# Tech Check

## A look at what's powering B2B sales and marketing success

# 7 Technological Advances Shaping the Future of Sales and Marketing

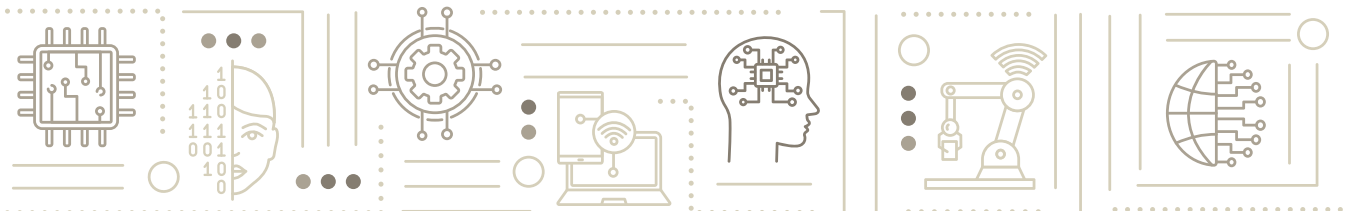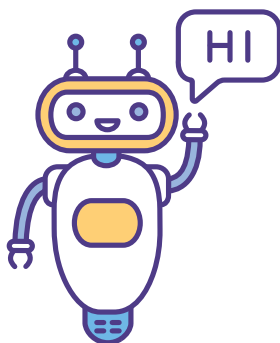BY ELOISE TOBLER

Every business needs active, well-planned strategies to stay ahead of its rivals. Incorporating the latest technological developments can help improve your marketing efficiency when dealing with business contacts. Identifying the most promising technological trends for marketing isn't always easy. Here are seven technological advancements that increasingly impact how businesses go to market.

## Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots

In many respects, AI still seems to belong to the realms of science fiction, yet it's steadily making progress in marketing. Small businesses, plagued by shortages of trained personnel and time, are expecting AI to compensate for their deficiencies. According to the report, State of Marketing by Drift, 42% of consumers are unaware of being attended to by chatbots. This advanced software can emulate human conversation and it's reassuringly lifelike. It's ideal for providing the answers to the common questions posed by your business contacts. It can be on duty 24/7, enabling your business to remain constantly active.

## Impact of Voice Searches

Smart automation technology is growing fast in the retail sector and could soon make a deep impression in B2B marketing. A recent survey by ThinkWithGoogle.com has shown that voice search is used by at least 27% of the world's consumers. 46% of these are conducting daily searches. Voice search is a convenient method of finding out all the information you need. Using it in your business marketing strategies could provide fast access for your future contacts.

## Online Content

Creating informative blog posts is already an essential marketing tool for every business regardless of size. In the competitive world of B2B marketing, it can be even more effective. OptinMonster has compiled statistics that reveal B2B marketers with effective blogs receive 67% more conversions than rivals who don't blog. 72% acknowledge blogging as the power behind their SEO campaigns. However, engaging, original content is an absolute priority. It's the only way to increase your brand's reputation as a trustworthy authority. According to Buffer.com, your SEO strategy is most effective when a blog post is around 1,600 words in length.

## Micro-Influencers are Gaining Ground

Statistics by InfluencerMarketing.com revealed that during 2021, influencers generated $13.8 billion in sales. 2022 is expected to see their input grow to $16.4 billion. Can your business afford to neglect this aspect of gaining more clients and customers? Fortunately, any business can join in this growing technological trend as it's not the celebrities that are making the largest impact.

Relatively unknown micro-influencers have been causing headlines on social media platforms such as TikTok. You no longer need to pay for celebrity endorsement. You simply need a great service or product and an engaging personality to get your message across.

## Prioritize Messaging Apps

Businesses have usually relied on professional platforms such as Linkedin for making regular contacts and sales. However, nothing stands still online. Messaging apps have begun to be big news, They work in a similar format to an online chat room. You can make fast progress by posting a message and receiving an instant reply. Data collected by BusinessInsider.com has shown there are four main messaging apps; Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber and WeChat. Most significantly, they have a greater number of users than their four big rivals on the traditional social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin and Instagram. In a B2B scenario, messaging apps appear to be an unstoppable technological trend.

