and Technology

What would be or were the most significant barriers you face/faced in adopting a sales enablement programme? Select up to two.



Section 3

Addressing sales enablement goals

The survey continued with some questions about specific elements of SE: training, content and customer insights.

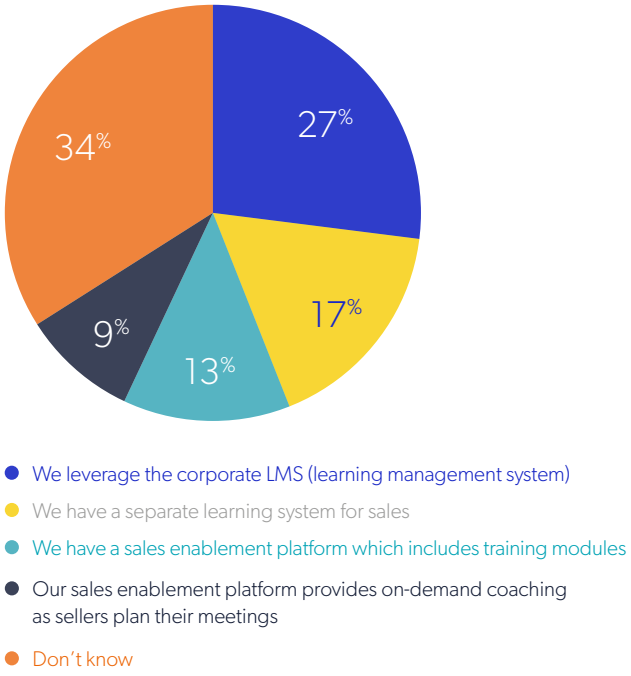
B2B sales training is mostly static with room for improvement

When asked who is responsible for seller training, 33% reported that there is a resource for that in the sales organisation. 15%, meanwhile, have the resource in marketing, and a significant 37% said 'it depends on the project', which would imply that there is actually nobody responsible – a product manager training the sales team before a launch should not count as sales enablement.

The next question was about whether there is a software platform in place for seller education. An incredible 34% (the #1 response to this question) replied 'don't know' – a worrying indication of how little attention some B2B marketers afford to the sales process of their own company. It's no wonder that marketing/sales alignment is a challenge in these cases. Some 27% of the companies revealed that the corporate learning management system (LMS) is used for sales training, while 13% have a separate sales training system.

34% don't know if they have a software platform in place for seller education

Do you have a software platform for seller training and education?



Sales executives commonly object to their people spending too much time in training, especially on products or concepts they may not even need. So, the ideal sales training scenario would be a system that pushed out training, or coaching modules, to sellers just before they really need it. In the survey, just 9% of companies are able to provide this on-demand coaching to their sellers.

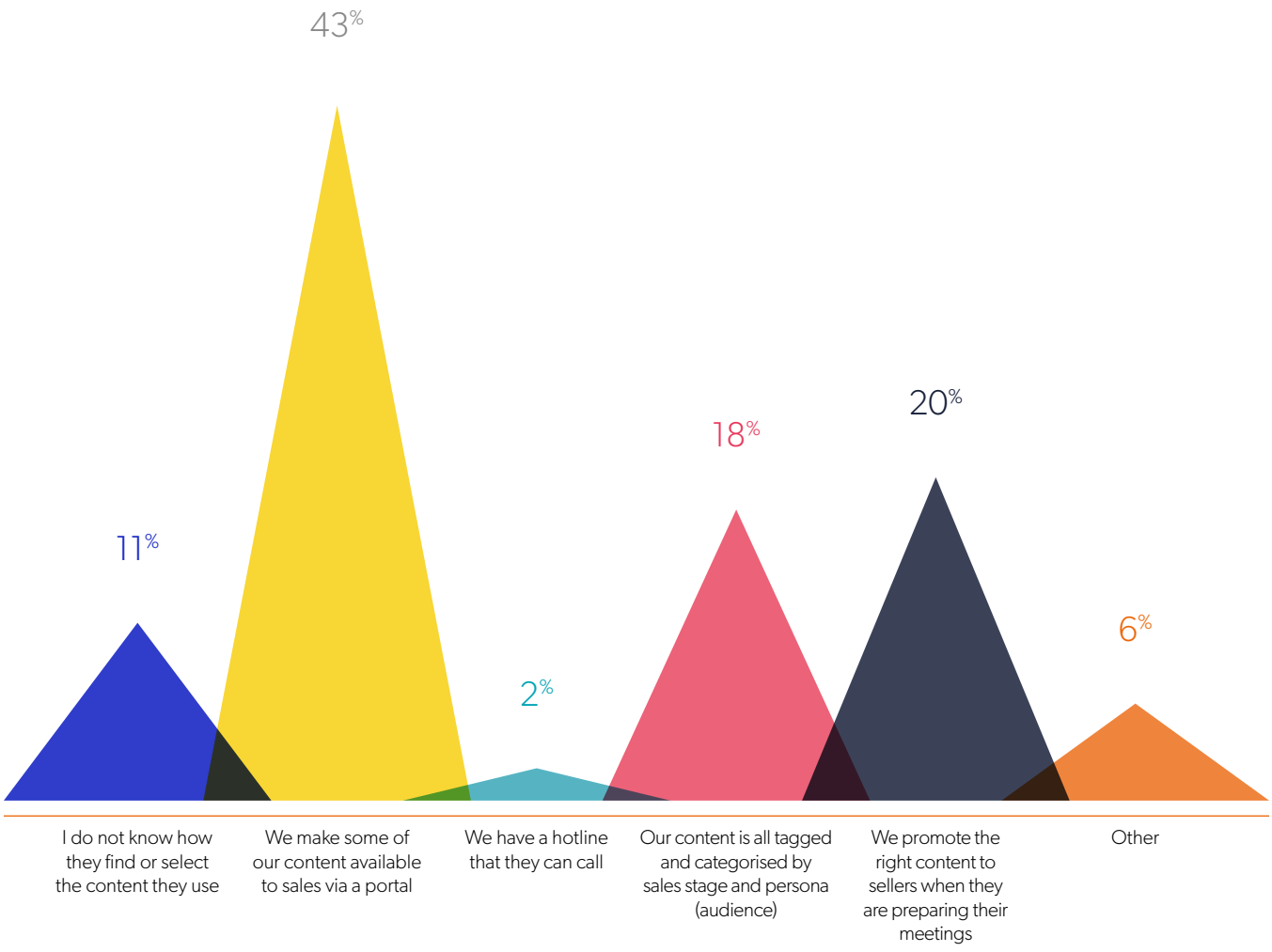
Digital marketing can support this scenario, and many marketers now do this for their digital audiences by identifying what needs to be presented/displayed and rendering content accordingly. Sometimes, sales enablement is just the realisation that sellers can be part of marketing's digital audience too.

