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Letter From the Editors

Chief sales officers (CSOs) are under pressure to generate results and meet CEO’s priority of growth (cited by 56% of CEOs in Gartner’s 2021 CEO Survey). In the changing sales environment where buyers are expecting better digital engagements, sales leaders need to have more data and more tools at their disposal than ever before. Consider these statistics:

• 43% of B2B buyers would prefer no interaction with a seller if given the opportunity.
• 88% of sales leaders have already made or are considering new technology investments to support analytics, machine learning and/or AI
• 64% of B2B customers can’t tell the difference between most brand’s digital experiences

This issue of The Chief Sales Officer focuses on the importance of data in a sales organization, especially in a world where B2B buying is increasingly occurring through digital channels. We look at how selling is changing at its very core and how CSOs need to incorporate digital buying into their selling processes. This approach requires a clear vision for what sellers should do as well as an investment in technology, literacy and governance to manage the data required to bring these two ideas together.

Within, you’ll have the opportunity to learn from a CSO who has leveraged data across his sales organization, including identifying prospects, understanding sales performance and supporting sales coaching. Marcus Jewell, Chief Sales Officer & EVP for Juniper Networks, a global, cloud-based networking and security company shares that “data and analytics provides guidance for sellers, but you can’t forget the importance of the person interpreting it.”

Read the latest Gartner research to help CSOs:
• Respond to buyers’ digital preferences and pitfalls with a revised sales process (Page 4)
• Design a more data-driven organization (Page 9)
• Understand and remember that people add required context to data, thereby making it actionable (Page 14)
• Leverage top data and analytics trends that will broaden their knowledge (Page 19)
• Manage data governance and data quality more effectively (Page 20)

We hope this issue inspires and informs how you chart your organization’s transformation in a data-driven environment.

Be well,
Jeffrey L. Cohen and Delainey Kirkwood
Sellers Must Adapt to Digital Buying Preferences and Behaviors

By Alice Walmsley

Buyers Want to Go It Alone

Most sales leaders would agree that it’s extremely difficult to sell large, complex B2B solutions when your buyers won’t talk to you. Buyer access has always been a challenge, but the pandemic has increased the struggle as remote work became the norm. Buyer expectations for digital engagement rose because of their own B2C experiences, and the techniques sales organizations applied to engage buyers no longer seemed to be as effective.

Considering the buyer’s perspective, they are empowered with information to do their own due diligence, talk to their peers and digitally proceed through their buying tasks. Therefore, it’s understandable that they may not want to engage with a seller who they believe, at best, may support them, or at worst, confuse them, attempt to redirect them and add little in the way of value.

In fact, 43% of buyers would opt to buy a complex solution without any interaction with a seller if they could (see Figure 1). While for

Figure 1. Percentage of B2B Buyers Preferring a Rep-Free Experience

![Graph showing the percentage of B2B buyers preferring a rep-free experience. The overall average is 43%.]

n = 979 B2B Customers

Source: 2021 Gartner Digital Buying Survey

Note: Percentages calculated based on number of B2B buyers who selected “Somewhat Agree,” “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” in response to the statement, “I prefer a rep-free sales experience.”
many buyers, an entirely rep-free purchase experience is unrealistic at present, this data shows a growing buyer preference increasingly out of sync with how suppliers sell. Buyers expect digital content to be relevant, useful and detailed, but most suppliers fall short in how they engage with buyers digitally, prioritizing the seller channel as their primary route to influence potential customers.

Suppliers are right to be concerned about this shift to a digital preference, and not only because it is challenging to drive influence in the vanishingly small window they do have in front of the buyer. When buyers are granted the independent digital learning experience they seek, it has unanticipated negative consequences for their purchase outcomes. Gartner research shows that customers who prefer to buy entirely through digital channels have 23% higher purchase regret than customers who are willing to use both digital and human channels. When customers avoid sales rep support, customer satisfaction plummets, which also has a negative impact on their likelihood to be loyal to the supplier. In their quest for digital experiences, buyers become their own worst enemy. Both suppliers and customers lose out. While it is important to provide buyers with the digital experience they seek, CSOs must proactively mitigate the downsides of digital buying.