## Be Smart with Personalized Content

Marketers have relied for years on tailoring adverts to the search activity of online visitors. Technological advancements are now stepping beyond these confines by using personalized content. Powerful software as a service (SaaS) monitors your clients' searches. It is then capable of presenting targeted information such as detailed blog posts instead of waiting for your visitors to search for them. Smart SaaS is easy to incorporate into your management system. As a marketing tool, it's a valuable business asset, helping to increase visitor interest by personalizing your products or services.

## Making the Most of Mobile Usage

The mobile revolution continues unabated online and has now been making great progress in B2B marketing. According to ThinkwithGoogle, B2B businesses have increased mobile usage in recent years. It's a convenient on-the-go tool that's instantly accessible. Google's statistics continue to note that 63% use their smartphones to purchase products that have been specifically tailored to their recent searches. Capturing your customers' attention is easier if your site has a mobile-friendly format.

Technological trends are vital in B2B marketing. They are most effective when they complement each other. Integrating smart, personalized content, AI and a mobile-friendly platform is an ideal way to use technology efficiently. Messaging apps, micro-influencers, high-quality content and voice searches can combine to become a powerful force in your marketing campaigns. These technological trends can help you effectively improve your marketing strategies to outperform your competitors. **smm**

Eloise Tobler is with Wisetek Store, which was created to give customers access to high-quality, reliable and affordable refurbished technological equipment.

# Sales Teams Embrace AI-Powered Conversation Analysis

BY PAUL NOLAN

"The leads are weak? You're weak!" Alec Baldwin's character in "Glengarry Glen Ross" rants.

"Sometimes it's true," said Amit Bendov, CEO and co-founder of Gong.io. Sometimes salespeople fall short, particularly in the conversations they have with prospects. His comments came in an interview on the Harvard-produced podcast "Cold Call." Alison Wood Brooks, a Harvard Business School associate professor who studies the psychology of conversation, was also featured on the podcast.

Gong.io is an example of a technological solution that is increasingly being adopted by sales teams globally: artificial intelligence-powered analysis of sales conversations to better understand what top salespeople do.

The technology is called natural language processing or NLP. In addition to Gong.io, Chorus.ai and VoiceVibes from Bigtincan are examples of the software as a service (SaaS). They use AI to analyze sales conversations specifically, including emails and meetings. Detailed reports are produced with metrics on everything from the amount of time each party talks and the impact of the words chosen, to the ratio of questions to statements used by a salesperson. (Generally, questions should outnumber statements.)

The technology also powers the operation of chatbots that provide automated customer service, as well as by marketing teams to enhance SEO, generate high-performance sales copy and monitor brand-building to recommend adjustments to messaging and positioning.

## Replicating Effective Sales Communication

AI can help answer the question, what do great salespeople say and do, and can we take their strategies and help other people learn to do those things as well? The technology is not a means to create scripts or make every conversation the same, Wood Brooks emphasized.

She created a course in Harvard's MBA curriculum called "How to Talk Gooder In Business and In Life." One of the biggest takeaways from the class and her research, she said, is "that you can learn tactics, you can learn strategies and how to prepare better for a conversation, but it's not a checklist. The thing that is beautiful about conversation is that it's serendipitous and unpredictable. Once you're in it, you have to let it all go."

Beverlie Heyman, director of sales enablement at Bigtincan, a sales readiness platform, said tools like the company's VoiceVibes product are the result of sales reps getting away from prepackaged slide deck presentations and turning the focus on presenting the right message in the right way so that it's tailored to each prospect or buying team. Bigtincan offers VoiceVibes as a stand-alone product or with the suite of sales enablement tools it creates for its customers.