Providing content to sellers is still pull/self-service in many companies

Around half of the respondents stated that they make content available to sales via a portal, which does not sound very proactive, dynamic, or helpful. But 18% of companies do tag their content pieces by sales stage and or persona, in order to help their colleagues decide whether the content applies to their next meeting. An encouraging 20% also stated that they even promote or recommend content to sellers according to their meeting scenario. However, another frightening 11% of B2B marketers admitted they do not know how their sales colleagues find suitable content at all.

While 13% of companies have separate sales content management software, 16% reported that they have an SE platform which channels content to sales. These companies are then also able to monitor how the content is deployed and then make decisions about the success of that content project.

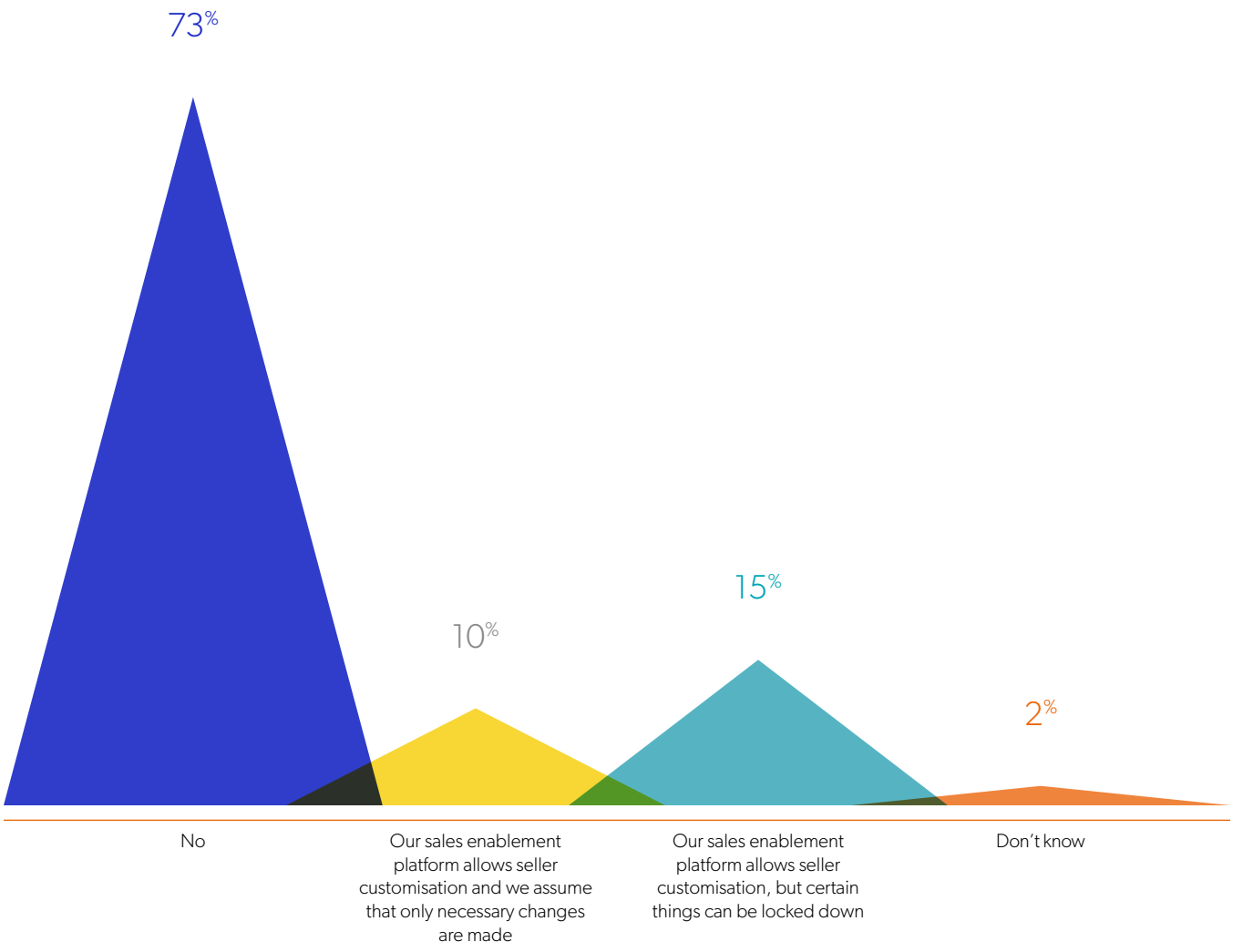
How do your sellers find suitable content to use in their conversations?