Solving for the Dark Side of Digital

To reverse the negative consequences of a digitally dominant world, CSOs need to build decision confidence in buyers. Decision confidence drives revenue growth because the risk associated with making complex, expensive purchases on the behalf of their company is what leads many buyers to play it safe and settle for “good enough” purchases. Decision confidence is not about confidence in the supplier; it is the buyer’s belief that they are exercising sound judgment when making a purchase. Decision confidence is when the buyer believes:

- They have identified the right questions to ask
- They have identified the most relevant information
- Stakeholders are aligned at key decision points
- The purchase will positively impact their business
- The purchase is ultimately a good choice.

Suppliers who deliver a digital buying experience that bolsters buyer decision confidence will win higher quality business, drive loyalty and gain commercial advantage. A Gartner survey of almost 1,000 B2B customers shows that when customers move from average decision confidence to high decision confidence, they are more than 10 times more likely to complete a high-quality, low-regret deal (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Likelihood of a High-Quality, Low-Regret Deal

![Figure 2](image_url)

n = 982 B2B Customers

Source: 2021 Gartner Digital Buying Survey

Note: Logistic regression controlled for buying group size, product vs. service, purchase type, tech supplier, percentage of remote meetings and complexity. High-quality, low-regret deal defined as the offering we purchased from the winning supplier was a high-end or premium solution and 1) The offering we purchased is failing to meet our expectations or 2) We considered offerings that were much more ambitious than what we ultimately chose.
However, an independent digital journey prevents buyers from engaging in the very behaviors that drive decision confidence. Removing the sales representative not only takes away an opportunity for the supplier to help the buyer make sense of conflicting information and answer buyer questions, but there are other more subtle, and equally troubling, implications as well.

When buying stakeholders engage in digital learning in individual buyer journeys, they are less likely to reach group consensus. With each individual consulting 3-8 pieces of content on average (e.g., white papers, infographics), independent learning exacerbates the differences in buying group priorities. Therefore, without a sales rep to help the group coalesce and build agreement around a common view of the problem or the solution, the buying group’s ability to align around key decision points is compromised. Buying groups that fail to reach consensus on the right problem to solve and how to solve it are more likely to settle for a “good enough” solution that fails to deliver on the expected outcomes.

As buyers explore complex, expensive solutions, the differences between options can be subtle, but it is critical that buyers can understand and articulate the nuances to justify one choice over another. However, as buyers use digital channels to learn and buy, 64% are not able to tell the difference between most brands’ digital experiences. Sales and marketing leaders must work together to ensure digital experiences are differentiated and enable buyers to understand the differences between themselves and the competition (see Figure 3).

Buyers’ struggle to learn digitally is the result of humans’ ability to learn through digital methods more broadly. Buyers typically multitask while learning through digital channels and make shallow, quick assessments about the quality and usability of a website. Shallow learning hinders their ability to reach decision confidence, limiting their ability to understand differences between suppliers and make deep connections between customer needs and supplier offerings. Sales organizations have a unique opportunity to utilize analytics to solve for shallow learning, drawing attention to critical pieces of information the buyer would otherwise overlook and highlighting subtleties that matter between supplier offerings.

As buyers move to a digitally-dominant world, what they want and need more than ever is a guide to help them buy, find nuance, understand and build consensus around their problem — in digital channels. As buyers seek an increasingly digital purchase experience, they unwittingly pursue buying behavior contrary to confidence creation. As a result, CSOs need to build integrated, immersive purchase experiences that allow buyers to learn through their preferred channel, but in a way that guides them to the right outcome, and boosts their decision confidence.

**Figure 3. Lack of Differentiation Between Digital Experiences**

64% B2B Customers That Can’t Tell the Difference Between Most Brands’ Digital Experiences

n = 1,101 B2B Customers

Source: 2020 Gartner Digital Experience Customer Survey
Recommendations for how CSOs Should Respond to Digital Buying Behaviors

CSOs need to build an engagement strategy that increases buyer confidence through digital channels. Here are 3 areas to prioritize:

• Create a digitally-differentiated buying experience:
  CSOs and marketing leaders should audit the current digital buying experience, methodically reviewing all information available in digital and human channels for each buying job to uncover information inconsistencies and to identify whether current content helps buyers feel more confident in their decisions.
  Leading suppliers utilize data and analytics to understand what the buyer's digital footprint is, and to build an experience that delivers value according to how customers behave. Be as creative as possible to create a digital experience that is both helpful and differentiated from your competitors.

