

Forbes
INSIGHTS

THE POWER OF ENABLEMENT

BRIDGING THE SALES PRODUCTIVITY GAP



IN ASSOCIATION WITH:  **brainshark.**

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OVERVIEW

As selling gets more costly and buyers become more informed, sales productivity continues to present challenges for all companies. But the difficulties are not the same across the board. Those with top-performing sales teams see real and measurable results from their focus on best-in-class sales practices—having a defined sales enablement function, strong alignment of sales and marketing, and a focus on content and technology to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of their sales force.

In short, they recognize the importance of sales productivity for the company's survival and success—it's a strategic priority.

Sales enablement is a potent formula for improving sales productivity (defined as revenue per rep). This is borne out by the fact that sales enablement is a key focus for companies with best-in-class sales organizations: 59% of leading companies have a defined sales enablement role.

And while there are notable performance differences between high performers and low performers, very few companies escape productivity challenges—they all look for ways to increase revenue per rep and narrow the gap between top-performing salespeople and the rest of the team. Companies that are at or below plan often struggle to meet or exceed revenue targets and are significantly hampered by the sales activities that leading companies seem to do well. Yet even top-performing companies face challenges with some of these issues, offering room to improve their performance even more.

To understand what makes best-in-class sales organizations tick and identify opportunities to close the sales productivity gap, Forbes Insights and Brainshark surveyed 216 top executives in companies headquartered in the U.S. during the summer of 2015. As the survey reveals, there is no single point of failure or success for

BEST VERSUS THE REST

What separates leaders in sales productivity from organizations still struggling with this critical issue? Top-performing companies—the top 10% of enterprises—are identified in the Forbes Insights/Brainshark survey as those executives whose organizations:

- Are above plan or well above plan in achieving revenue targets
- Rank sales productivity as the top priority relative to other key areas of management focus
- Self-identified as being “above average” or “leading the way” with regard to sales productivity

sales organizations. All companies face a combination of factors that together affect productivity. To overcome these challenging issues, companies need to find a solution that addresses both halves of sales productivity—efficiency and effectiveness—and learn to work collaboratively to deliver value messages to their customers and top-line sales results to the C-suite.

KEY FINDINGS

Sales productivity and sales enablement are dead center on management's radar screen.

Three-fifths of top-performing companies have a defined sales enablement role. And C-level executives in all companies realize the critical value of sales productivity to achieving growth and competitive advantage.

Leading companies value alignment of sales and marketing.

Three-fourths of top-performing organizations have strong alignment between sales and marketing; poorly performing companies notably do not.

Top sales organizations recognize the key role content plays in sales productivity.

Investment in content is helping top-performing firms succeed—top sales organizations are less likely to consider the amount of time reps spend creating or looking for content as a top productivity challenge, and nearly half want sales enablement technology to help them more easily create high-quality sales content.

Leading companies excel at providing consistent sales messages.

Seven out of 10 top-performing companies are able to provide a consistent sales message, compared with just four out of 10 for those with less sales success.

Investments in improving efficiency and effectiveness provide value to the sales organization.

Best-in-class companies know that many factors work together to drive productivity and look to technology as a way to address this need.



“SALES ENABLEMENT IS ABOUT CREATING EVER-INCREASING SALES PRODUCTIVITY FROM THE DAY THE REP ARRIVES AT THE COMPANY.”

Jay Barrows
Chief Sales Officer
GE Intelligent Platforms

MANAGEMENT FOCUS ON SALES ENABLEMENT AND SALES PRODUCTIVITY

The sales organization drives revenue for companies, and executives in the C-suite look to them to deliver top-line sales results.

“It would be hard to find a CEO who wouldn’t say that increasing revenue and reducing cost of sales is one of their top three or four goals,” says Jackie Quint, global director of sales enablement at Extreme Networks. “This is why sales enablement has become so critical.”

Yet the job of those in the C-suite is to see the big picture for the entire company. So they view the sales function through another lens in addition to revenue—how it helps to meet or exceed corporate goals and objectives.