Ensuring that sales stay on-message was the #2 driver for SE in a previous question, but companies seem to rely mainly on trust to achieve that objective. When asked about how they address the challenge of message governance, 49% of respondents reported that they merely ship out the 'corporate slide deck and expect', and 29% of the companies also hold regular training sessions. An outstanding 73% of companies do not have any software that ensures message governance, although brand management and SE software for this task has been available for over 10 years now.

One quarter of companies use their SE software platform for this purpose.

Do you have a software platform that ensures message governance?



Customer insights are rarely shared

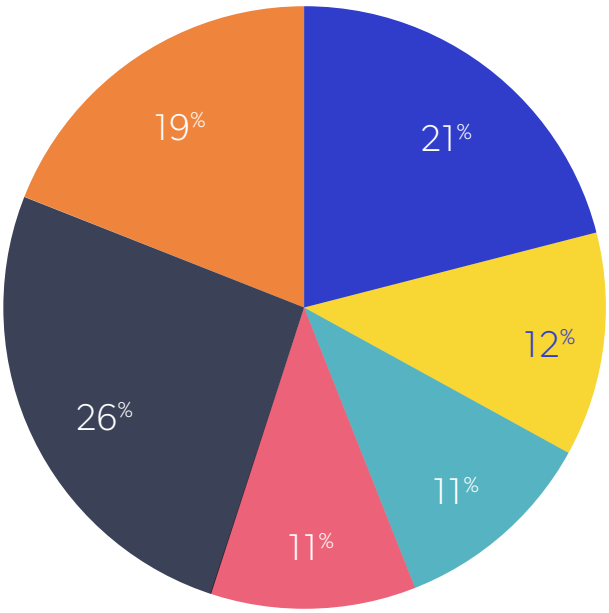
Many B2B marketing organisations now have extensive market/customer data gathering systems in place around their digital marketing programmes, which generate predictive analytics on buyer preferences, and even intent. But less than a quarter (22%) of respondents share this data with sales.

12% percent admit that they only use the data for marketing purposes and do not share. One in five (21%) of the respondents know of resources in the sales organisation also collecting data about customers, and therefore presumably do not see the need for sharing. Realistically though, this data is more likely to be contact-data cleansing or perhaps organisational data within an account as provided by services like LinkedIn Sales Navigator. Sales operations is hardly likely to have access to analytics from the digital marketing systems.

So, around one third of companies are missing a golden opportunity to help their sales colleagues with behavioural analysis and, more importantly, the research history of individual contacts. Buyers continue to be frustrated by sellers wanting to hand over a white paper or webinar invitation which they already obtained themselves.

Just 8% of companies have an SE platform which provides predictive analytics with sellers.

Do you provide insights on a contact's research to date and current information to sellers?



"The era of marketing and sales behaving like two separate entities is over. There must be a full alignment of both roles working together and helping each other. But they then need to be looking at the same data when collaborating on helping customers succeed"

Toni Allen, director of international strategic marketing and engagement, The Institution of Engineering and Technology

Section 4

B2B marketing agencies and their sales enablement practices

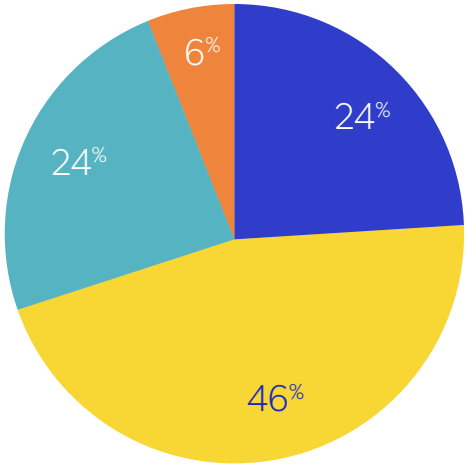
Almost all marketing agencies do sales enablement work

We interviewed 50 marketing agencies separately on the topic to find out how they are set up to help clients on SE projects. Only one of them never provides SE services and three others only do it rarely. The rest are active with SE services, and 40% claim that it is a core part of their positioning.

