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FOCUS REPORT

Setting the Stage for Growth

Why sales enablement matters more than ever

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BY PAUL NOLAN

When Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota was failing to close some sales that were in the late stages, they enlisted help from Minneapolis-based Schermer, a B2B marketing agency that focuses on creating better buying experiences. As founder and CEO Chris Schermer explains it, his company assessed the buying journey that the insurance provider's sales reps were providing prospects and began to make changes.

"We looked at the type of information that large enterprise prospects would need to choose benefits for their organization," Schermer said. "We showed them what the buyer journey looked like for many personas in a single prospect company. We researched the touchpoints that [buying team members] were having to find information – touchpoints that were needed to influence the prospects at the right time."

Schermer's team created new digital experiences for the prospective buyers, an approach that ultimately yielded a "tremendous amount of new revenue" for Blue Cross and Blue Shield. "Our effort was recognized by the client as their marketing innovation of the year," he said.

Analyzing the buying experience, developing more accurate buying personas and creating more effective touchpoints are all components of a holistic strategy that is collectively referred to these days as sales enablement. However, Schermer didn't produce these results with the comprehensive, AI-driven sales enablement software platforms that have become table stakes for B2B companies. It's a case study from nearly a decade ago.

Evolution of Sales Enablement

Sales enablement is the strategic, ongoing process of equipping sales teams with the content, guidance and training they need to effectively engage buyers, according to Highspot, a provider of sales enablement tools. It has existed in one form or another for nearly as long as sales itself.

Use of the term today frequently conjures up the software platforms that comprise B2B sales and marketing teams' tech stacks. Those we spoke with for this report, however, emphasize that sales enablement is much more than software. Sales enablement has taken on such importance for developing go-to-market strategies that it is a separate division in many companies. The number of LinkedIn users with sales enablement in their current job title has increased five-fold since 2015, according to Paul Krajewski, an Australian-based sales enablement professional who tracks the industry. He estimates it will be a $10 billion market in annual revenue in 2023.

"It's important to separate the discipline of enablement from the department carrying enablement in its name," said Jillian Maiorino, sales enablement manager for Vendr, a Boston-based company that helps companies buy, manage and renew the software as a service (SaaS) they use. Maiorino plays a role in Vendr's onboarding, ongoing training, sales methodology rollouts and everything else that is tied to increasing revenue at the company.

"At the highest level, the key objective for enablement is to knock down the wave of information that is coming at sales. Our goal is to create an environment in which they can swim out into all the content that is coming at them and easily grab what they need and remove the friction as much as possible."

At RocketPlan, a provider of project management software for property restoration contractors, sales enablement is under the guidance of Kevin Gryzbowski. He started in a consulting role with the company late last year before joining the company as its chief revenue officer. Founded in 2020 by the owners of a restoration company, the Vancouver, B.C., company expects to double its internal sales team to 10 reps by the end of this year.

Gryzbowski said RocketPlan had a substantial tech stack in place when he began working with them that included Hubspot, Intercom and Stripe. "They built a smart infrastructure of tools to support the growth of their business. I was to take the kernel of happy customers and replicate it to find more customers," he said.

To get a better handle on what sales enablement is, where it's been and where it's headed, it's best to answer some frequently asked questions.

What is sales enablement?

In short, sales enablement is the process of providing salespeople whatever they need to engage their target buyers. As a report from Salesforce states, with sales professionals reporting their job has become more consultative and less transactional, reps need to "better understand the product, the customer and the market more deeply so they bring more value to each conversation."

Gartner states that sales enablement is about providing sales professionals the information that helps convert qualified leads into signed contracts. Gartner groups this information into two categories: content that sales provides to the buyer, and best practices, research and tools that sales consumes internally.

Technology has become a key component of sales enablement, but it's also still very much the people and the processes behind running a revenue engine, those we spoke with emphasized.