“CEOs fundamentally don’t want to hear about tools; they don’t care,” says Walter Rogers, CEO of CCI Global Holdings LLC. “They want to hear about how to connect their end-point vision, such as productivity or profitability, to a strategy.”

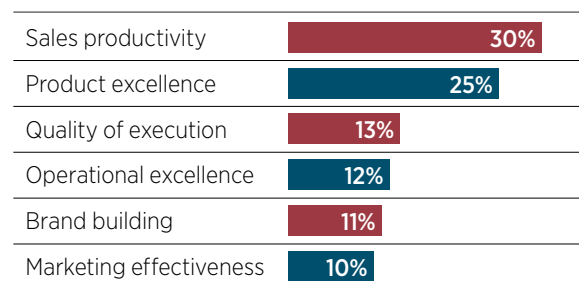
Companies succeed when the issue of sales enablement and sales productivity is top of mind for the management team. Sales enablement is a key focus for companies at the top of the productivity scale—59% of top-performing companies have a defined sales enablement role, as do 72% of all companies that report revenues more than 25% above plan.

“Sales enablement is about creating ever-increasing sales productivity from the day the rep arrives at the company,” says Jay Barrows, chief sales officer at GE Intelligent Platforms. “Hiring reps with the right subject matter experience and giving them the right process, the right accounts, the right tools...to help ensure they prioritize every day so they can be effective, productive and massively impactful.”

When management pays attention to enabling their sales teams, it makes a real difference. The evidence is in the performance of “the rest” of the companies in the survey, or those not leading the way in sales. Only 30% of underperforming companies have a sales enablement role in their organizations.

Companies across the productivity continuum recognize the key role sales productivity needs to play in the organization: nearly one-third (30%) of all the companies surveyed rank sales productivity as the most important management focus, more important than any other factor, including creating an excellent product or focusing on brand building (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Please rank how important sales productivity is relative to these other key areas of management focus:





71%

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES IN PARTICULAR KNOW THAT SALES PRODUCTIVITY IS, IN FACT, PARAMOUNT TO ENABLING A COMPANY TO GROW—71% RANK IT AS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE.

Sales productivity is critical to achieving the goals of the organization, such as profit, competitive advantage and shareholder value. The top goal that sales productivity enables any company to achieve is growth—half of the executives surveyed cite that as essential to success. But C-level executives in particular know that sales productivity is, in fact, paramount to enabling a company to grow—71% rank it as of critical importance (Figure 2).

Together this data suggests that to be truly productive, companies need a defined sales enablement function within the organization and need to ensure that sales productivity is on the radar screen in the executive suite. Without support from the CEO and the entire management team, the sales organization may not receive the resources and focus necessary for success.

Figure 2: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important and 5 is critical, please rate how important sales productivity is to achieving growth

Achieving Growth	5 = Critical
C-Level	71%
Other Executives	55%

ALIGNING SALES AND MARKETING

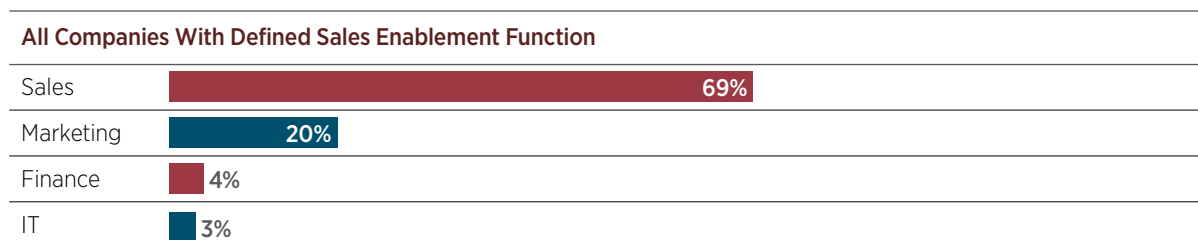
Top-performing companies value a strong sales enablement function and understand the importance of aligning sales and marketing teams. These companies know that sales enablement is best addressed by having the function sit inside the sales organization and then work closely with teams outside sales as well.