They are also being engaged to do this work, with nearly a quarter of the agencies reporting that SE services count for over 50% of their total revenues, while another 46% still book more than 10% of their revenues with SE work.

Interestingly, 48% of the agency respondents report that they get their SE project work from marketing and sales in partnership. It would seem that the outside influence is helping many companies along their marketing/sales alignment journey.

How significant are sales enablement projects as part of your total client revenue?



- They make up a significant portion of revenue – 50% or more
- They make up a small but important part of our revenue – 10-50%
- It's only a small part of our revenue – less than 10%
- I have no idea

Mostly, agencies help to create content for sales

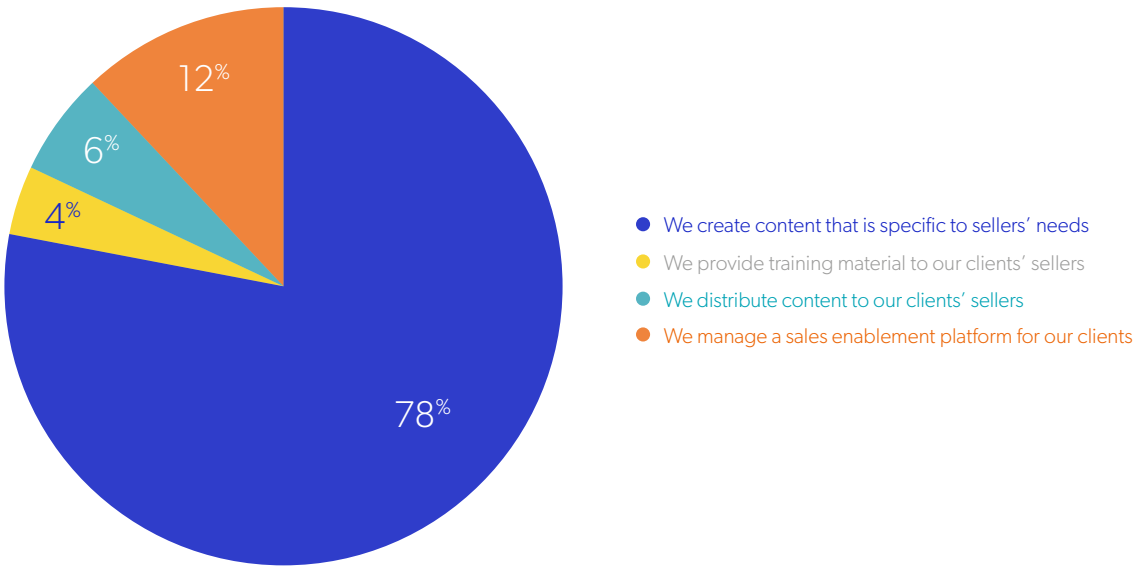
Four out of five agencies are engaged in creating content specific to sellers' needs, including providing training material. A significant 12% even run an SE platform for their client.

An overwhelming 74% of the agencies expect their SE business to grow in the next year.

"We enjoy our role as third-party facilitator, helping to bring marketing and sales together on the same page and appreciate each other's perspective. Many of our clients have active ABM programmes and that tends to bring marketing and sales together in their work"

Alisha Lyndon, CEO, MomentumABM

Which of the following types of sales enablement services do you offer?



Section 5

Vendors for sales enablement

The general tone in many marketing conferences, including the 2020 Get Stacked conference, is that technology vendors are not always particularly helpful. They are extremely aggressive in their marketing, and the barrage of content marketing that they broadcast is not always perceived as educational or evangelical. In fact, it seems to almost shame marketers into investing in more and more software. They are also similarly aggressive in their selling and many anecdotal comments collected in the survey related to that behaviour.



Most valued vendor improvements

The survey included the open and constructive question: 'How do you feel vendors can support you better?'. The numerous statements entered sort into these four desired areas of improvement:

40%

Provide more business orientation (use cases, processes, language).

29%

Provide more guidance and responsiveness (training, support).

14%

Reduce the amount and tone of salesmanship.

17%

Improve integration to other elements of the martech stack.

The SE software market is just moving on from its initial adoption phase.

Here are individual comments collected from the survey which illustrate the sentiments well.

1. More business orientation

- "Be more clear about the solution."
- "Show clear ROI that motivates executives."
- "Help to build business cases for management and talk to my boss."
- "Communicate the benefits and business case."
- "Tailor offering to our specific processes/tech stack and show how it will deliver results."
- "Provide relevant content with new ideas I can use to make an impact."

2. More guidance and responsiveness

- "Make it simpler to use and understand."
- "Provide regular training to the marketing organisation."
- "Proactive communication around training."
- "More comparisons, integrations and customisation."

3. Reduce salesmanship

- "Be more honest about capabilities, some are glorified file managers."
- "Differentiate between needed capabilities versus the next shiny object capabilities."
- "Simplify the sales presentation and address our issues."
- "Stop selling the dream and present viable solutions."

4. Improve integration

- "Working better with my existing platforms."
- "Better integration."
- "Integrate with CRM or other parts of already existing tech stack."
- "Better vendor integration, connectors and pre-defined APIs."