"More people are realizing the importance of tone and articulation and engagement. It's not just about the message. You can be listening to two people deliver the same message, and one can be boring and monotone and disengaged while the second is more engaging and enthusiastic," Heyman said in a telephone interview. "We've come to the point where we're equally concerned about keeping the customer inspired throughout the conversation.

Heyman said Bigtincan uses the VoiceVibes tool with its own sales team. Lead generation reps are asked to record their pitch five times and submit the best one. "When you are getting your reps to work five different times on a message before getting in front of a customer, all the better," she said.

Jane Reed, director of life sciences at Linguamatics, which delivers NLP-based AI solutions for life science and health care companies, stated in a blog post that she once believed use of NLP software in her industry was primarily suited to pull out critical information from reports on pharmaceutical research and development. When she dug deeper, she realized it could "bring real productivity gains" to pharmaceutical sales teams.

Reed said NLP can help identify key opinion leaders, which in turn helps structure marketing messages and present the most important information when reps are in front of decision-makers.

"AI — in the shape of NLP — has been proven to bring value to pharma field, medical affairs and sales teams, providing insights and information that can boost communication, understanding and productivity. And, as the volume and variety of real-world data source grows, I am sure that the opportunity for value contributed by AI technologies will grow as well," she stated.

It's common for sales reps to be wary of having their customer interactions recorded and analyzed, especially if they are not performing well. Wood Brooks points out it's akin to coaches and athletes watching game film. When reps experience the improved conversations that can result from NLP, it quickly is embraced.

A concern that knowledge of their conversations being recorded will alter the flow is also quickly dispelled, Wood Brooks said. "In practice, you quickly forget you are being recorded. Then, they get this big benefit at the end of the analysis report." smm
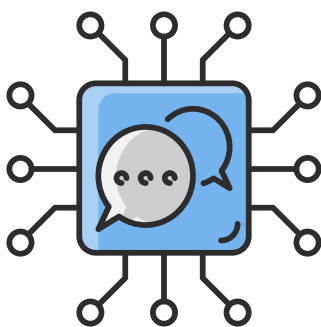
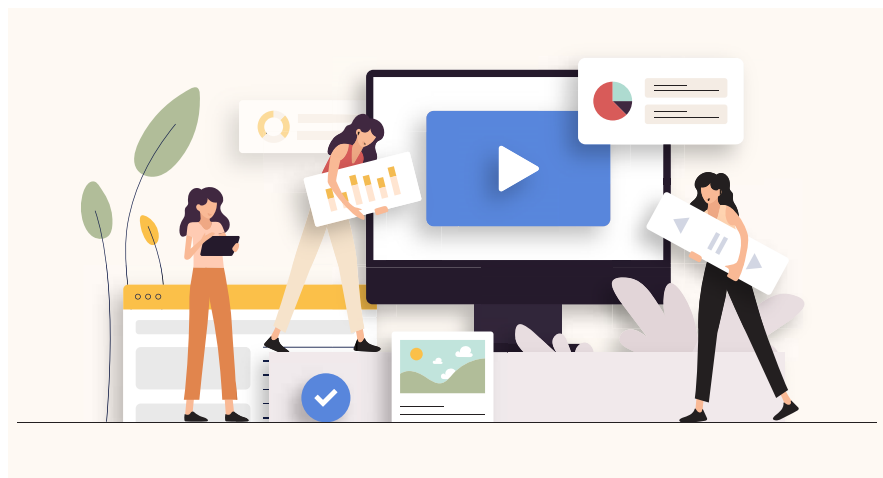# Experiential Sales: The Strategy of the Future That's Here Today

BY DAVID FLETCHER

Personalized customer experiences aren't just for marketers anymore. As B2C and B2B customers keep raising their expectations for custom-tailored interactions with brands and vendors, it's time for sales teams to develop experiential customer acquisition programs that increase engagement and conversion. Here are the tools and tactics we see organizations adopting to create more memorable, compelling sales experiences.