• Identify where and how to create moments of nuance in the digital learning journey:
  Review win-loss analysis, and speak with sellers and customers to identify the important subtleties between suppliers that customers would otherwise overlook. Use frontline input and customer journey mapping to identify critical insights that customers may miss in their digital learning. This map may look very different than the one for in-person buying.

• Determine how to insert sales reps into digital to develop rep-mediated digital experience:
  Leading organizations interview customers to understand where in the digital buying experience they find the most value from engaging with a supplier, and which buying tasks would benefit from seller coaching. CSOs should then consider the digital opportunities to mediate with seller coaching, and the technologies that sellers can use to support the buyer's journey through digital channels. The digital opportunity is the moment where the buyer is most likely to feel more confident in their decision.

Upcoming Virtual Events

Gartner regularly hosts virtual events across a variety of Sales topics. The following are a small selection of our upcoming webinars:

- Building the Data Driven Organization
  02 November 2021, 09:00 a.m. ET
- Unlocking Growth by Reducing Frontline Burden (re)building Key Account Programs
  21 October 2021, 11:00 a.m. ET
- Building the Data Driven Organization
  08 September 2021, 08:00 a.m. ET

Please join us by registering online.
Sales analytics functions often struggle to deliver desired commercial impact due to perennial challenges with low data quality and poor stakeholder engagement. To achieve their full potential, sales operations leaders must prioritize data governance, data literacy and advanced analytics technology.

53% of surveyed organizations attribute poor sales data quality to inaccurate and incomplete data.

51% have established a formalized data governance body.

→ Download the Gartner Roadmap to Get Started
With the increasing number of data-producing, digital interactions between buyers and sellers, sales leaders are increasingly looking to leverage intelligence and analytics to make their organizations more data-driven.

Leading a data-driven organization requires: improving collaborative data and analytics governance, building frontline data literacy and expanding the audience of sales analytics through new cross-functional use case-driven technologies.

The number of digital interactions between buyers and sellers continues to increase, with each interaction producing data that can be harnessed to improve sales execution. Sales leaders recognize this — by 2025 Gartner predicts that 60% of B2B sales organizations will transition from experience and intuition-based selling to data-driven selling.

Becoming data-driven requires sales organizations to move away from their reliance on a sales operations team acting in hero mode. Rather than concentrating all interpretation and insight within the operations organization, data-driven organizations leverage the expertise of their sellers and managers to unlock the maximum amount of insight from data and analytics — all without creating information overload. This shift will create competitive pressure on CSOs. Data-driven sales organizations have a marked advantage over intuition and experience-driven ones in terms of sales force design, sales execution and strategic decision-making. For this reason, becoming more data-driven is a strategic imperative for CSOs.

To make their organizations more data-driven, CSOs need to:

• Pursue collaborative data governance strategies to broaden the adoption and impact of analytics.
• Improve data literacy to enable stakeholders (on the frontline in particular) to draw their own insights and actions from analytics.
• Manage technology solutions as a well-curated portfolio that will help organize and select data and tools efficiently to increase usage and returns.

Being data-driven is less about individual skill and competency, and more about creating both an organizational capability and frontline responsibility to speak and consume analytics consistently and broadly.

There are three areas that CSOs must focus on in order to have a data-driven sales organization:

1. Governance
2. Data Literacy
3. Technology
Ensure Collaborative Governance Within the Sales Organization

Data and analytic governance is a consolidation of data and analytic standards, definitions and metrics that ensure effective, efficient and ethical use of data to make decisions.

A lack of data governance makes it difficult for sales organizations to improve data quality and usage, as there is a lack of trust in analytical insights from sellers. This is not surprising, as 53% of surveyed heads of sales, sales operations and sales analytics identified “inaccurate data stemming from user inputs” as one of the top three challenges to using analytics to improve commercial performance, higher than any other challenge (see Figure 1).

However, when high-quality data, created from standardization of metrics and definitions, is provided to sellers, their trust and usage of data increases. The same can be said for analytics.

Recommendations for CSOs to ensure collaborative governance:

• Inspect the charter of your data and analytics governance program
• Formalize data and analytics governance with an objective definition of data quality to drive collaboration and consistency
• Involve and standardize governance efforts with other commercial functions to achieve synergistic consumption and use of sales data and analytics

Figure 1. Most Significant Data Quality Challenges to Improving Commercial Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Top-Ranked</th>
<th>Second-Ranked</th>
<th>Third-Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate Data Stemming From User Inputs</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete Data</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent or Incomplete Integration Across Systems and Platforms</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Data Volumes and Latency of Updates</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplication of Data</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Compliance Regulations</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Accessibility Limited by Security Rules</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 299 heads of sales, sales operations and sales analytics

Q: Please select the three most significant data quality challenges to sales analytics improving commercial performance.