"It's a philosophy; it's a strategy; it's the approach of an organization. Technology is helping to streamline and enable that, but it would be wrong to pigeonhole sales enablement as primarily technology," said Chris Schermer.

"It starts at the most basic element of defining the ideal customer profile (ICP), then determining what are the most effective ways of reaching them," added Gryzbowski. "When you connect with that potential buyer, what steps do you take them through? How do they move through your sales function?"

Ideally, sales enablement boosts the performance of middling and low-performing reps. According to Gartner, one sales enablement best practice is to designate overachievers as leaders/teachers of the program.

Who owns sales enablement?

While more companies are creating sales enablement positions and even whole departments, ownership of sales enablement is the wrong question in many respects. Those we spoke with said sales enablement requires a holistic approach that involves the entire company, à la Daniel Pink's "we're all in sales" philosophy.

"If you look at the ways that sales and marketing can align, sales enablement, revenue enablement and, eventually, business enablement is the one place that you can actually align sales and marketing. I think that's one of the most powerful things we've seen," said Patrick Welch, president of Bigtincan, a sales enablement solution provider.

Because sales enablement involves onboarding, HR touches it. Because it includes continued training, your skills development personnel are involved. Because it impacts revenue, a chief revenue officer has an important role to play. As mentioned, technology is increasingly important to sales enablement, which means IT is part of the process.

Welch envisions the concept transitioning to business enablement and not being sales centric. It already encompasses more than identifying and engaging prospects. Sales enablement must include relationship building with existing customers, he said.

"You can't just look at the buying journey. It's the whole customer journey. If you just look at the buying side, you forget about the customer side. How does that experience get created when so many people are touching the customer? How do you go from a sales and revenue strategy to a business enablement strategy where you are enabling all the folks that create the experience for the customer? There isn't a space called business enablement yet, but it could be the term five or 10 years from now," Welch said.

What tools are necessary for effective sales enablement?

Undoubtedly, technology plays a vital role in sales enablement. The market is loaded with sales enablement software. Understanding your sales methodology and your buyers' journey is key to identifying what sales enablement tools make sense for you.

Allaya Cooks-Campbell, a learning and development strategist at the coaching platform BetterUp, writes in a blog post that the data you need to track, integration with your current CRM and ease of use are factors to consider when determining what sales enablement technology to adopt.

Highspot has a nine-step process for selecting the right sales enablement solution that includes ensuring scalability, confirming cross-team workflows and reviewing the mobile experience. (See graphic on steps to implement effective sales enablement below.)

What metrics should be measured to assess sales enablement ROI?

The obvious answer is sales, but there are numerous other metrics that can be tracked to gauge the success of sales enablement. These include:

- Time to first sale (ramp time)
- Sales cycle length
- Win rate
- Number of reps achieving quota
- Average deal size

Both qualitative and quantitative metrics should be measured, Maiorino stressed. She meets weekly with her company's sales directors to review what they are hearing from their 50-plus reps about the challenges they're encountering and gaps that exist regarding information and tools.

Artificial intelligence (AI) that didn't exist as recently as two or three years ago is proving to be a data-collecting game-changer, said Chris Cabrera, founder and CEO of Xactly, which offers SaaS that allows companies to track sales performance management, sales effectiveness, sales compensation and employee engagement.

SOURCE: HIGHSPOT "THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SALES ENABLEMENT"

"AI looks for pattern recognition that humans can't find," Cabrera said. "For example, how does a deal that a rep says is near closing match the patterns of deals that have closed historically? If it doesn't match, AI helps feed that back to the rep with information that it doesn't match the pattern for these three reasons and that rep can go fix those. That's really powerful and couldn't be done a couple years ago."

In a Highspot podcast episode, Stacey Justice, vice president of revenue enablement at HashiCorp said, "enablement should be one of the most, if not the most, cross-functionally collaborative teams in the business. I've seen it where systems have just been rolled out to the teams and it's just not done optimally from the beginning, so it becomes a mess at the end and not optimized, not adopted and it's just wasting time. It's a matter of prioritizing both the systems and the work that you want your teams to do and recognizing that systems take work."