## Sales Data Analysis

Because more sales experiences are happening remotely and online, there's more sales data than ever that organizations can use to refine and optimize their sales strategies. For example, McKinsey suggests that companies draw on sales and marketing behavioral data as well as voice of customer data to "find patterns in completed deals and to generate insights on which behaviors can help win deals and boost satisfaction scores."

Effective data analysis depends on unified data across marketing, sales and possibly product development that's consistently formatted for easy analysis. Analytics teams can pull sales data from the organization's CRM, and there are a number of KPIs that organizations can track, including win rate, average time to close, ratio of sales to new versus existing customers, and success by lead generation format. With ongoing data analysis, organizations can improve their existing sales strategies and develop new ones.

## Hyperpersonalization

One way to leverage unified data and AI for a more immersive and compelling sales experience is hyper personalization. By drawing on data for individual customers and buyers, brands and organizations can custom tailor unique experiences and guide them through their specific buying journey in a way that strengthens their bond with the brand, gives them the exact experience and information they are looking for, and doesn't waste their time with off-message or extraneous sales information.

Dynamic pricing is one example of hyperpersonalization in sales. Another example, from Deloitte, is drawing on online and profile data for airline customers to create omnichannel, continuously updated personalization across customer service interactions, airport lounge experiences, service recommendations, and other touchpoints.

## AI-based Selling

Data analysis is critical for B2B sales as well as B2C. Although many B2B organizations have made great progress in personalized marketing and digital experiences since the start of the pandemic, overall, B2B still lags behind BTC innovations. That has implications for B2B sales programs' success. A recent report by PYMNTS and American Express found that among millennial B2B buyers, 74% have switched to vendors that offer more consumer-style buying experiences.

However, there are indications that the B2B sales transformation is accelerating. A new Gartner Sales report finds that three-fourths of B2B sales organizations will use AI-based selling by 2025 "to look into data and recommend the next best actions."
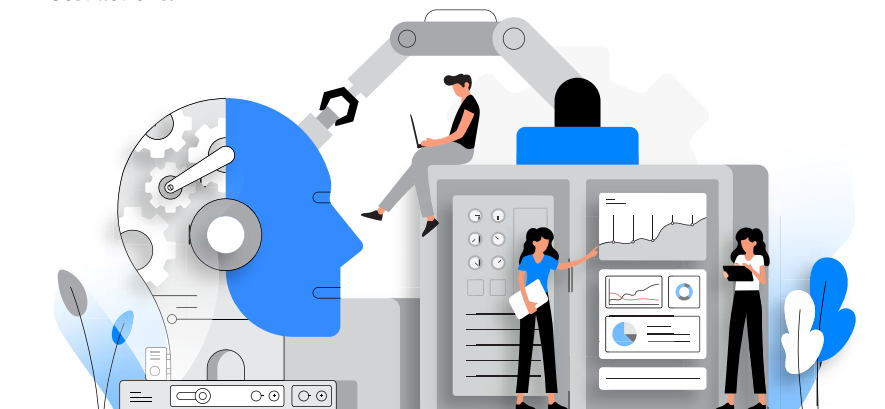
## Event Marketing and Sales

Even with so many digital and analytical tools available for creating great sales experiences, face-to-face sales and marketing events are still important for building trust among customers. That's especially true for complex and costly B2B sales as well as for B2C sales that have a strong physical component to the decision-making process, like buying a new car.

Of course, digital tools can help you plan and execute a more successful sales event than you could run otherwise. That starts with identifying your event goals and the customer segment — or even the specific customers — most aligned with those goals. With a clear goal and audience, it's time to structure the event format in a way that appeals to the target audience and furthers the sales goals.

For example, a B2B company selling a new, niche SaaS solution might hold an online event for their hottest prospects to walk through the solution and answer customers' questions in real time. A luxury carmaker, on the other hand, might combine on-site digital learning experiences about their newest model with test drives at a special showroom event. And a company that's just getting its first product to market might combine VR experiences with face-to-face conversations at trade shows. Ideally, customer data from each event would feed into the sales analytics database.

