Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference Key Take-Aways

May 17 – 18, 2021  |  Americas  |  Virtual

Transform Sales for the Future of Buying
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Conference Features

While Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference 2021 was virtual, that didn’t stop our attendees from connecting. With multiple opportunities to engage with sales leader peers and Gartner experts, there was no shortage of networking.

The CSO Circle
The CSO Circle allowed chief sales officers to partake in an exclusive program within the overall agenda, including a Fireside Chat with guest keynote speaker Carla Harris.

One-on-one sessions
A 30-minute one-on-one consultation with a Gartner expert provided targeted, personalized advice to help each attendee plan proactively and invest wisely.

Ask the Expert sessions
These topic-driven sessions provided a more intimate discussion forum where one Gartner expert answered questions posed by end-user attendees. Topics covered included virtual events, sales data and analytics, and indirect channel optimization.

Roundtables
In these topic-driven end-user forums, moderated by Gartner experts, attendees got the opportunity to learn what their peers are doing around particular issues and across different industries. Topics included frontline manager effectiveness, demand generation strategies and sales enablement.

Gartner Magic Quadrant
Attendees discovered how well the sales training services market is executing against its stated vision and what products best suited their particular use cases.
Attendee Demographics

Our attendees represented a variety of industries, titles and countries. Take a deeper dive and find out what the top 5 most popular one-on-one topics were.

**Number of attendees**
1,900+

**Top 5 industries**
- Technology and telecom
- Manufacturing
- Banking, finance and insurance
- Healthcare
- Services

**Top enterprise sizes**
- XX-Large
- X-Large
- Small
- Medium
- Large

**Top job titles**
- Vice president
- CSO or C-level
- Director
- Management

**Top one-on-one meeting topics**
1. Customer acquisition and retention
2. Marketing leadership and strategy
3. Sales enablement
4. Sales operations
5. Sales strategy and leadership
Exhibitors

Premier Exhibitors

- CHORUS
- conga
- GONG
- HIGHSPOT
- MindTickle
- modus
- salesforce
- SEISMIC
- Showpad

Platinum Exhibitors

- Anaplan
- conversica
- groove
- Outreach
- ringDNA
- vidyard
Gartner Keynote

Rewriting B2B Selling for Digital Buying

B2B buyers’ increasing use of digital means suppliers must rethink how they sell. Brent Adamson showed how the answer lies in the very different way humans engage with digital information. Ironically, that difference makes it harder not only for suppliers to sell but for buyers to buy, at least with confidence. And therein is a huge opportunity for the best suppliers to sell very differently.

3 key take-aways

• 43% of B2B customers today would prefer to buy a complex solution without engaging a sales rep at all.
• B2B customers in an all-digital world are unwittingly pursuing buying behavior deeply contrary to confidence creation. In other words, digital-only buying actually harms customer confidence.
• In this world where customers would prefer not to talk to sales reps at all, but find little to no value in the online experience, sales leaders have to find a completely new means to give back what neither sellers nor digital can provide on its own.

Guest Keynote

Intentional Leadership

A growing majority of the professional workforce are millennials and Gen Zers who demand motivation and inspiration as table stakes for their performance in any environment. Carla Harris highlighted eight things people must be intentional about to be a powerful leader in today’s environment: authenticity, building trust, clarity, creating other leaders, diversity, innovation, inclusivity and voice.

Want to dig deeper?
Check out these related resources:

5 Ways the Future of B2B Buying Will Rewrite the Rules of Effective Selling
4 Ways to Lead Sales Teams in a Postpandemic World
Gartner Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resource Center
Future of Work Reinvented
Agenda Tracks

Our research-based sessions were designed to help sales leaders drive profitable revenue growth, improve the buyer experience and build a stronger sales force. Each track had a particular area of focus to help deliver on what matters most to our attendees:

**Track A: Leading Sales Into a Postpandemic World**

In a rapidly evolving commercial landscape, heads of sales face many tactical, strategic and structural questions regarding how best to position their organization for future success. Sales leaders must identify and adjust to the macro trends that most likely impact commercial performance. Sessions in this track focused on leading the sales organization, go-to-market models and commercial execution.

**Track B: Building the Seller of the Future**

From helping sellers evolve to win in a virtual selling world to helping buyers confidently make buying decisions, sales enablement functions are in uncharted waters. Executing on these new imperatives will distinguish leading sales organizations from their competition. Sessions in this track focused on new and adaptive strategies that apply to virtual selling and digital buying, as well as how leaders can enable operational growth.

**Track C: Modernizing Sales Operations for Digital Execution**

Rapid digital transformation means sales operation’s ability to influence commercial success is increasingly tied to other functions in the organization. Today’s sales operations must improve collaboration across all commercial functions and help leaders make data-driven decisions. Sessions in this track covered transforming sales operations to drive digital execution, cross-functional collaboration and alignment to virtual selling informed by analytical insights.

**Track D: Innovative Strategies for Revenue Growth**

The aligned revenue organization interconnects marketing, sales and service to operate as a seamless, unified commercial function. To achieve this, leaders must break down silos and lead a broader coalition to drive repeatable and scalable growth. Sessions in this track covered the powerful innovations commercial convergence drives, including new approaches to commercial alignment, dynamic customer engagement and technologies that support revenue operations.
Featured Sessions

Uncertain times are often a critical juncture where top performing organizations pull away from the competition at an accelerated rate. This requires quick, decisive action by sales leaders to adapt their teams to keep pace with the changing environment. Our most popular sessions showcased how to transform sales for the future of buying.