What's next for sales enablement?

We've shared Welch's prediction for a shift to business enablement. "Whereas, sales and revenue enablement connote focus on sales productivity and sales training, business enablement puts less focus on sales and more focus on the whole ecosystem that touches the customer and serving customers at a higher level," he states in a blog post.

The traditional KPIs of sales success will always be relevant. However, Welch said the shift to business enablement will call for increased focus on customer engagement with sales and customer success content, as well as heightened awareness and measurement of customer satisfaction, including net promoter scores (NPS) and customer reviews.

"Companies can embrace true business enablement by preparing and upskilling the entire ecosystem that touches the customer. That means leveraging the power of all the resource touchpoints starting with sales and marketing, continuing to customer success, and all the way through to account managers and channel partners," Welch states.

It's clear that sales enablement is a vital revenue generator that's here to stay. Every year, Gartner asks chief sales officers what their top priorities are. While there were no surprises in 2022, it's notable that the top answers were all objectives that sales enablement assists with:

- Improving pipeline creation
- Identifying, nurturing and growing key accounts
- Driving growth through smarter account management
- Increasing sales manager focus for maximum impact

B2B purchase decisions are increasingly made by buying teams, yet these teams' participants expect to be treated as individuals with unique interests. Sales enablement is all about adding customer value. As Mediafly reports, 74% of buyers choose the vendor that first adds value. Also, when buyers understand the business value of your offer, deals close faster and at higher average order values.

The complexity of B2B sales requires the AI-driven capabilities of sophisticated sales enablement platforms. Insights that could never be collected without today's technology optimize marketing strategies and trigger the right steps to take at precisely the right time.

Cabrera is excited to be part of what he sees as a technology revolution, which he views as a key reason to commit to the sales enablement movement.

"We're in an exciting time like I've never seen in my 34-year career. The technology is always changing, but it seems like we're in a period where it's leap-frogging, allowing a dramatic amount of change in a short period of time," he said. "If sales leaders and CEOs don't jump on board and figure this stuff out, they're going to be at a decided disadvantage." smm

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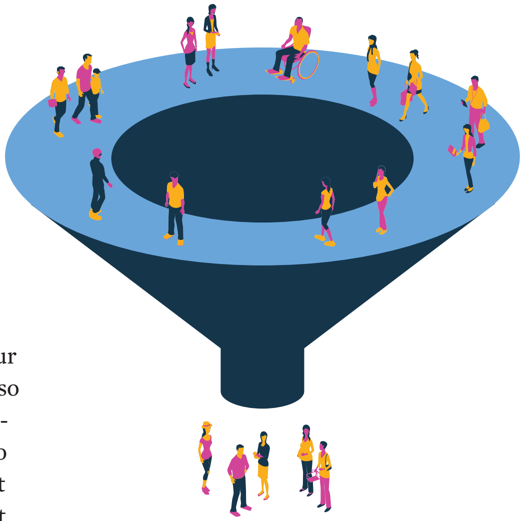
How to Create a Sales Enablement Center of Excellence

BY AMY FRANKO



As modern sellers, our goal is to solve our clients' and prospects' business challenges. When we do so, we increase sales growth. Sales enablement addresses those challenges and is at the heart of a successful sales strategy.

Sales enablement is an executive business function that combines sales strategy and implementation to positively impact the sales profession within our organization and leads to creating stronger client outcomes. It is a bridge connecting people, sales structures and clients.

Think of sales enablement with a center of excellence approach. When you have this mindset, you can position sales enablement to have the same authority as a project management organization or other program vital to business. This requires advocacy from the CEO, CSO and CRO. You must create this by looking cross-functionally to gain support with key stakeholders and establishing ownership.

Doing so will help you put discipline into place.