## Peer to Peer Programs

Customers trust peer recommendations. That's why online reviews are so popular and so important. Even among B2B decision makers, 45% cite user reviews as one of their top resources for evaluating possible purchases, which means every organization can benefit from engaging with their review profiles on third-party sites and responding to reviews.

Of course, peer to peer sales programs go beyond leveraging customer reviews and written or video testimonials. They can also include social media and on-site user communities, where existing customers and prospects can share feedback, suggestions and examples of how to use the product or service. These community discussions also provide voice of the customer data for sales, marketing and product teams to analyze and use.

## Sales Portals

As your sales organization adds more experiences and more content and data to support them, you'll need a single place where your team can find the right resources for customers. A well-organized sales portal saves teams time looking through different apps and systems to find the information they need to customize the customer experience.

Individually, each of these tools can improve the sales process. Together, they can build an extremely efficient and compelling suite of sales experiences that generates more data for continuous improvement, ultimately leaving an impression on customers that boosts recommendations and sales performance. **SMM**

David Fletcher serves as senior vice president at ClearSale, a card-not-present fraud prevention operation that helps retailers increase sales and eliminate chargebacks before they happen. At ClearSale, he spearheads business development, sales, partnerships and alliances with top e-commerce organizations. Follow on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter @ClearSaleUS, or visit https://www.clear.sale.

# Know Who Will Hit Quota Before Hiring Sales Reps

BY MATTHEW KURASKA

The guess-and-check approach to hiring sales reps will never yield positive results, especially when attempting to scale your team during a labor shortage. These are uncertain times, and you need to bring more certainty to your hiring process than simply relying on reviewing resumes and conducting brief interviews. These methods don't give you enough insight into applicants to make informed decisions, ultimately inhibiting revenue growth and in some cases, causing costly employee turnover.

Companies must shift their focus from experience to coachability, like one software company that achieved 338% annual revenue growth by hiring sales reps with no experience. They discovered several candidates who were fresh out of college but ended up being better hires than veterans of the industry!

## How to Hire Sales Reps Like Your Top Performers

If you want to take a page out of their book, start focusing on applicants who possess soft skills that align with your sales teams, like empathy and adaptability. Industry experience only takes a person so far, but someone with the right set of soft skills can exceed expectations with the proper environment and training. If done properly, you can identify and hire candidates with the same mental makeup as your current top performers.
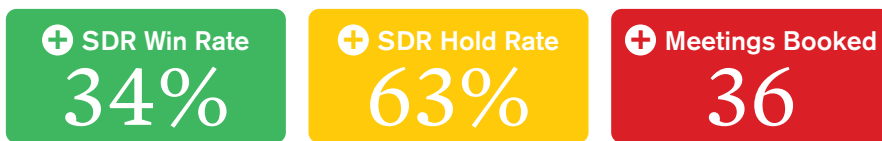
One way to identify the ideal applicants is to rethink your interview process. Are you asking worthwhile questions that glean important insight about an individual's soft skills, or do you stick with the traditional script and go with your gut feelings? For example, you could evaluate someone's adaptability by asking how they handled a surprising objection that blocked a sale. However, there will always be some level of uncertainty when trying to identify personality traits via resumes and interviews.

The only way to predict applicant success with pinpoint precision is with Sprockets' hiring platform—the solution that the software company used to achieve remarkable growth with sales reps who had no experience. It identified key personality traits in their top performers, revealed which applicants shared similar mental makeups, and made it easy to hire the best candidates with a simple red-yellow-green scoring system. Ultimately, they were able to quickly scale their sales team during a labor crisis without sacrificing performance.
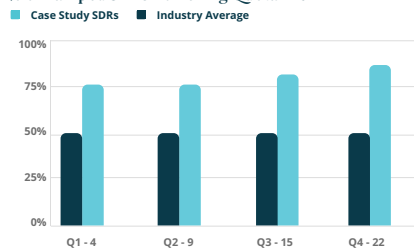
## Hire the Best Sales Reps