“The sales enablement function exists because it is getting harder and harder to get reps to the point where they maximize every customer interaction,” says Jim Ninivaggi, service director, sales enablement strategies at SiriusDecisions. “Reps are overwhelmed with content, communications, events and the like. Companies need to have a function in place that acts like a buffer, to orchestrate and deliver information to reps in a way they can find, digest and utilize.”

It is compelling to note that sales enablement is a distinct function of sales for companies at or near the top of the performance scale. Among firms with a defined sales enablement function, that function resides inside the sales organization for 69% of the companies surveyed, no matter where they fall on the productivity scale (Figure 3).

And there is evidence suggesting that when the enablement function sits within the sales organization, it may lead to higher sales productivity: 18% of firms with the sales enablement function in the sales organization are considered top performers, compared with just 6% of firms with the function elsewhere.

Figure 3: Which function in your organization is primarily responsible for sales enablement activities?

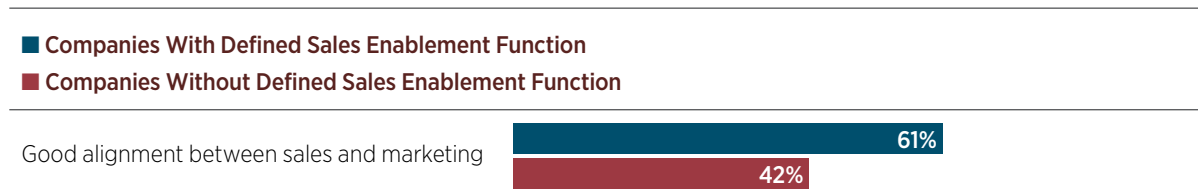


Top-performing companies recognize that the sales team cannot achieve success alone. This is supported by the fact that companies with strong alignment between the marketing and sales departments come out on the top of the sales productivity scale. Three-quarters (74%) of top-performing companies report good alignment between their sales and marketing departments, compared with just half (49%) of other firms. In fact, most companies (87%) that are below their revenue plan report poor alignment between sales and marketing teams.

This survey finds that firms with a defined enablement function have greater alignment between sales and marketing (Figure 4). By joining the forces of these two key departments, sales leaders are recognizing the cross-functional nature of sales and the importance of marketing's role in supporting content, creating value messaging and aligning content to the sales process and customer journey.

“Who is going to own the problem of content?” says Stephen Diorio, chief analyst, Forbes CMO Practice. “Sales wants the content and can tell you what it should look like. But marketing has to provide it. And there's a shared responsibility to maintain it.”

Figure 4: How well aligned are the marketing and sales functions in your organization?



“THE SALES ENABLEMENT FUNCTION EXISTS BECAUSE IT IS GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO GET REPS TO THE POINT WHERE THEY MAXIMIZE EVERY CUSTOMER INTERACTION.”

Jim Ninivaggi

Service Director, Sales Enablement Strategies
SiriusDecisions



CONTENT IS THE SALES PRODUCTIVITY SECRET

Content facilitates effective sales conversations. Top-performing sales organizations know the key role it plays in sales productivity. Creating the right content and ensuring that sales reps can find it when they need it is a significant challenge for some companies. Getting that activity right is the secret to success.

“One big problem for sales reps is that they spend much too much time looking for content,” says Joe Gustafson, founder and CEO of Brainshark. “And they aren’t even sure if they are finding the right information or the most up-to-date content. Worse yet, they may create their own content, which can erode the brand or even make commitments the company can’t keep.”

To be sure, content presents a complicated problem, even for companies in which sales and marketing work effectively together. Content quality and creation is always a challenge for marketers, while too much content can overwhelm salespeople—especially when it’s not clear where and how the best content should be accessed.

“Don’t ask the salespeople to become librarians,” says Diorio. “Put the content on the table—they shouldn’t have to look for it. A rep needs to be able to find the right content—right when he or she needs it.”