Three Key Components of Sales Enablement

1. PEOPLE

Strategic Hiring and Onboarding

The success or failure of sales enablement begins with hiring and extends through onboarding. This makes the difference between a sales rep who is a right fit for the role and contributes to your sales growth, or one that's no longer with your organization after a few months.

Remember, it can take nearly a year for a new salesperson to be fully onboarded and productive. If they don't work out, not only have you lost time and hard dollars, you've also lost a minimum of six figures in opportunity cost.

Assessment

Data-driven assessment will study your team's productivity and performance so you can truly understand their competencies. It gives you the opportunity to stop and consider if you have the right people in the right roles with the right skills to get you where you need to go as a business.

Sales Leadership Development

Consider your sales leadership pipeline. Do you have talent identified and ready to lead in your most critical leadership roles? It takes more than being a rock star seller. In the end, sales leaders are responsible for hiring, coaching and guiding their teams. They must be trained to design the right hiring strategy and develop interviewing skills to effectively assess candidates.

2. STRUCTURES

The Sales Process

A reliable sales process helps provide the right path for sales enablement. While a sale itself may have varying levels of complexity, the process should be as systematic as possible. It will consider the customer, the type of sale (consultative or transactional), average sale cycles, and pipeline management principles. It also provides direction on the various stages of the customer relationship, from beginning (prospective customers) through maturity (ongoing relationship management and sales opportunities).

Sales Pipeline

I'm a believer in quality first and then quantity. This is especially true in high-value, consultative sales opportunities. It requires intelligence on target accounts, building relationships with decision-makers and other buyer roles, understanding your organization's fit with that client, and determining the lifetime value of the account.

3. CLIENTS

Account Development

When your pipeline has the right mix of quality and quantity, you'll close more new business and expand your reach within your existing accounts. Too frequently, sellers make the mistake of only seeking net-new prospects and not realizing the wealth of opportunities available to grow existing, loyal clients.

Business Partner Development

These are your outside partners, where you can create mutually beneficial results. They become additional "feet on the street," helping you to identify opportunities, partner on engagements or make introductions. smm

Amy Franko is a leading sales strategist for growth-oriented mid-market organizations. She works with a variety of sectors to grow sales results through sales strategy, assessment and skill development programs. Her book, "The Modern Seller," is an Amazon best-seller and she is also recognized by LinkedIn as a Top Sales Voice. Learn more at amyfranko.com.

Weathering Economic Downturns with Sales Enablement Automation

Make data do the work

BY PATRICK WELCH

With a potential economic recession looming, key B2B decision-makers within sales organizations are assessing how to cut costs and preserve margins. It's imperative to develop a firm understanding of which investments can effectively generate revenue and enable their organization to weather the storm.

Leveraging data to drive decision-making is a critical component to building that resilience. Through the adoption of sales enablement automation solutions, sales leaders can use real time, AI-powered feedback loops to determine what is driving buyer engagement, converting sales and maximizing ROI. Before chopping and changing, B2B decision-makers should first explore how their existing automation tools can forge new pathways to profitability amidst economic uncertainty.

Keeping Customers Around

Everyone knows it is more difficult to attract new prospects than it is to retain existing customers. This struggle is compounded by the fact that consumer loyalty levels have reached all-time lows. Focusing on delivering meaningful buyer experiences is an effective way to ensure they keep coming back.

That requires a deeper understanding of their buyer preferences. While certain variables like price points and customer service play a primary role in buyer loyalty, brands also need to consider the human-centric element. According to one eMarketer survey, 57% of companies rank creating an emotional connection as a primary driver for their loyalty investments.

The widespread shift to virtual selling may feel less personalized at times, but it has provided sales reps more tools to learn about their prospects and foster impactful connections. Sellers now have the ability to measure buyer engagement and responsiveness in real time by leveraging insights generated from AI-powered tools including conversation intelligence. During a virtual product presentation, they can measure which buyers were most engaged and, in turn, prioritize the right leads at the right times to boost revenue.