Most valuable players named in this survey

The feedback was not all negative or critical. As a balance, we also asked the following open question: 'Which is your most useful piece of sales enablement technology and why? Please state the specific brand platform name.' We received lots of interesting answers. Six vendors specifically were named by a multitude of respondents and therefore earn a 'most valuable player' (MVP) recognition.

The MVP award from the 2020 SE survey goes to Salesforce. Comments about Salesforce included the following:

- "Central source of contact and interaction data."
- "To track lead progression."

A clear second-place for MVP was earned by Hubspot with comments such as:

- "Providing CRM, marketing and sales tools."
- "The central platform for us."
- "Full lifecycle management."

Third placed in the voting was SharePoint, which is still the most common tool used to share content across a company. Honourable recognition was also earned by LinkedIn Sales Navigator, Seismic and Showpad.

A further five vendors got one or two citations each.

The industry analyst company Research in Action recently surveyed 1500 businesses globally about their SE software vendors and the top 15 vendors based upon their ratings were as follows:

1. Seismic
2. Clearslide
3. Showpad
4. Brainshark
5. Highspot
6. SaleSphere
7. Bigtincan
8. SAP
9. Mediafly
10. Pitcher
11. SalesLoft
12. Apparound
13. CustomShow
14. Prolifiq
15. Accent Technologies

Although the user scores do produce a ranking, the list above is more of a 'vendor landscape' – it lists those vendors who are the most highly regarded by users for automation of SE process (or family of processes). Due to geographical, segmentation and functional differences, it is not always a list of direct competitors. In fact, most companies deployed at least two to cover their needs. This is a software market perhaps coming to the end of its 'early-adopter' phase and about to mature, aggregate and consolidate.



Section 6

Recommendations and call-to-action

The digital B2B buyer journey is, itself, driving the alignment of sales and marketing teams. The average B2B buyer interacts with a brand six to eight times before becoming a viable sales lead: typically engagements with ads, emails or content downloads from a website – all orchestrated by the marketing department. But often, a lead is passed to sales with little or no information about those interactions.

This disconnect leaves sales teams in the dark about how a buyer gets from the initial interaction with a salesperson to conversion. This information is crucial for both marketers and salespeople to do their jobs effectively in the future. Without this insight, it's difficult to determine how to effectively guide future prospects toward a deal or strategise marketing efforts moving forward.