Top-performing companies have already identified content as an essential ingredient and have begun investing here. When asked about what specific features and capabilities they would find most beneficial in sales enablement technology, the most frequently cited answers among top performers were related to content:

- Sales content analytics that help identify the best content to drive results (44% versus 31% for all other firms)
- Seamless and fast access to sales content in the field (41% versus 33% for all other firms)

When looking at how investments in content can improve sales productivity, top performers lead here, too. They focus on creating content that is relevant to the needs of the customers they call on (67% compared with 58% of the rest), and recognize the value in using content to communicate the company’s value story and in being able to proactively provide content recommendations to reps in specific selling situations (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The following investments in marketing content can improve sales productivity

	Best
Create content that is relevant to the needs of the customers we call on	67%
Help communicate a value story in sales meetings	63%
Proactively recommend content in specific selling situations	63%
Improve access to content by salespeople	59%
Create content that helps differentiate our company	59%
Make it easier to find content relevant to a client or sales situation	59%
Create content that reinforces our sales training in day-to-day calling	59%
Better align content with the customer journey and sales process	56%
Write content that better supports sales and service interactions	56%



“CONTENT HAS GOT TO BE USED TO BUILD CREDIBILITY AND OPEN UP A RICH AND MEANINGFUL CUSTOMER CONVERSATION.”

Dan Smoot

Executive Vice President, Market Readiness
Salesforce.com

“Content has got to be used to build credibility and open up a rich and meaningful customer conversation,” says Dan Smoot, executive vice president of market readiness at Salesforce.com. “If you are heavily competing, you want to be aggressive. But you fail if you are just talking about yourself. Customers want you to understand them.”

Where does all that content come from? Leading companies are aware of the critical role the marketing department plays here, and top performers work closely with marketing to create and deliver relevant content.

“Marketing is a part of the journey around sales content,” says Jeff McKittrick, director of sales enablement at Cisco Systems. “We have weekly meetings with marketing leaders to discuss what content is working well, almost like an editorial review board.”

Arguably, the relationship between sales and marketing is the most important one within a company when it comes to driving sales productivity. Half (52%)

of top performers say that working closely with marketing to better support value selling with content is the top way that sales support (sales operations) can drive sales productivity, compared with 32% for other firms. Next in importance for top performers is working closely with marketing to define and create more relevant content. This is also the top method identified by the rest of the companies.

“To be successful, marketing has to better understand what sales is doing and develop well-targeted content,” says Nicolas Lihou, head of global sales enablement at Xerox. “The same for sales—they have to let marketing know about their accounts and give them a good understanding of the customer experience.”

THE ADVANTAGE OF VALUE CONVERSATIONS

Because the buyer’s world has changed, and it is easier for people to research online before they even get to the point of contacting a salesperson, it is more challenging for salespeople to have high-value conversations and help the buyer on topics they haven’t already learned. There often is a disconnect between what the buyer expects and what the seller is able to deliver in a meeting.

Companies leading the way in sales productivity focus on enabling salespeople to consistently engage in these value conversations. The key differentiator here is consistency of the sales message. When asked to identify top challenges to productivity, 70% of top-performing companies report that the ability to deliver a consistent message is not a challenge at all, and in fact, they do it well. In contrast, only 37% of all other firms think they have a handle on this.

“Value messaging and value conversations have to be consistent from end to end, so the salesperson tells the same story as marketing, but tuned to the buyer’s needs,” says Diorio.

Consistency requires alignment across the entire organization, as well as skill development and training to ensure salespeople know the core selling themes. They