With customers willing to switch suppliers more than ever before, ensuring that your sales team is buyer-ready requires harnessing customer touchpoint data from live interactions. Investing in each interaction by tracking customer reactions down to the smallest intricacies provides sellers with unprecedented visibility into what is resonating with customers and prospects alike.

Hold On to What's Working

When making budgetary decisions, especially pertaining to spending cuts, businesses must be able to decipher what is working from what is not. For example, measuring the effectiveness of marketing content can present its fair share of challenges. For starters, a majority of marketing collateral often goes unused. By some estimates, only 35% of marketing content

Creating a web of data around customer touchpoints offers visibility into the fundamental components of closing a deal.

is used during the B2B sales process—a trend that isn't indicative of the quality (or lack thereof) of the actual content.

In order to gain real, actionable feedback on what content assets are supporting meaningful prospect interactions, organizations need to utilize platforms that automate the analysis of buyer engagement. Does the content effectively articulate value and relevance to the prospect? Does it appeal to the specific challenges of their industry? Is it accessible across multiple channels and devices? These are the kinds of questions that must be top of mind.

Sellers now can quickly deliver content, monitor its engagement levels, and then adjust their approaches accordingly. Creating a web of data around customer touchpoints offers visibility into the fundamental components of closing a deal. Just because marketing content is going unused doesn't mean you should throw the baby out with the bathwater. It can make a major impact on revenue as long as it's leveraged effectively.

Don't Leave Money on the Table

B2B sales organizations already have a wide range of data to leverage for revenue generation, but the power of that data is dependent on their ability to act on it. When staring down a potential economic recession, it's important to pause and assess how your existing infrastructure can help you do more with less. Is each buyer/seller interaction building emotional currency? Are content assets being overlooked due to irrelevance or complexity?

Empowering your sales and marketing teams starts with data-driven decisioning. With sales enablement automation, organizations have the tools and technologies to remove uncertainty from their spending decisions. Before making rash decisions, businesses should take a more calculated, data-driven approach. It just might be the bridge that gets them to the other side. smm

Patrick Welch is the president of Bigtincan, providers of an industry-leading sales enablement platform.

Seizing Every Revenue Moment

In good economic times, it's important to be aware of every revenue opportunity. In uncertain times, it's mission critical.

BY MARK EBERT

Sales leaders today need to be able to capitalize on every opportunity at the exact right time — in what we call the revenue moment. This is the point in time when an account is showing itself to be most ready to buy, and, as the name suggests, it's fleeting.

The trick is recognizing when that moment occurs and knowing the most effective way to respond. That requires a mixture of art and science to ensure visibility into pipeline, intent signals and account readiness so your sellers can act on them — quickly.

The Dark Funnel

B2B buying has changed drastically in recent years. In order to recognize when revenue moments are happening, we need to understand and adapt to modern buying behavior. Buyers conduct most of their research online, and they do so anonymously.

Before making a decision or even reaching out to a vendor for information, buyers have explored countless online resources across the internet, including industry publications, blogs, social networks and review sites like G2 and TrustRadius.

They may have anonymously explored your website, but only 3% of them will identify themselves to you by filling out a form. Unless you have a way to identify the other 97% of visitors, you're missing out on clear signals of interest in your company.

The good news is that as buyers do their research, they leave behind a trail of digital breadcrumbs that can alert you to revenue moments. This breadcrumb trail exists in what we call the Dark Funnel, a data realm full of signals about buyers' interests and intent. These signals are brimming with useful, actionable intent data that sellers can use to reach out with relevant value at exactly the right moment.

Cut Through the Noise

All this Dark Funnel data has the potential to equip your sellers to recognize and respond to every revenue moment. But it's a massive amount of data — and it can become noise unless you can distill it into action. AI and predictive analytics make it possible to use large amounts of data to tell you things about where the prospect is in the buyer's journey, which buyers to prioritize today, and how to best engage with the prospects.