Whether you're dealing with a labor crisis or are just at a pivotal point in your business's growth, you need to be certain about the new hires that you bring on board. Will you be among the 45% of businesses that fail within their first five years, or will you build a reliable, high-performing sales team that drives growth no matter what obstacles stand in your way? The answer is obvious, and the key is Sprockets. **smm**

Matthew Kuraska is a Digital Marketing Specialist at Sprockets, a Charleston-based tech company that helps businesses build high-performance teams by revealing which applicants will perform like their current top performers.
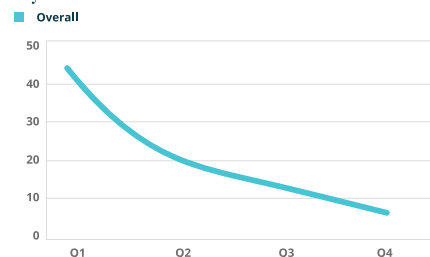


| SDR Win Rate | SDR Hold Rate | Meetings Booked |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| **34%** | **63%** | **36** |



**% of Ramped SDRs Achieving Quota - 2021**
Case Study SDRs · Industry Average

The number of ramped SDRs achieving quota improved while the team scaled from four team members to **22 over the course of the year. (The industry average is 48%)**
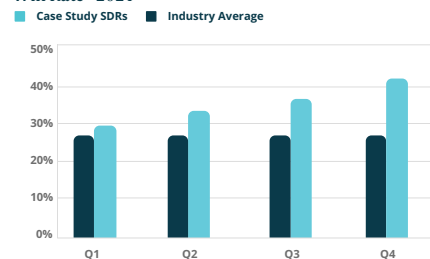


**Payback Period - 2021**
Overall

The SDR and AE teams drastically reduced their payback period by booking biggers deals, ultimately leading to the **3X revenue growth from 2020 to 2021.**



**New Pipeline - 2021**
Overall
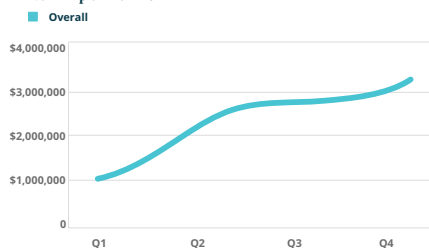
As performance increased, overall pipeline creation saw a **225% increase over the year.**



**Win Rate - 2021**
Case Study SDRs · Industry Average

The SDR win rate started at the **industry average of 25% and reached 41%** by Q4.

# Sprockets

# Build the Best Sales Teams

Sprockets' solution reveals which applicants will consistently hit quota like your current top-performing sales representatives. That means less time spent on the hiring process and more time spent closing deals.

Top Match

Match
Trust

Match
Openness

9.1

**Hire 37% Faster**

**Reduce Ramp-Up Time**

**Increase Win Rate**

## Sales Team Triples Revenue Growth by Hiring People With No Experience

**SEE HOW**

# 338%
## Increase in Revenue Growth

# The Past, Present, and Future of Enablement Technology

BY IRINA SORIANO

I've had the pleasure of working in the enablement industry for more than 10 years. A lot has changed since the early days, but there's been one constant since the industry was born: enablement is about building relationships. Relationships between buyers and go-to-market teams; relationships between sales reps and their managers; and inter-departmental relationships across organizations. What began as a technology to help sellers meet their quotas and engage buyers is now a diverse industry dedicated to fostering a thoroughly human experience.

## Where We've Been

Way back when, enablement technology was focused primarily on the sales rep. What we once referred to as "sales enablement" allowed sellers to create and maintain a consistent, organized content strategy that helped them get assets to their audience as quickly as possible. Having one single source of truth for content promoted overall accessibility and structure, and it, well, *enabled* sellers to deliver consistent experiences to their customers. They were building real connections with customers through experiences and content they could count on.

