



RISE OF THE DIGITAL SALES FORCE

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INTRODUCTION

In a lot of ways, COVID-19 was a catalyst for change. For businesses, the pandemic and resulting economic shakeup dramatically accelerated many trends already in the works including work from home policies and **digital-first communication with prospects and customers**. Digitally enabling the buyer's journey went from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have' practically overnight. The market has changed as well. Due to economic uncertainty, B2B buying cycles are taking longer as businesses are more conscientious about spending¹, which requires sellers to be more persistent. These shifts in the economy and buyer behaviors force businesses to adjust their go-to-market approach to drive sales and revenue.

One such example is the rise of the digital sales force. Sales organizations contending with the pandemic had to suspend in-person meetings, events, and tradeshows which were essential to building relationships and closing deals. Instead, Sales teams—and the people they sell to—are now working from home. This creates a number of challenges for organizations including **enabling teams for digital selling** and **meeting the needs of a digital-first audience**. While some organizations were ahead of the curve, now it is imperative for all businesses to operate from a digital-first mindset.

This eBook will discuss **what's driving the rise of digital sales**, **challenges and limitations** to its adoption, and **how to best innovate your techniques and technologies** to match the new normal.



WHAT'S DRIVING THE RISE OF DIGITAL SALES

There are four primary factors driving the rise of digital sales:

- **Field Sales are now the new Inside Sales;** operating completely as a remote, online sales force.
- **There is a change in B2B buying habits as customers prefer remote, digital buying experiences.**
- While B2B buyers want a self-service experience, they also **expect immediate engagement after contacting a company²**, which is simply not possible with people power alone and requires technology solutions to fill the gap.
- Innovative solutions like **Conversational AI** are imperative to **meet demands for scalable, personalized, and timely customer engagement.**

Whereas Salespeople interacted with prospects in an office onsite, in-person event, or tradeshow, now all these interactions are happening online. Gone are the days of meeting a customer, taking them out to dinner, and greeting them with a firm handshake since these activities are off-limits in a pandemic.

This is a major shake-up for sellers. But for consumers, it might be a welcome change. The

Gartner Future of Sales 2025 report predicts that by 2025, **80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in digital channels³**. Furthermore, Millennials now make up the majority of B2B decision-makers and buyers and are very comfortable with digital self-service¹. Education about your offerings is largely self-driven via websites, virtual events, and webinars.

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But while prospects can educate themselves using your online materials or attending virtual events, B2B buying still requires conversations between prospects and Salespeople before closing the deal. After all, the would-be buyer wants to know they are getting the right solution to fit their needs and sellers want to ensure that their solution can help the buyer.

That's where remote selling comes in. B2B purchases are rather complex and buyers and sellers alike need to connect to decide if the solution is really a match for their needs. Communications are fostered through digital channels including phone calls, emails, text

83% of customers expect to engage with someone immediately after contacting a company.²

messages, website chat, and video conferencing platforms like Zoom. Consumers list several benefits to remote interactions including ease of scheduling, saving on travel expenses, avoiding travel restrictions, and health/safety.

An unfortunate consequence of this is that the buyer's journey feels rather impersonal until the final stages when a prospect raises their hand, schedules a meeting, or requests a demo. Sales teams must adjust to these realities if they are going to thrive today and into the future.

Once a prospective buyer raises their hand, it's up to Sales teams to follow up quickly to schedule a meeting. Research finds that 83% of customers expect to engage with someone immediately after contacting a company².

Yet the vast majority of businesses fail to promptly follow up with handraisers⁴ due to capacity constraints. It's clear that organizations need to augment their human teams with technological solutions that foster promptness and scalability to effectively engage prospects and drive them towards converting. Organizations that do not adjust to this new normal will likely lose opportunities to competitors who have.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE DIGITAL SALES FORCE

For many businesses, this is their first time adopting a digital sales force. This can manifest internally (in the way it affects teams and employees or externally (as it affects leads and prospects. Organizations need to digitally enable their Sales teams to foster effective remote selling and match consumer expectations.

Unfortunately, **less than 6% of enterprise workforces were prepared for telecommuting**⁵. This puts tremendous pressure on business leaders to enable their teams quickly. Even Field Sales, who are used to working remotely to serve the territories they live in, are not used to remote interactions with their customers including virtual conferences and video conferencing. To succeed in a digital-first world, Sales organizations need to deliver valuable virtual experiences that educate the market, as well as follow up with leads after these interactions to discover sales-ready opportunities.

The second reason is that Sales teams are not enabled to meet the expectations of digital customers. Since most customer journeys start online, organizations need a way to capture interest from the get-go. Common examples include customer case studies, testimonials, and thought leadership pieces. Still, it's easy for leads and prospects to forget about a brand as soon as they leave your website. This is why organizations must capture a lead's contact

information (such as name, email address, and phone number for Sales follow-up. Without an engaging website, quality content, and lead forms it's virtually impossible to operate in a digital self-service world.