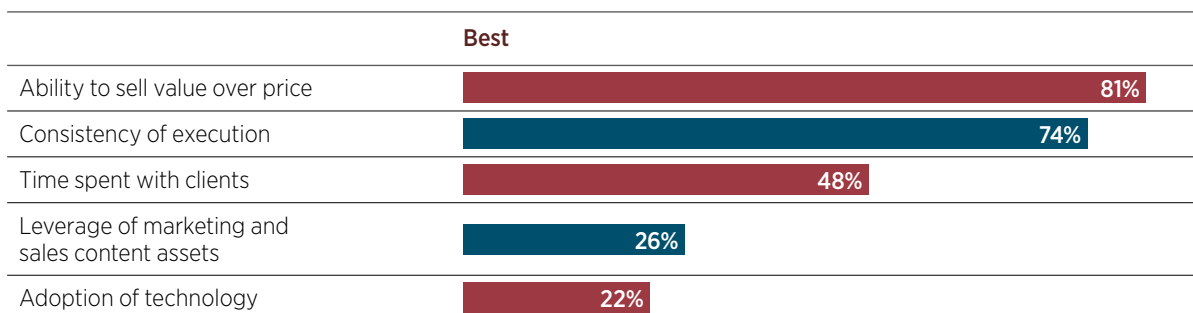
also need access to the necessary content and resources to engage with buyers and support their sales conversations.

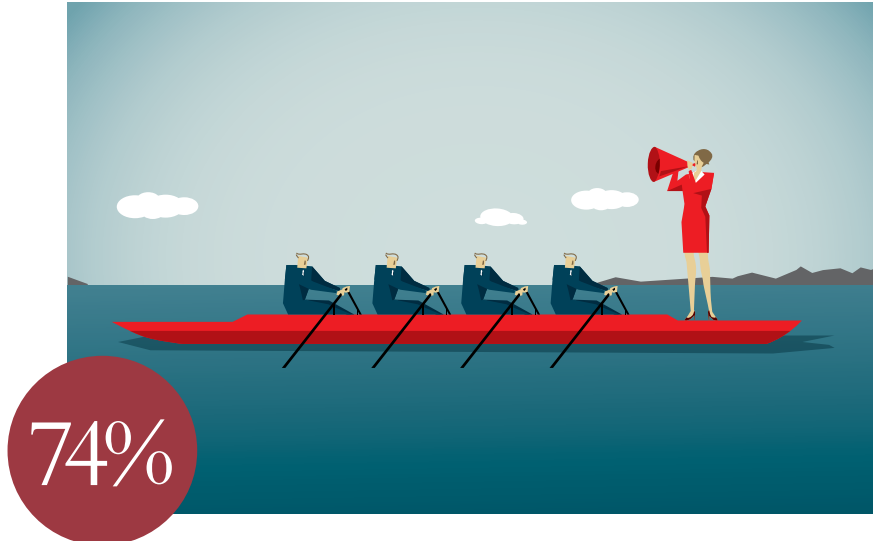
As companies consider all the moving parts that contribute to sales productivity, those at the front of the pack know that human capital makes a difference. Both individual contributors and front-line sales managers have roles here.

First, when thinking about the role of individuals in sales success, executives see two top characteristics among their high-performing salespeople—the ability to sell value over price (81%) and consistency of execution (74%).

“A key characteristic of a high-performing salesperson is an attitude to create value for customers,” says Tamara Schenk, research director at CSO Insights. “It’s a mindset. High performers have a need and desire to help a customer solve a problem, to create value for them. The business follows from that approach.”

Figure 6: What are the key characteristics of high-performing salespeople?





THREE-FOURTHS (74%) OF TOP COMPANIES CITE COACHING OR MENTORING OF SALES REPS AS THE FRONT-LINE MANAGERS' MOST IMPORTANT ROLE.

Companies with top sales organizations also pay particular attention to front-line sales managers. When these managers have the right information and the right tools, they can more effectively coach salespeople in a way that has a measurable impact on sales outcomes.

“Front-line sales managers are the most important people to hire in the company,” says Smoot. “If you don’t have great sales leaders, that is your first line of fault. We had some issues, and now we spend as much time talking about sales leadership as we do about individual contributors.”

Schenk agrees. “Front-line managers have the highest effect in any sales organization. Just think about how many salespeople they lead on average. Why wouldn’t you invest in the front-line sales managers first, knowing that this investment can impact six to 12 people?”

This layer of management is an important cog in the machine of top-performing companies, especially in coaching and supporting the reps they manage. Three-fourths (74%) of top companies cite coaching or mentoring of sales reps as the front-line managers’ most important role, and almost the same amount (70%) cite providing ongoing support for sales activities as their next most important job.