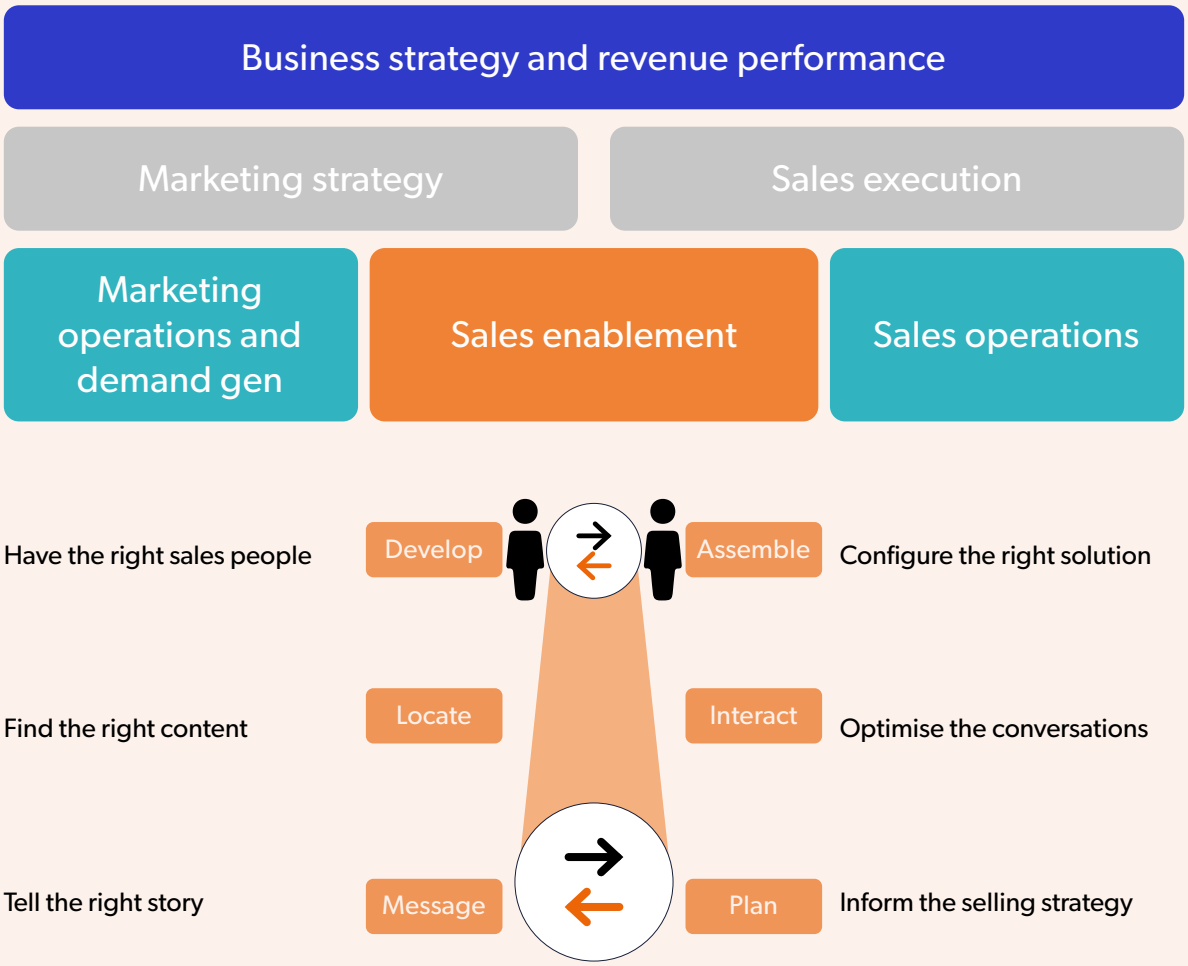
Introducing sales enablement

The progress is a golden opportunity for B2B marketers to share their knowhow and expertise and help sellers look good in front of buyers. The perennial goal of marketing/sales alignment depends heavily on mutual trust and respect, and that would be easy to obtain with a successful SE programme. An SE programme with a full supply chain of services and processes addressing the competencies now required in a digital business world; providing content and training on a dynamic and responsive platform; and helping sellers to configure the right solutions for their customers quickly.

"B2B marketing has moved from a sequential process of collecting and nurturing leads and asking sales to close out. The buyer now controls the process, so firms must offer a unified buying experience where marketing and sales don't pass the lead baton but actually share it: sometimes carrying it together, other times trusting one another to progress the interaction appropriately"

Alisha Lyndon, CEO, MomentumABM

The supply chain behind sales conversations





The typical sequence of an SE project goes through these five stages of maturity:

1. Improve sales training. The training content matures from pure product training to more customer-centric arguments, plus industry and business education. The media becomes more digital and it includes methodology and playbook concepts for the more sophisticated organisations. At this point, SE is usually organised by sales only.

2. Provide sales with digital content – passive. Marketing provides digital content with sales. This begins with a shared, self-service portal.

3. Promote content to sales proactively. The process becomes more powerful with the introduction of dedicated SE software platforms which spread content to mobile devices and/or microsites, support customisation and collect usage and consumption data. As discussed above, this allows marketing to manage the brand and the message much better.

4. Add customer insights. Marketing now routinely collects and leverages website visitor, customer, and even third-party data and uses predictive analytics to improve the digital content they render. The next stage in SE is to leverage these insights to inform sellers about their contacts or accounts before meetings, passively as self-service or even proactively with alerts and predictions.

5. Integrate to other sales systems. A later-stage SE project is the integration of the above SE solutions with other regular processes that sellers must manage, such as the sales proposal process. One consideration among sales executives is how many applications a seller has time to work with and they prefer this number to be held at a minimum. Many SE platform installations must be embedded into the CRM system because that is the dashboard #1 for the seller. Another element of SE integration is when the SE content management function can recognise and provide a digital sales training module, on-demand, in context to the sales scenario about to be addressed.

The survey used as the basis for this report was built around this maturity model and can be leveraged to monitor and plan the progress of SE over time.

Sales enablement is as much B2B marketing as ABM

B2B marketer, your sales organisation is not the other game in town that you are competing with, or ignoring. They are your human route to market, another channel of communication. We encourage you to plan an SE initiative and take advantage of this opportunity. Ultimately, the SE role will fulfil, or at least ensure, several functions or goals around training, content and customer insights.

The six goals of sales enablement

- **Training** on company brand values, product and benefits, and sales methods.
- **Message.** Helping sellers to fully represent the value proposition (brand promise) of the company.
- **Content.** Finding the right piece of content for the right customer at the right time.
- **Providing insights** on a contact's research to date and current information needs.
- **Deployment** of an innovative media platform to share content with buyers.
- **Assembly** of presentations, proposals or price configurations as quickly as possible.

Some of you will be able to improve marketing/sales alignment by just extending your current marketing automation processes and/or better-integrating your MA with the CRM or SFA systems. Others will want to invest in a new SE platform that does quite a bit more. Either way, here are some important points to consider:

› Address sales adoption from day one

The most successful SE projects will need to focus on providing the optimal selling experience. Consider sales to be your customer for content, training and insights; research their needs first; and provide the information in the forms and technologies that they prefer.

› Compare various SE platforms

Please do not sign-up to the first SE vendor that calls. For the SE vendors, it is gold rush time currently and the SE software demos are all impressive – flowing PowerPoint presentations and running on tablet devices. Ensure there are standard interfaces to the systems that matter in your company; look for an empathetic user interface and adaptability in the software; and, perhaps most importantly, ensure it supports those devices that your sellers use. Sellers are already collecting a massive number of apps onto their devices through their own efforts. The SE system of choice needs to be visible, and recognised as important by the sellers, among that forest. It has to earn its adoption, based on ease of use, accessibility, comfort and applicability to the sellers' daily tasks.