Source: 2020 Gartner State of Sales Operations and Analytics Survey
Enhance Data Literacy Among Sellers

Data literacy is the ability to read, write and communicate data “in context,” including an understanding of data sources and constructs, analytical methods and techniques applied, and the ability to describe the use-case application and resulting value.

There is currently a disparity in data literacy levels between groups. While sales leaders typically possess a high level of data proficiency, roles closest to customers showed the lowest ratings in data literacy. Only 43% of sales operations leaders deem their direct sellers as highly sales data proficient. This marginally improves as the focus shifts to frontline sales managers — where only 46% are rated as highly proficient (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Direct and Overlay Sellers’ Ranking for Data Proficiency**

Percentage Rating a Stakeholder Highly Proficient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sales Stakeholder/Function</th>
<th>Highly Proficient</th>
<th>Moderate Proficient</th>
<th>Low Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Analytics</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Operations</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Sales Leadership</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Enablement</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Line Sales Management</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline Sales Management</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources (HR)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Sellers</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlay Sellers</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 299 heads of sales, sales operations and sales analytics

Q: How would you rate the level of sales data proficiency (i.e. understanding of what information is available and how it can be used to solve business problems) for these stakeholders/functions in your organization?

Source: 2020 Gartner State of Sales Operations and Analytics Survey

Note: Highly effective is 6 and 7 on a 7-point scale.
This lack of data literacy can mean that sellers take longer to analyze data (if they do it at all) and sometimes reach erroneous conclusions when they do, leading to wasted effort, missed commercial opportunities and sub-par customer experiences. For this reason, CSOs should encourage their sales operation leaders to create a cross-functional program to improve data literacy among sellers that enables sellers to accurately draw their own insights from analytics. When data literacy efforts are prioritized, sales reps and frontline managers can understand and interpret the analyses correctly and use the data to make well-informed customer and account decisions.

**Recommendations for CSOs to enhance data literacy in their organizations:**

- Identify key analytics use-cases and select one to “test drive” the VIA model approach. The VIA approach requires leaders to first understand the value or business problem, then assess the information available, and only then design the analytics.

- Implement regional champions to drive data literacy. Data champions address organizational skepticism toward analytics by driving and sustaining the adoption of analytics tools. Champions train regional sales teams on how they can capture data accurately and why they should bother with accurate data capturing and strong data literacy.

### 3 Build and Invest in a Strong Technology Portfolio

A strong technology stack is built upon an understanding and analysis of the entire collection of technology tools and resources that provide the highest potential commercial impact. To ensure future positive ROI from sales technology, CSOs and sales operations leaders need to clarify specific use-cases and assess their organization’s needs for advanced analytic technology within a well-optimized portfolio.

To expedite technology acquisition, sales leaders often avoid a detailed technology needs assessment and do not have a unique portfolio. Instead, they rely on their business judgment to decide what sellers need, resulting in delayed adoption, sub-par performance and shorter shelf-life that reduce the ROI of the implemented technology.

Instead of investing in technology based on features and instinct, sales operations leaders should analyze potential tools and technology based on whether the analytics can convert data and decisions into action and minimize the need for human input. Sales operations leaders must understand what sellers need and make tradeoffs between short- and long-term technology solutions. Leaders should avoid responding reactively to ad-hoc requests for tools, and analyze the strategic capabilities of their organization and select a technology portfolio to enable those capabilities.

**Recommendations for CSOs to leverage technology in a data-driven organization:**

- Use a formal root-cause needs assessment to identify and prioritize use-cases for simple and advanced analytics

- Avoid unstructured and reactive technology investments to satisfy narrow use-case needs without considering burden and portfolio risk

### Conclusion

CSOs are on a journey to become leaders of data-driven organizations, and to successfully achieve this they must invest in governance, data literacy and technology. These actions will compound improvements to the value of sales data and analytics, allow measurement of success in strategies, and allow accurate deployment of the right resources to the right accounts.
The Decision-Making Revolution

Gartner Business Quarterly: Q2 2021

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An interview with Marcus Jewell, Chief Sales Officer and EVP at Juniper Networks, about capturing and incorporating data and leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning throughout the entire sales process.
Our research has shown the increasing importance of leveraging sales analytics and data in part to help sellers make better decisions. You’ve expressed that your teams are able to adapt and overcome challenges with constant innovation that drives towards success. On a more granular level, you’ve also said that good pipeline management is grounded in data. How do you begin to collect buyer data in the sales process?