Adopting technologies self-service and digital-first offer a competitive advantage. Research firm, Forrester finds that it takes an average of 18 meaningful interactions during the buyer's journey, divided evenly between human and non-human interactions.⁶

The good news is that many organizations do have these things in place. The bad news is that it's easy to fall behind on Sales follow-up.

Regrettably but perhaps unsurprisingly, many businesses had to layoff employees or freeze hiring due to the economic recession. This creates capacity challenges for the remaining Salespeople who simply cannot touch every single incoming lead to determine which ones are hot. This forces Salespeople to cherry-pick which leads to go after and leaves many untouched⁷.

Today as businesses recover from the initial impact of the pandemic and hiring resumes, Sales teams are faced with a new challenge of how to structure the Digital Sales team of the future. Even well-staffed Sales teams fall short in

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prompt, persistent, and personalized lead follow-up⁴. Business leaders know there is value hidden within swaths of untouched leads, but the teams they manage simply cannot give these leads the attention needed to turn them into opportunities with their headcount alone. Many organizations are taking this opportunity to re-imagine their Sales structure, optimize to a digital-first world, and even hire Salespeople who are more savvy operating in this new digital environment.

Yes, technology can fill in the gap, but it needs to be the right kind of technology. Finding a balance between impersonal but scalable communications and personal but time-consuming one-on-one communications can be tough. After all, customers want a digital-first experience; not a digital-only experience. The onus is on organizations to provide this.

Challenges facing Sales team capacity:

- Too many leads, not enough capacity
- Fears of low-quality leads
- Longer sales cycles
- Inability to deliver personalized messages promptly and persistently
- Suspected value and opportunities hidden within cold leads, but no way to efficiently discover these.

ENABLING SALES TEAMS WITH THE RIGHT TECHNIQUES

To meet the challenges of today, organizations need to innovate the way Sales teams interact with remote customers, enable their (now digital) Sales teams and adopt technologies to scale their operations without sacrificing a personalized touch. Business leaders need to enable their teams for telecommuting by adopting technologies that allow them to digitally meet with leads and prospects. This includes techniques that allow for nimble strategizing and technologies that drive personalization and scalability to motivate conversions.

Develop a Content Sales Strategy

Businesses need to make digital self-service easy for their audiences. Provide quality information on your website so consumers can educate themselves at their own speed. Consider that different audiences prefer to consume content in different ways. Have a mix of short-form written content, long-form written content, videos, and webinars, as well as audio-only podcasts.

Using lead forms to capture contact information as leads request access to these materials gives Sellers an in-road to communicate with customers, answer questions, and schedule meetings with handraisers.

Communicate With Customers Across Multiple Channels

Businesses need to communicate with customers on their terms across multiple channels while driving them to take the next best action. Website chat is a great way to give customers something to interact with when they land on your website. It can also be a valuable tool for capturing contact information beyond the use of traditional lead forms.

But interactions shouldn't stop there. SMS text messaging or social selling through platforms like LinkedIn can help cut through the noise and engage prospective customers in a friendly dialogue about your products and services. However, email is still the primary place people anticipate follow-up and where consumers prefer to get their information⁸.

Identifying Prospects via Account-Based Marketing (ABM)

Account-Based Marketing (ABM) offers an important strategic approach that recognizes that multiple stakeholders from the same company or account are investigating your products or services. Buying decisions are rarely made by a single person, so it's a bit shortsighted to focus on how a single individual qualifies as a lead. This is especially true today when buyers

The average buyer uses
7 information sources to make
a purchase decision, which is a
35% increase from last year.¹



are more conscientious about when and where they spend their money. To more accurately target prospective B2B buyers, it's prudent for organizations to adopt ABM technologies and strategies.

ENABLING SALES TEAMS WITH THE RIGHT TECHNIQUES

Dynamic Sales Planning

Agility and flexibility are vital attributes for organizations to thrive in the new normal. To integrate these qualities into your business, organizations need to modify how they plan.

Traditional strategic sales planning, for example, looks at long-term history in an attempt to plan for a long-term future. But this is much harder to accomplish when 2020 and 2021 are anything but typical. In response, organizations should consider dynamic sales planning instead.

Dynamic sales planning encourages short-term planning that allows for nimble recalibration in uncertain times⁹. Consider planning quarterly to assess where you are, where you need to go in the medium-term, and how you can accomplish that. Increased communication is key. Team leaders ought to establish regular checkpoints to keep Sellers motivated, identify issues early, and work together to close deals.