› Assign an SE programme manager high up in the organisation

Unless you set up a team of 5–10 people, the SE goals listed above cannot be achieved by your SE programme manager alone. Much of the work will be done by colleagues in other departments with encouragement and assistance from the SE programme: creating content, cranking data, providing training modules. Executive support across the organisation is, therefore, critical.

B2B marketing's sales enablement moment is now

B2B buyers now rely the very least on what they are told by the potential supplier – neither the website or, even less, the salesperson. They have given up on many sales meetings because they perceive the seller as only trying to deliver the company or product pitch at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of cutting through that noise, the seller has to become more empathetic to what the buyer is seeking. Let us assume that the buyer no longer responds to cold calls anymore, so that means that salespeople are only getting meetings based upon a buyer request. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis has accelerated the adoption of a new dialogue form in the business world: remote meetings supported by technology that shares content.

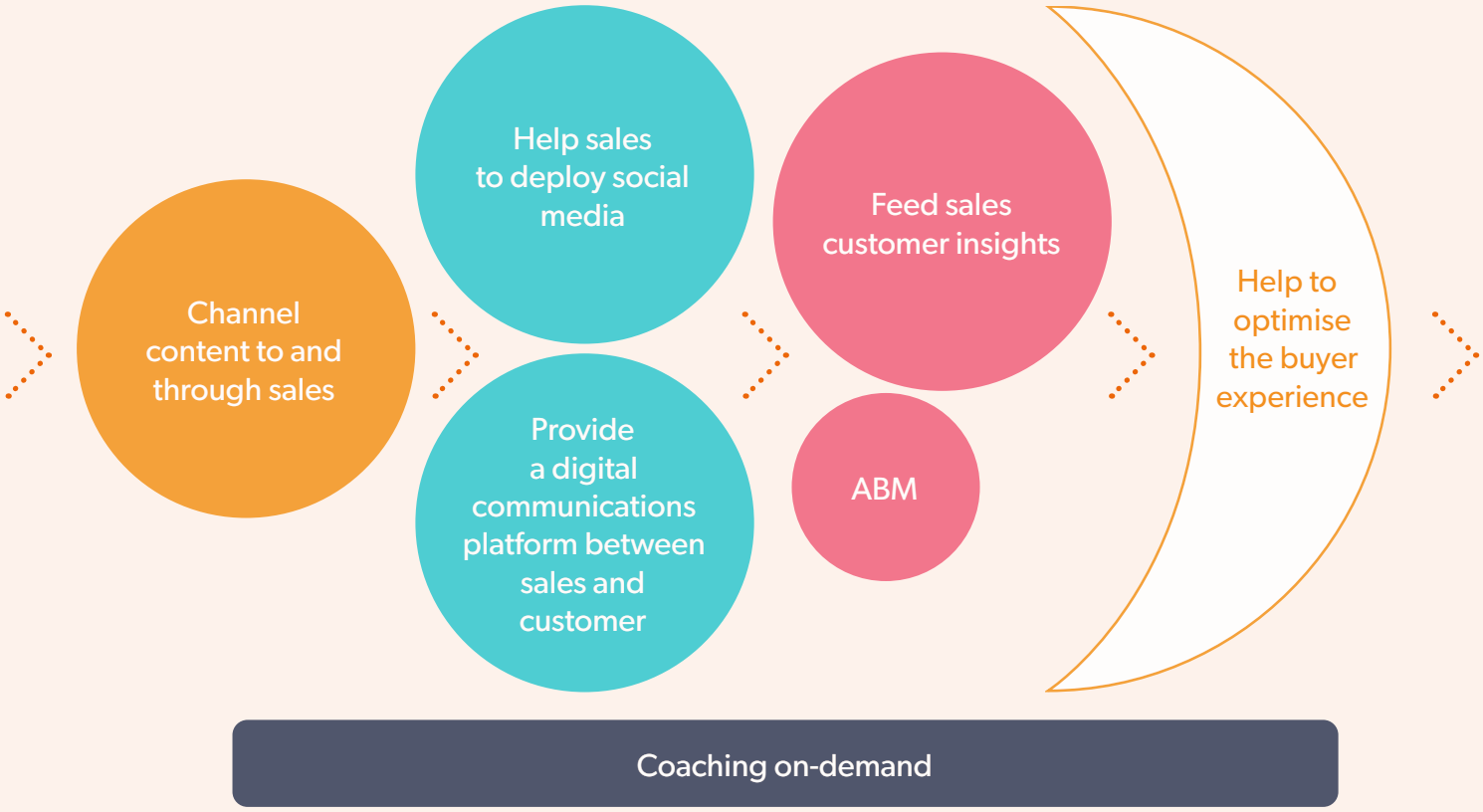
Marketing has the chance to impose itself into the supply chain to sales before that meeting, in order to prepare the seller properly. What is the buyer looking for in the meeting? What does the buyer already know about you? What type of role does the buyer have in the buying decision? Sales know they need this information and will appreciate the assistance.

"Our partners in sales appreciate the technology we've adopted. We're helping them stay in contact with their customers, and also providing market intelligence and advice on topics to discuss. Covid-19 has placed a spotlight on our sales and marketing alignment"

Tracey Schroeder, senior director global marketing, Ingredion

B2B marketing's SE would be a system that has gathered and prepared all that information – and puts it at the fingertips of the seller before the meeting.