But we learned a successful buyer journey can't be dependent on buyer-seller relationships alone. A stellar sales team won't get you far if your customer service or marketing team isn't on the same page. That's why enablement technology has taken on a more holistic role in recent years to serve more than just the sales team, evolving toward supporting everyone involved in the customer journey.

If other teams aren't delivering because they lack the skills, processes and knowledge — as well as access to valuable assets for their customers — the buying experience may be lacking. In

the end, it's about creating happy customers who want to extend their partnership with your company, not leave as soon as their contract is up.

## Where We Are

When the pandemic took the in-person element out of selling by rendering most human-to-human connections impossible, enablement rose to the challenge. It now plays a critical role in companies' growth plans. Enablement technology is no longer simply providing skill, knowledge, and process support — it's the bridge between people and departments. Enablement allows teams to keep their motivation high while the whole world works remotely.

Now, social selling is a priority for revenue teams looking to make connections with their buyers in a remote environment. We've seen social media tools evolve to ensure we're meaningfully engaging our prospects from our very first interaction. With emergent social selling capabilities, enablement technology helps us provide early value, build strong relationships based on trust right out of the gate, and position ourselves as consultants and partners rather than just salespeople. The right enablement tools can be a major differentiator when it comes to meeting prospects where they're at and making them feel heard.

With the majority of training sessions and events now taking place using video meeting software, we've also seen the advent of technology that addresses the need for virtual events and training to take standard video meetings to the next level. These tools allow enablers to create interactive and fun virtual instructor-led trainings (VILTs) and eliminate the need to fly folks to one location for events, which is a huge money saver,

not to mention a way to make connections virtually. This isn't to say that in-person events and trainings should be replaced by virtual forever, but that supplemental tools exist to make these processes seamless and engaging, regardless of whether they occur online or IRL (in real life).

Furthermore, with the enablement industry and profession exploding worldwide, there's a wealth of new space for software development and advancement. The need for learning management systems (LMS) and sales readiness software has increased exponentially, as we now have to train new hires remotely. We've learned that LMS and enablement technology need to sync and operate in tandem to ensure a smooth passive and active enablement experience. Using enablement technology to onboard and train your revenue teams doesn't just improve alignment and consistency; it drives team growth and brings disparate teams closer together.

## Where We're Going

As the enablement industry continues to expand, we're going to see more and more new hires ending up in roles with zero experience. That's no fault of their own. It's not as if any of them had the opportunity to complete a degree in enablement (yet). This will lead to a skills gap between the more experienced professionals and those just breaking into the industry, which means there's a greater need for enablement education overall.

We'll also likely see more small software companies arising to address minute enablement needs, like improving experiences and tracking ROI and impact. We know that enablement efforts help drive company growth, people development and ultimately revenue. It's about showing which metrics we're directly impacting and which leading and lagging indicators come into play. Enablers who try to track their own performance are the ones who will eventually thrive in this space.

And while enablement will likely still be the new kid on the block for many organizations, it will become increasingly important to have a data-driven enablement strategy to increase top-line revenue and reduce unnecessary spending. That necessitates the proliferation of the enabler role, an employee whose primary function is to drive strategy, provide ROI, track impact and ensure their voices are heard across the organization.

The world of selling today would be virtually unrecognizable to past generations of salespeople, but that doesn't mean the core tenet of selling—building relationships—has changed. Enablement technology has evolved over the years to help us make connections with every person involved in the customer journey, just as the selling motion itself has evolved. I can't wait to see where it goes next! **smm**

*Irina Soriano is vice president of Enablement & Process at Seismic, a sales enablement platform.*

# Selling Virtually With Visuals

## CGI and 3D Visualization Creates Dynamic Customer Experiences

BY ALEXANDRE DE VIGAN

Product visuals marketing is evolving. As sales channels evolve from physical marketplaces to the digital sphere, the production process for product visuals must also make the leap. Marketers need to be more agile to create visuals that move the sales needle. Digitization is the only way to address the growing number of product catalogs and a greater need to personalize visual content through creativity.

