Gartner

Chief Sales Officer Leadership Vision 2022

3 Strategic Actions for Success
From Chris Howard, Chief of Research, Gartner

As we head into 2022, we continue to feel the human toll of the global pandemic, but we already know it has been a watershed period in which attitudes and norms have permanently shifted — in our everyday lives and at work.

Living through COVID-19 has increased social awareness — as have growing demands for equity for those who are underrepresented.

Businesses have also changed. For many organizations, the pandemic has catalyzed digital business initiatives as we adapt to the demands of employees, customers and other stakeholders, who were forced into new digital options that they have now come to favor.

B2B purchasers are happy to buy digitally, without a sales representative; B2C consumers are buying off social media platforms; employees are physically distributed and communicating asynchronously — and IT infrastructures must secure the organization despite this “anytime, anywhere, anywhere” way in which we’re operating.

You and your team may be burning out, and it’s never been more important to prioritize your time and energy.

In your role as a leader, you’ve now spent months adapting to change and delivering new solutions at speed. You and your team may be burning out, and it’s never been more important to prioritize your time and energy. To help with that, Gartner Leadership Vision provides top-level guidance to leaders and their teams on where to focus — based on our data-driven research.

We’re providing detailed insights to our clients across dozens of roles, and we’re now excited to share excerpts with the business community beyond our clients. We hope this will help you to focus discussions with your teams, peers and other leaders, so you can more quickly and effectively diagnose priorities and actions, especially as you solidify your strategic plans for 2022.

Chris Howard
Chief of Research, Gartner
Three Opportunities for the Chief Sales Officer (CSO) to Drive Digital Era Hypergrowth

Digital buying becoming more common

Overall, 43% of B2B buyers would prefer a rep-free experience, a rise to 54% among millennials, who are aging into key decision-making roles and influencers of organizational purchases.

Virtual selling changing how selling happens

70% of B2B sellers cite “gaining access to stakeholders virtually” as their top challenge, and 74% of CSOs have recently or are currently updating their seller competencies for virtual selling.

Sales budgets shifting to emerging technology

The percentage of sales budgets allocated to sales technology is rising, and 88% of CSOs are considering or already executing investments in new technology to support analytics, machine learning and/or artificial intelligence (AI).

CSO challenges

Digital buying undermines confidence in complex purchases, and customers who prefer rep-free buying experience 23% higher purchase regret.

Most sellers feel unprepared for the new selling environment and only 20% of B2B sellers believe they are as effective selling virtually as in person.

Emerging technology investments often underperform due to underlying data issues. Organizations estimate the average cost of poor data quality at $12.9 million every year.

CSO actions

Create confidence-boosting and immersive digital experiences.

Hire and develop flexible sellers able to deliver rep-mediated digital experiences.

Create an AI-augmented sales function by prioritizing technology investments.

Source: Gartner
Create Confidence-Boosting and Immersive Digital Experiences

Digital buying journey

- Make sure to map a robust digital buying journey that shows:
  - How interbuying group communication occurs; e.g., what channels they use and the frequency/cadence of discussions.
  - The touchpoints customers use to engage with your organization throughout the customer life cycle and why they favor one touchpoint (e.g., email, phone, webchat, in person) over another.

Digitally different experiences

- Take an active role in the organization’s digital channels to make sure buyers can see differences between you as a supplier and the rest of the market — starting with differentiation of the buying experience itself.

Moments of nuance

- Ensure that digital experience revolves around the small number of critically important nuances that differentiate your solution from competitors. This will help customers feel more confident that there are meaningful differences between their options.

Rep-mediated digital experiences

- Integrate sales reps into the digital experience. Customers moving between channels shouldn’t be a hand-off from digital to human but a complementary symbiosis between digital and human. In this world, the seller becomes a much-needed guide through the digital world.
Hire and Develop Flexible Sellers Able to Deliver Rep-Mediated Digital Experiences

- **Digital dexterity**: Ability and ambition to work digitally
- **Data literacy**: Understanding and responding to data insights
- **Virtual customer engagement**: Ability to work synchronously or asynchronously

**Action to develop virtual selling**

- **Set clear expectations** for live or synchronous virtual engagements.
- **Support sellers** to engage stakeholders effectively in virtual interactions. Improve the “production value” of meetings.
- **Invest in technology** to increase asynchronous customer engagement such as digital sales rooms.
- **Communicate a clear virtual coaching framework** and provide the technology to support full coaching life cycle. Hold managers accountable for quality coaching.
Create an AI-Augmented Sales Function by Prioritizing Technology Investments

Two key actions to address foundational data issues

Implement cross-functional collaborative governance policies to improve data quality throughout the organization, address system incompatibility and improve AI’s impact.

Create data literacy programs to help sellers draw their own insights from analytics and understand why they must modify their behavior based on AI recommendations.

Prioritize future AI-investments based on business value and feasibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Efficiency¹</th>
<th>Revenue Growth²</th>
<th>Business Viability³</th>
<th>Technology Maturity⁴</th>
<th>External/Organizational Factors⁵</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td>♦</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Includes operational efficiency
2. Includes additional revenue streams
3. Includes investments for sustainable business transformation
4. Includes requirements for acquiring data of sufficient quality and quantity
5. Includes legal and ethical considerations, stakeholder adoption, available skills and infrastructure readiness

Source: Gartner
Three Overlapping Trends Create One Opportunity for Hypergrowth

CSOs who drive market-leading growth in 2022 will:

- Give digital buyers the confidence-boosting and immersive digital experiences they need to make a high-quality purchase
- Hire and develop flexible sellers able to deliver rep-mediated digital experiences in virtual environments
- Overcome foundational issues holding back emerging sales technology investments to create an AI-augmented sales function
Actionable, objective insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for sales leaders:

**Research**
- **Future of Sales**
  Learn how to build a buyer-centric digital-first sales function.
  - Download Report

**Research**
- **Build a Better Strategic Plan for Your Function**
  Turn your strategy into action with our tools and templates.
  - Download Templates

**Resource Hub**
- **Future of Work Reinvented**
  Reinvent where, when and how we work to maximize employees’ engagement and productivity.
  - Learn More

**Journal**
- **Gartner Business Quarterly**
  Stay up to date with the most compelling research on organizational issues that cut across the C-suite.
  - Download Now

Already a client?
Get access to even more resources in your client portal. Log In
Get More.

Get actionable, objective insight to deliver on your most critical priorities. Our expert guidance and tools enable faster, smarter decisions and stronger performance. Contact us to become a client:

**U.S.:** 1 855 811 7593

**International:** +44 (0) 3330 607 044

Learn more about Gartner for Sales Leaders
gartner.com/en/sales

Stay connected to the latest insights