“Best-in-class companies understand the critical role of the front-line manager,” says Ninivaggi. “They provide them with a clear expectation of the manager as a coach and as someone who will hold the rep accountable, and they provide the manager with the tools to be better.”

Top-performing companies understand that training and learning are also critical success factors for sales team members. When asked how they are investing in skills development to improve sales productivity, top-performing companies overwhelmingly cite training and reinforcement—74% (versus 50% of the rest).

“Training is a word that is nearly dead,” says Lihou. “It is much more about learning now. Learning activities are critical, to ensure that anytime something changes in the market, reps are aware of it.”

In addition to recognizing the value of individual contributors and sales managers, and the role of learning to enable their success, top-performing companies are also more willing than their underperforming counterparts to be open to new approaches—59% compared with 43%. This suggests that poorly performing sales organizations may be less agile, and less able to grow and adapt to changing market and selling conditions.



WHEN LOOKING AT HOW THEY INVEST IN TECHNOLOGY TO DRIVE SALES, TOP-PERFORMING COMPANIES ARE INVESTING AT A HIGHER RATE THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN UNDERPERFORMING COMPANIES.

THE “HOW” TO PRODUCTIVITY = EFFICIENCY + EFFECTIVENESS

Companies with successful sales organizations know that sales productivity is about being both efficient and effective. “Sales enablement is about how to improve productivity of sales by squeezing out inefficiencies and maximizing effectiveness,” says Ninivaggi. “The salesperson has to show up on the call, be knowledgeable and skillful, and have the right assets.”

Four out of the top five sales productivity challenges deal with effectiveness of sales reps—onboarding new sales reps, cutting time to close first deals for new reps, shortening the sales cycle, increasing percentage of reps who reach quota (Figure 7). Top performers have already identified these impactful areas and are less likely to have critical issues there. They have also found ways to speed up the process outside of core selling activities and identified how to make reps more efficient.

Top-tier companies know that many factors work together to drive efficiency and effectiveness within a sales team. That means that there are many things that compete for attention, as management considers how to apportion limited budgets and finds ways to simplify and streamline the selling process. Technology is part of the answer, and an aspect that requires a thoughtful approach.

“Technology plays an important role,” says Schenk. “The sequence is important, though. Companies should have a solid foundation of strategies, processes and methodologies. That will enable them to select the

right technology and be well prepared for a successful implementation. If the homework is done before, technology can create a lot of value for an organization.”

For organizations with a strong and consistent methodology, technology is an incredible tool—one that helps their reps train and prepare faster, find the right content and communicate the right messaging to each customer.

“Salespeople are spending hours searching for information and recreating things,” says Lihou. “They are mobile and doing things in the car or a coffee shop. The resources should be available to them, and access to those resources can now be enabled with technology.”

When looking at how they invest in technology to drive sales, top-performing companies are investing at a higher rate than their counterparts in underperforming companies. And they are looking to sales enablement technologies, analytics, CRM systems and learning technologies to make the difference for their teams (Figure 8).

Figure 7: What are the top things that are holding back your organization from achieving its full potential today?*

	Rest	Best
Cutting the time it takes for new reps to close first deals	43%	19%
Onboarding new reps quickly and effectively	41%	26%
Increasing percentage of reps who reach quota	41%	19%
Shortening sales cycles	39%	26%
Reduce time reps waste searching for content	39%	22%
Coaching/mentoring reps throughout the selling process	38%	19%
Improve forecast accuracy	38%	11%
Increasing deal sizes	37%	26%
Increase CRM (customer relationship management) system adoption	36%	26%
Selling new or acquired products	32%	15%
Reduce time reps spend creating their own content	31%	19%
Understand how content affects sales cycles	31%	15%
Consistency of sales messages	30%	11%

*Respondents rated these factors as either materially impacting sales productivity or a critical problem and a top reason their salespeople do not perform well.