### CGI/3D Product Modeling to the Rescue

By embracing next-gen technologies like computer-generated imagery (CGI) and 3D visualization, businesses can start to update, refresh and adapt product photos for infinitely personalized and dynamic customer experiences. They can create dynamic, photorealistic visuals in a few clicks — without even needing a camera.

The benefits are tremendous. CGI reduces costs for marketers by eliminating the need for logistical and production costs, like hiring crews for photography, moving and even staging. It also saves organizations time by eliminating the logistical and transportation hassles, while lowering the carbon footprint associated with the logistics. CGI allows marketers to create and customize high-quality, infinitely adaptable visual content for different audiences and makes A/B testing easier to trigger more purchases.

### Diverse Ways to Engage Your Audience

For marketers who are only starting to explore the world of CGI product visuals or looking to enhance the effectiveness of their digital content via creative alternatives, CGI can produce a wide selection of digital asset:

- 3D model production: high-fidelity of product shape, measurements, and material
- Silo renders: immerse products into a variety of contextual backgrounds
- 360° product spin: multiple-angle view of product details
- Background scene templates: creative sceneries for better customer experience

### The Need to Scale

3D modeling is the biggest bottleneck for CGI: not standardized, not transparent, expensive and very hard to scale. Today, 3D modeling is undertaken by freelancers who are artists
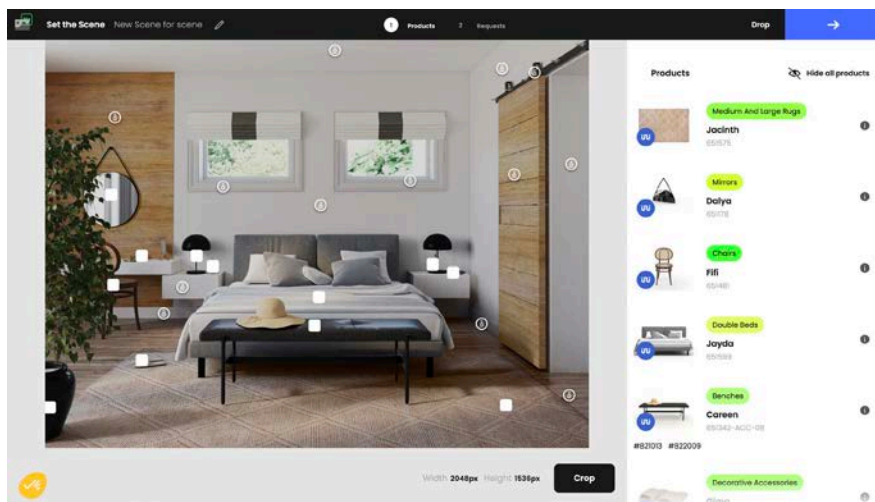


IMAGE COURTESY OF NFINITE

with their own individual stack, processes and post-effect. Basically, it's an art. This means it is difficult to scale, not standardized and expensive.

The future of 3D lies in the ability to process large sets of assets with predictable timing, quality, and pricing. Organizations are just now trying to solve the scaling problem and to speed up the production process and understand the potential obstacles.

**Unifying inputs –** Unifying the multitude of input formats can speed up production. 3D modeling requires a minimum number of inputs to achieve the desired results. Inputs can be of a great variety of formats from CAD to photo files. Different inputs can be translated into a common protocol for 3D modelers to work on, speeding up the process

**Standardization of outputs –** Human-created 3D models are not free from artistic biases. However, visual outputs should have a standard look and feel across the process. Outputs should be future-proof, so they can be applied to new digital experiences such as the Metaverse.

**AI assistance to simplify process –** Artificial Intelligence tools and automated sub-processes in the modeling journey (think human-assistance tools in the aircraft industry) can greatly reduce production time.

Brands' and retailers' appetites for CGI/ 3D product visuals is growing exponentially. With this technology, visuals can be produced 10 times faster than with traditional methods.

Alexandre de Vigan is founder & CEO at nfinite, a one-stop solution for creating and managing unlimited product visuals.