Benefits of a digital sales structure:

- More visibility and speed
- Giving remote people purpose and direction
- Salespeople enjoy in-person interactions
- Use technology to enable this purpose and foster human connections

Embrace Conversational AI for Sales

While the above strategies help sellers meet some of the challenges of a digital-firstworld where consumers prefer to digitally educate themselves, there are still obstacles facing Sales teams when consumers are ready to take the next step. Prospects expect to engage with someone immediately after contacting a company², which is simply not possible to accomplish consistently with people power alone.

To truly enable Sales teams for prompt, personalized, and persistent lead follow-up, organizations ought to consider a Conversational AI solution to scale teams and drive revenue.

But what is Conversational AI and what value does it offer Sales teams?



SALES TEAMS RISE TO THE OCCASION WITH CONVERSATIONAL AI

To thrive in a digital-first world, leading organizations are adopting Conversational AI solutions to improve scalability, offer a more personalized experience for leads and prospects, and work every opportunity to its fullest.

Conversational AI incorporates natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning technologies to engage in humanlike, two-way conversations across multiple communication interfaces, thus helping scale human teams that would otherwise be unable to cover their duties.

Intelligent Virtual Assistants (AI Assistants), specifically, are a form of Conversational AI that delivers personalized, two-way conversations across multiple channels including email, SMS text, and website chat. By applying Conversational AI solutions to Sales, an AI Assistant acts as a Digital Sales Rep that can engage with leads and prospects to qualify leads and pass hot leads off to Sales.

What does this mean for the rise of the digital sales force? Prospects and customers expect a prompt and personalized touch when investigating your products and services. With high enough traffic volumes, it would be impossible for any Sales team to deliver a quality experience to every contact. AI Assistants fill this gap while driving customers to the next best action, such as scheduling a meeting or demo.

The same principles apply to webinars and virtual events. By delivering a personalized message to a lead within five minutes after attending a webinar or virtual event, Sales teams boost their chances of qualifying a lead by 21x compared to following up after just 30 minutes¹⁰. Yet many Sales organizations fail to promptly; taking hours, sometimes days to follow up with event attendees.

AI Assistants provide the necessary coverage—and the necessary intelligence—to manage large swaths of prospects and customers so that every contact is given the attention it deserves. Whether that's delivering a personalized first touch via IVA-powered website chat, following up with a lead via email to see if they are interested in speaking to a Salesperson, or texting an existing customer about a renewal or upgrade opportunity, an IVA is always polite and persistent to ensure the best experience for customers and Sellers.

Conversational AI gives organizations the ability to personalize communications at scale, while allowing customers to self-serve in a digital-first world. By asking every incoming lead whether they are interested in scheduling a meeting with a Salesperson, an Intelligent Virtual Assistant can accelerate pipeline by elevating handraisers or autonomously fostering warm leads until they are hot. This includes the ability to send an IVA after

swaths of cold or untouched leads to discover hidden opportunities; something too time-consuming for business professionals, but easy for an Intelligent Virtual Assistant.

Lastly, Conversational AI provides business leaders greater visibility into the sales process by providing insights into the number of touches, interactions, hot lead opportunities, and more. IVAs help to improve data integrity by automatically updating contact information in your CRM as it interacts with leads and customers. To close the loop an Intelligent Virtual Assistant follows up with prospects 48 hours after a scheduled appointment to ensure that the lead received the help they needed or to reschedule a call if it was missed.

What an Intelligent Virtual Assistant means for Sales Teams:

- Increased capacity to discover more revenue opportunities from your existing pipeline
- Ability to scale personalized, prompt, and persistent lead follow-up
- Time saved so you can focus on closing deals rather than chasing them
- AI-driven conversations that always drive towards the next best action

CONCLUSION



This past year has required substantial adjustments in the way organizations manage their teams, how they engage with the market, and how they allocate resources. These shifts are becoming the new normal.

To meet these challenges head-on, organizations need to innovate teams, technologies, and techniques. These actions will determine how well your digital sales force can rise to the occasion.



END NOTES

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About Conversica

Conversica is the leading provider of Conversational AI solutions that help enterprise marketing, sales, customer success, and finance teams attract, acquire and grow customers at scale across the customer revenue lifecycle.

Conversica AI Assistants serve as digital team members and autonomously engage contacts, prospects, customers, or partners in human-like, two-way interactions at scale to drive towards the next best action, whether that's scheduling a sales meeting, gauging interest to buy additional products or services, or politely but persistently collecting overdue payments.

Processing over a billion interactions, the Conversica Conversational AI platform integrates natural language processing (NLU & NLG), decision &

policy management, business process automation and deep learning capabilities to drive customer engagement across multiple digital communication channels and languages.

The Conversica platform supports over 50 integrations into the most popular MAP and CRM platforms and offers an open API for custom integration.

To learn more, visit www.conversica.com and follow the company on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