The sales enablement moment is now



Buyers now compare suppliers based on their experience. They want relevant, personalised information that speaks to their needs and where they are in the sales cycle. Based on research from Salesforce, over half (59%) of customers say tailored engagement based on past interactions is very important to winning their business.

Beyond the changing behaviours and higher expectations of modern buyers, marketers also still struggle to overcome one of their most persistent challenges: linking their work to revenue generation, especially for mid or bottom-of-funnel content not easy to track in website analytics. A lack of visibility into content usage and impact on sales pipeline means marketing must make assumptions when creating and updating collateral for sellers.

Making sure salespeople have messaging and collateral that successfully addresses buyer pain points will drive deeper alignment between sales and marketing teams as they address the same challenge together. Now is the optimal time to make impactful changes that support marketing teams and improve business operations as a whole.

SE strategies that incorporate content, training and coaching, and possibly powered by technology, allow CMOs to tackle their key challenges head on: demonstrating the financial impact of marketing, improving team efficiency and keeping sellers on-brand and on-message, all while increasing alignment between sales and marketing teams.

Next steps and call-to-action

Now is the moment to turn possible complications into a true competitive advantage by introducing SE. We suggest that marketing executives initiate a discussion with their sales peers about how they can contribute in SE. They will be receptive. The following action plan is recommended:

1. Research phase

Collect your own picture of how sales find (or do not find) content to use in their meetings; how and what they want to customise; and how much time this takes. Also make a note of the devices and possibly software they already deploy. Assess how your existing content management system(s) (CMS) could be extended to include sales as a target or even distribution channel. Is your content even tagged according to sales' needs (sales stage, persona, call-to-action)? Meet with marketing and sales executives, plus some sellers, and solicit initial agreement on the problem.

2. Proposal phase

The data you have collected should be enough to enable you to create a business proposal for investments in process, resources and perhaps technology to support an SE initiative. Be relevant with your project proposal; an SE objective is not to sell more product or increase revenues, but to achieve something like 'increase selling time during the seller's day' (i.e. less time wasted looking for content around the company or in a portal), or 'increase the percentage of successful sales conversations'.

3. Preparation phase

Plan how marketing can restructure and organise its content for sales use. Is a different CMS necessary? Plan to incorporate 'sales content' in your SE system – usually content for internal use, such as battle cards, templates, case studies, conversation guides, etc. Trigger your colleagues producing your predictive analytics data to enhance their processes and output for the sales audience.

4. Technology selection and/or modification

If you need an SE software platform, go through the vendor selection process and select the most suitable solution that fits your needs and technology scenario (see above recommendations). If you are able to meet your SE goals with your existing platforms, plan which modifications are necessary and set those projects into motion.

5. Launch phase

Many companies promote a new SE initiative on the back of a new product introduction, or a new market launch, or even a new deployment of a device to sales such as a pre-configured tablet. As with any business process automation project, success (i.e. adoption) will depend on adequate provision of training, assistance and hotline support. Also, the classical project marketing tasks of early successes being captured and promoted; satisfied users being documented and encouraged to coach colleagues; and early collection of the promised benefits data as a proof-point.

6. Operating phase

When the SE processes get into full production and the software is routinely being used, you will be able to collect data about content usage and effectiveness. There will also invariably be feedback about the processes and technology. On an ongoing basis, review your SE programme and resources and make adjustments accordingly. If you have set up an SE platform, that will be a SaaS solution and you will want to re-justify the value of that investment, or even increase it, when the time comes to renew the subscription.

According to Harvard Business School Professor Frank Cespedes, the sum that companies spend on their sales force (totalling $900 billion annually in the US) dwarfs all other budget items: 20x their digital marketing spend, 3x their total media spend and 100x their social media spend. But across the companies, 50% of employees are not able to describe their company's strategy to an outsider, and that proportion increases the closer to customers the employee is working. The SE programmes proposed here will help to improve the communication of brand and offering to potential buyers: the fundamental role of marketing.

About

B2B Marketing

With hundreds of thousands of users across the globe, we are the leading trusted voice at the centre of the B2B marketing community.

B2B Marketing members are kept up to date with the latest strategies, insight and inspiration from the B2B marketing space, through our dedicated:

- Research and analysis
- News
- Information portal
- Events
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- Networking.

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Our Premium membership package delivers outstanding value, and is the go-to choice for thousands of senior-level B2B marketers, decision-makers and leaders.

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- Put your best-ever strategies in place.
- Lock down the multiple skills, tools and insights you need.
- Find real-world inspiration for rolling out outstanding marketing initiatives.

How to get started

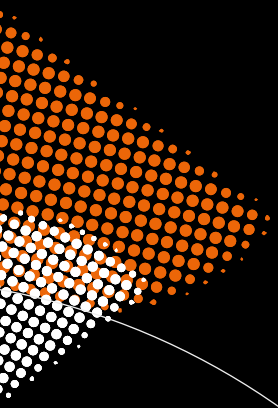
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