We start at the beginning of the sales process by trying to understand what signals our buyers are giving us through tracking them with sales engagement tools and an element of AI. We are looking for buyers who are expressing an interest in something that we do. At that point, it doesn’t indicate an intent to buy.

With support from marketing, we try to surface a buyer’s intent to purchase by looking at signals, such as the amount of time buyers spend on our website and the keywords that they are using in their search. We try to answer the question: “Have they seen something of interest that we actually do or can solve for?” They might not even be looking for us. They might be looking at that problem that our solution can address. That’s the first level of information that we try to build and tag in our CRM.

You’ve called your team completely data-driven, and stated that this gives you a big advantage. How does data improve the process of handing off leads to the sales team?

We have a pretty strict MQL to SQL process with a scoring methodology in which we need to see 5-7 positive signals before buyers are handed off to sales. Buyers are not passed to a seller until they demonstrate further interest through web searches or taking a specific action. We want to ensure that the buyer wasn’t just bored on a Thursday afternoon searching for a white paper, but that there is some level of interest. Once our historical data shows us that they would welcome a contact request, the sales rep then reviews the buyer’s activities and initiates the next best action.

As a seller is reviewing a buyer’s profile, how does the data and automation help recommend what is the next best action?

We use an automated template that pre-populates data from the CRM and shows everything about the contact we don’t know. This triggers a recommendation of the next action the seller should take. For example, if there are really strong buying signals, but they don’t have any contact data, then the next best action is to get an account map. It will also suggest what internal resources to engage in order to be successful. A buyer downloads a white paper, so the sales rep needs to connect with the internal expert in that technology.

The benefit of the salesperson completing that template is that it gives them a structure to follow in the early part of the sales process. The automation provides the sales rep with the top three recommendations for what to do next based on previous successful actions. But these recommendations are a signal, not an absolute step. It’s still up to the individual sales rep to control what they’re going to do next.

There are too many variables of human nature and sentiment for AI to be 100% accurate. There is no such thing as sales automation by the way, because buying is not automated. It’s a fallacy to even try to automate selling.
How do you use conversation intelligence to capture data to help inform sellers what they should be doing?

We integrate conversation intelligence [CI] data into what we call the Juniper Stickiness Number. We listen for how much that buyer is on our side. Are they using words that we use or are they bringing up words that we know our competitors use? We search through that and use it as a guide in the sales process.

Most sales that score number 5 will close. If a rep is at a 4, there’s work to do. There is some promotional work to do to get them on our side. When prospects are not speaking positively about us, that scores a 1 and we are not going to win that deal.

“Are they using words that we use or are they bringing up words that we know our competitors use?”

CI only captures a piece of the sales conversation. Only a small percentage of the time is spent between vendor and buyer in solution selling. Most of our selling is done on the inside with an internal champion. It’s that person’s ability to convince their internal stakeholders of our solution’s value. Conversation intelligence is just one of many signals in the sales process.

How does data feed into the coaching that is done with your sales reps and their managers?

We make sure that our line managers have at least one session a week with each rep. We alternate between business reviews and coaching sessions. In the business review, they talk about the business but do not coach on that call. The next week, they make it purely a coaching call and identify areas for improvement. They use data showing where people are losing deals and where they are winning deals. We create insights from that and digitize our experience into best practice guides, tagged by sales status.

Does that mean that the coaching is standardized as opposed to individualized based on data?

It’s totally standardized. The art of coaching isn’t to be creative, but to identify a problem. There are no new philosophies. It’s just that people are able to interpret data and patterns and see things that others haven’t, and apply known, proven techniques. Pattern recognition is critically important these days and that’s the new creativity in business.

“Pattern recognition is critically important these days and that’s the new creativity in business.”

How has coaching changed in a more virtual environment over the last year and a half?

It has become easier. When I started selling 20 to 25 years ago coaching was built into selling because we did ride-alongs with our manager. You would run the meeting and they would sit, observe and give feedback afterwards. That’s why people my age are effective sales leaders, because we had a lot of coaching.