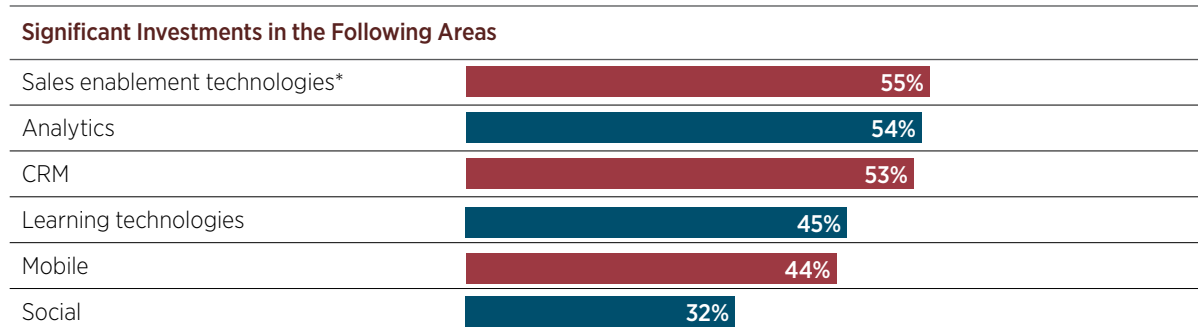
In today’s climate, companies face a plethora of technology options. There are many available solutions with the goal of helping sales reps become more productive—to the degree that it creates confusion. It may even reduce sales productivity in organizations that do not approach a technology solution thoughtfully. With the number of functions that need to work together to drive true sales productivity, this makes the case for companies to look to sales enablement platform solutions rather than to individual or piecemeal technology approaches.

“What we are running into is that some companies have upwards of five to 10 different productivity tools, and that makes it challenging for sales reps,” says Quint. “There is a tipping point where [using] too many of these applications has a negative impact.”

Companies with successful sales organizations know that productivity is about being both efficient and effective. And they recognize that sales enablement technology can help take them to the next level. Top-performing companies look to sales enablement technology to consistently empower their sales reps beyond the basics—to improve their efficiency and effectiveness by enabling marketing to create high-quality sales content, shortening the sales cycle and ensuring salespeople get up to speed and trained faster.

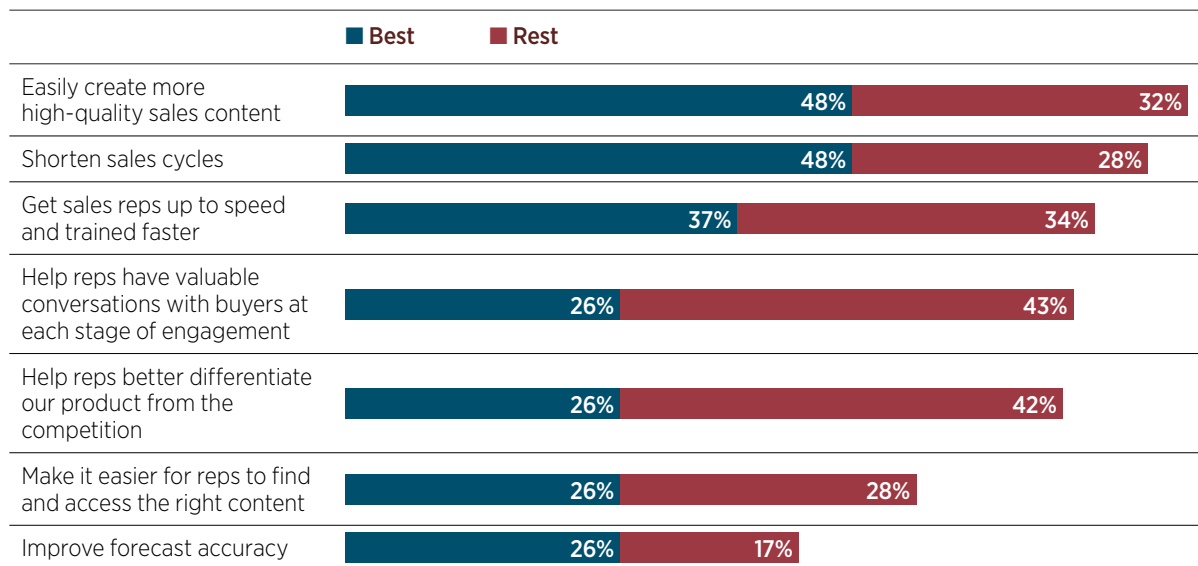
Companies that are not performing well look to sales enablement technology for more-fundamental selling tasks like enabling value conversations with buyers and differentiating the company’s product from the competition (Figure 9).