**Leading Sales Into the New Digital Reality**
*Michele Buckley, VP Analyst*

B2B buyers require sellers to deliver value across both human and digital channels. The rise in digital interaction requires sellers, processes and technology to not only adapt but to do so in a manner that provides customers a seamless experience. This session provided a strategic roadmap for CSOs to lead into that digital future by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), hyperautomation and advanced analytics.

3 key take-aways
- Most CSOs are redesigning their sales strategy to focus on a highly effective and efficient route to market.
- If you haven’t started looking at AI, in six months you’re going to be left behind.
- Hyperautomation is about fixing pent-up automation requirements at speed. It combines various complementary technologies to automate and augment business processes faster, which in turn delivers business outcomes faster.

**Activating Revenue Enablement: How CSOs Are Integrating Enablement Actions to Drive Revenue Growth**
*Doug Bushee, Senior Director Analyst*

This session introduced CSOs to a revenue enablement framework that focuses on how progressive sales organizations are moving beyond enabling sellers to align and integrate stand-alone enablement found in sales, marketing and customer success functions to drive revenue growth.

3 key take-aways
- We are seeing sales operations function align and combine marketing, sales and customer success operations to form revenue operations functions.
- By aligning enablement functions, you can improve communications and messaging across all revenue-generating roles, improve redundancy, and take advantage of the experience and expertise within your organization.
- Revenue enablement can help streamline the sales motion in support of the buying journey.

Want to dig deeper? Check out these related resources:
- Future of Sales 2025: Data-Driven B2B Selling to Drive Digital Commerce
- The Future of Sales 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report
- Gartner Sales Enablement Framework
- Virtual Selling Framework
The Tenets of Successful Account-Based Sales Strategy

Craig Rosenberg, Distinguished VP Analyst

Account-based strategy is the coordination of valuable, relevant experiences delivered across all functions that influence the customer, to drive engagement and conversion at a targeted set of accounts. This type of go-to-market is not a fad, it is one of the most effective strategies organizations are employing. And with data and technology innovation, it keeps getting better.

3 key take-aways
• We are in a perpetual need for driving new pipeline. 49% of organizations cite pipeline and demand generation as their critical 2021 initiative.
• This is not about account-based marketing, it’s bigger than that. Account-based strategy delivers across all functions — a go-to-market strategy for the entire customer-facing organization.
• Sales leaders who see account-based strategies as an initiative solely driven by marketing will miss opportunities to acquire new customers and grow existing customer accounts.

Optimize Sales Execution With Artificial Intelligence for B2B Guided Selling

Theodore Travis, VP Analyst

The pandemic has exposed cracks in every company’s sales processes. Knowing that sales process discipline must be optimized to increase the chances of closing new deals, sales leaders should adopt AI-based guided selling capabilities. This session explored the top forms of guided selling technology, examined successful use cases and explored what’s next for the technology.

3 key take-aways
• Top cautions to AI-based guided selling include the use of explicit or manually determined customer verifiers, analysis of customer sentiment and highly dynamic prescriptive next best actions.
• If you have not started yet, start with deal intelligence because the use cases are well-established and the maturity of the algorithms are strong.
• If you have already started, you can get ahead of your competitors by adding customer verifiers.

Want to dig deeper? Check out these related resources:

Gartner Account-Based Framework
AI Use Case Prism for B2B Sales
The Chief Sales Officer, 1Q21
3 Steps to Prevent Digital Backsliding Across the Enterprise
(Re)Aligning Channel Partner Selling to Changing Customer Buying

Tom Cosgrove, Senior Director Analyst

B2B buying has evolved dramatically, but many channel partners’ sales strategies have failed to keep pace. This session provided sales leaders a practical framework for increasing alignment between channel partners’ go-to-market models and current customer buying behavior. Areas addressed included virtual selling, buying journey mapping, data sharing and improving digital buying experiences.

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3 key take-aways

• Customer buying behavior is already putting pressure on suppliers to improve sales channel alignment, so sales leaders responsible for indirect channel strategy need to position and enable their partners to be a channel that can play a consistent and additive part in such an ecosystem.

• To avoid the common pitfalls of lackluster channel partner program design and channel conflict, channel sales leaders must first clearly define their goals and objectives.

• Sales leaders driving channel strategy must play a key role in helping their company provide a truly omnichannel and virtualized experience for their end customer more consistently.

Want to dig deeper?
Check out these related resources:

- 3 Steps to Create a Winning Channel Partner Strategy
- Panel Discussion: 3 Critical Steps to Create a Winning Sales Channel Strategy
- Sales Development Framework
Power of Gartner

Gartner for Sales

Gartner for Sales Leaders provides insights for sales executives who seek to catapult growth through winning practices. Smaller companies need to grow at scale and larger enterprises need to grow faster. Our experts equip you from strategy through execution with impactful insights, data tools and one-on-one guidance. The result is a better, faster, smarter sales organization that achieves repeatable, scalable revenue growth.

Key coverage areas

- Account management and account-based strategies
- Buyer and seller enablement
- Go-to-market strategy
- Leading sales enablement
- Leading sales operations
- Leading the sales function
- Pipeline creation and sales development
- Sales analytics and systems
- Sales compensation
- Sales execution and methodology
- Sales force design and deployment
- Talent development programs

Learn more at gartner.com/en/sales or contact us at salesleaders@gartner.com
Save the date for Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference
San Diego, CA
October 12 – 14, 2022

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