More recently, managers were managing instead of coaching and leading. Now digital environments have allowed us to go back where we can virtually assess performance because everything is documented throughout the sales process. Coaching has become better through the virtual environment because of the available data, which is similar to the awareness we had in the old days.
What are the potential pitfalls of using data for coaching?

Reps do not want to be treated as if they are working off a template or a framework. Managers need to adapt the coaching templates for them. The weak manager will open up the template and go through it, but that is not helpful. The point is to listen to the rep, understand them and personalize the coaching using data and their strengths.

You are not going to change sales people with data. You can only augment sales people. That’s why I call AI “augmented intelligence,” instead of artificial intelligence. You need that human interaction and you need that sentiment. Data without context and data without personalization is pointless. The good managers use that data and personalize it.

“You are not going to change sales people with data. You can only augment sales people.”

Teams are drowning in data now, but we expect that the availability of data throughout the sales process will only increase. How will teams solve this in the future?

Machine learning will improve so it provides better outcomes, but it will also get smarter with more data. The data systems will become more robust and the answers will be clearer. All of this will create more true results and fewer false positives in recommended next actions. Pair this with a new range of younger sellers in the market who are used to looking for signals and guidance of what to do next surfaced in the sales platform.

Customers’ expectations are also changing as a result of available data. When they get on a call, they expect you to know what they do, what they are interested in, what their business does. They don’t need to go through a conversation to tell you that.
Build a Better Strategic Plan for Your Function

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gartner.com/en/insights/strategic-planning
CSOs are transforming their organizations to become more data-driven as selling becomes more complex and competitive pressures increase. Staying ahead of trends in the use of data and analytics can enable CSOs to anticipate competitors’ actions and identify innovative new approaches to the use of data. Here are four data and analytics trends identified by Gartner that CSOs should be aware of when leading a data-driven organization.

1. **Smarter, Responsible, Scalable AI**

   Today’s AI technology must operate with fewer data inputs and be scalable across an organization. Also, AI systems must be responsible — they should protect privacy, comply with federal regulations and minimize bias to support ethical AI. CSOs should consider these descriptors when encouraging their sales operation managers to invest in AI technology to ensure accurate insights from sellers.

2. **From Big Data to Small and Wide Data**

   Small data uses data models that require less data but still generate useful insights. Wide data (varied data) enables analysis of unstructured and structured data sources to assist in contextual awareness and decisions. CSOs should invest in technology and models that can utilize small and wide data.

3. **Composable Data and Analytics**

   Composable data allows for a user-friendly experience that enables collaboration and increases access to analytics for sellers to create data insights. Rather than multiple standards and definitions, composable data and analytics creates a unified standard. CSOs should invest in analytics tools that create a common data fabric across the sales function.

4. **Data & Analytics as a Core Business Function**

   Instead of being completed by a separate team, Data and Analytics is shifting to a core function. CSOs should encourage their sales leaders to incorporate data and analytics into their function as a core capability to drive their business results rather than just a secondary activity supported by IT.
Establish and promote a dedicated cross-functional data governance team to create regular and intentional oversight of sales analytics decisions and processes, confront data-quality challenges and ensure metric standardization.

Good governance starts with a clear strategic vision. The top three areas identified for data governance team success are:

- Setting a Strategic Vision for the Analytics Program (37%)
- Establishing Targets for Data Quality Measures (24%)
- Reviewing Data Quality Measures (21%)

Data governance bodies are undervalued. Two key barriers to effective governance are:

- Underutilization of Formal Data Governance Body
  - 6% Have No Plans
  - 32% Informal or Ad Hoc Group
  - Only 51% Formal Data Governance Body

- Low Cross-Functional Representation
  - Sales: 93%
  - Marketing: 69%
  - IT: 64%
  - Customer Service: Only 33%

Seventy-four percent of the surveyed organizations lacked a standard, organization-wide definition for sales metrics.

- Consistent Within Sales: 55%
- Consistent Across Actions Organization: 25%
- Ad Hoc: 19%

Data quality poses a major challenge to improving commercial performance. The top two data quality challenges preventing improved commercial performance are:

- Inaccurate data stemming from user inputs: 53%
- Incomplete data: 52%

Data quality takes sustained and consistent effort. Modern analytic programs require regular oversight and formalized data governance.