Figure 8: On a scale where 1 is “very little” and 5 is “significantly,” in what ways are you investing in technology to improve sales productivity?



*(Note: Sales enablement technology includes any solutions that provide integrated content, training or coaching services to reps and managers.)

Figure 9: What are the most important results you would want sales enablement technology to accomplish for your organization?



CONCLUSION

It is possible for companies to achieve dramatic improvements in sales productivity. The information to do so is out there—top-performing companies are exceeding their goals every day. To join the ranks of these leading sales organizations, companies would do well to recognize the critical success factors of top companies and follow their lead in key areas such as onboarding, continuous learning, and coaching powered by content and analytics.



Sales organizations need to make sales enablement and sales productivity a priority for the company as a whole. And they need to work to ensure support for this mission from the C-suite. They should also recognize that a sales enablement function cannot provide enough value on its own. The road to success involves aligning with other teams in the company, especially marketing, and working together to create and deliver value for customers.

To bridge the sales productivity gap, struggling companies need to understand the key role of content in empowering reps—to make sense of the client's challenges and meet their needs—in other words, to deliver value in every sales meeting. And they need to put the right technology and resources in place to enable reps and everyone in the organization to deliver a consistent sales message.

Finally, successful sales organizations know that enablement is all about improving both efficiency and effectiveness. In today's world one of the most powerful ways to accomplish this is with sales enablement technology that addresses the comprehensive need.

Businesses with inefficient and ineffective sales processes are not reaching their potential. Their sales productivity is way off the mark as they struggle to increase revenue per rep and narrow the gap between their top salespeople and the rest of the team. And even top performers know there is room for improvement.

Not every sales enablement function looks the same, and there are many different levers a company can pull in an effort to make its sales force more productive. But no matter what that function looks like, companies that prioritize sales productivity, work collaboratively to deliver the company's value message and recognize the value of investing in technology to improve both efficiency and effectiveness will start to close that gap and make their way to the top of the list.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

216 U.S.-based executives

Functional role

- 59% Sales
- 18% General management
- 12% Marketing
- 11% Business development

Title

- 29% Director
- 23% Senior VP / VP
- 19% Managing Director
- 11% Other
- 9% Executive VP
- 5% CEO
- 3% CMO
- 1% COO

Industry

- 32% Financial services
- 25% Manufacturing
- 16% Technology and software
- 11% Insurance
- 8% Healthcare
- 5% Other
- 4% Medical device/healthcare solutions

Annual revenue

- 34% Greater than \$5 billion
- 19% \$1 billion - \$5 billion
- 15% \$510 million - \$1 billion
- 20% \$101 million - \$500 million
- 11% \$51 million - \$100 million

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- **Walter Rogers**, CEO, CCI Global Holdings LLC
- **Tamara Schenk**, Research Director, CSO Insights
- **Dan Smoot**, Executive Vice President of Market Readiness, Salesforce.com

ABOUT BRAINSHARK

Brainshark sales enablement solutions help organizations harness the power of content to achieve faster training, better coaching and more successful sales conversations.

Brainshark simplifies the creation and delivery of content to ensure salespeople are always up-to-date with the information and resources they need—anytime, anywhere, and from any device. Tight integration with Salesforce empowers reps with fast, seamless access to the right content and training for every selling situation. Detailed analytics enable managers to tie content directly to revenue, identify the best sales opportunities, and use best practices to coach B players to perform like A players.

Thousands of companies—including half of the Fortune 100—rely on Brainshark to improve sales productivity and increase the impact of their sales, marketing, and training communications.

Learn more at www.brainshark.com.

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