Don't let the moment pass.

With Dark Funnel data and the tech needed to turn it into actionable insights, you have the tools you need to seize on every revenue moment. But you need to make sure your sellers can do it fast. Again, it's not a revenue week or month. It's a revenue *moment*.

Part of this comes down to setting expectations. Your SLAs can outline the time it should take for your sellers to reach out (and how many touches are expected) when a prospect shows itself to be in market for what you're selling. It's a good idea to have a backup plan in place to make sure that if your seller can't or doesn't reach out, for whatever reason, the revenue moment doesn't go unaddressed. This is a case where AI-powered conversational email can be a deal-saver. It makes it possible to get the conversation started at just the right time, with relevant and engaging outreach, even if your seller is on vacation or is just having a bad day.

Another essential for reaching out at the right time to the right people is having high-quality contact data for the main decision-makers on the account. After all, it doesn't do a seller much good to know that this is the moment if she then has to spend a day or two tracking down contact info for all relevant personas.

Relevance Is Key

Timing is one part of the equation; the other big factor is relevance. After all, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Here are the things I look at when coaching my sellers to engage in a way that's relevant to the prospect:

- **Fit –** Before reaching out to a prospect, understand what makes the account a good fit for what you're selling. Look at all the data you have about the account — things like company size, geography, and vertical — and be clear about what unique value you can add.
- **Persona –** Current economic conditions mean more personas than ever (and different personas) are now involved in deals. Engaging all of them from the start makes it much more likely that your efforts will result in a win. Look at your data to determine which personas are essential for successful deals. Then get clear on how your solution can help them in their individual roles, and include that in your individualized outreach.
- **Behavior –** Understanding buying behavior is fundamental to hyper-relevant outreach. What is the account researching and talking about online? Use that to personalize your first outreach. Try popping relevant keywords in the subject line of your email or using them in your first phone call.
- **Timing –** How you address the prospect will vary depending on their buying stage. You should be able to determine that from your data. Tailor your outreach so it matches their level of awareness and readiness.

As sales leaders in this economy, it's more important than ever to provide the tools they need to never miss a revenue moment. It's important for seller success, of course, but it's also essential for the company's bottom line that we're not leaving opportunities on the table.

One part of doing that is to light up the Dark Funnel with the right data and technology solutions so you can accurately connect digital breadcrumbs back to the companies leaving them. Having the capacity to stay on top of these signals, and then seamlessly aggregating and serving up to your team as actionable insights, gives you a competitive advantage. It takes what was previously hidden and turns it into a revenue moment that you can seize. **smm**

Mark Ebert is senior vice president of sales at 6sense, whose tool, 6sense Revenue AI, captures anonymous buying signals, targets the right accounts at the ideal time, and recommends the channels and messages to boost revenue performance.

Sales Enablement Statistics

Need more proof of sales enablement's vital role in revenue generation? Aayushi Sanghavi, a content marketing specialist at G2, culled these statistics for a 2021 blog post. She cites her resources, including Marketo, CSO Insights, Google Trends, Hubspot, the Sales Management Association, Highspot, Salesforce and Forrester.

Organizations with sales enablement achieve a
49% win rate
on forecasted deals, compared to
42.5% for those without.

84% of sales reps
achieve their quotas
when their employer incorporates a best-in-class sales enablement strategy.

The best sales onboarding programs help new sales hires become productive
3.4 months sooner,
on average – a time-to-productivity that's
37% faster
than firms with low-performing programs.

42% of sales reps feel
they don't have enough information before making a call.

Sales teams that work closely with marketing see
41% greater growth
in reaching their quotas.

77.1% of companies with a sales force exceeding 500 people
have dedicated sales enablement in place, compared to 39.3% of companies with 25 or fewer.

Sales and marketing alignment can help your company become
67% better at closing deals.

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