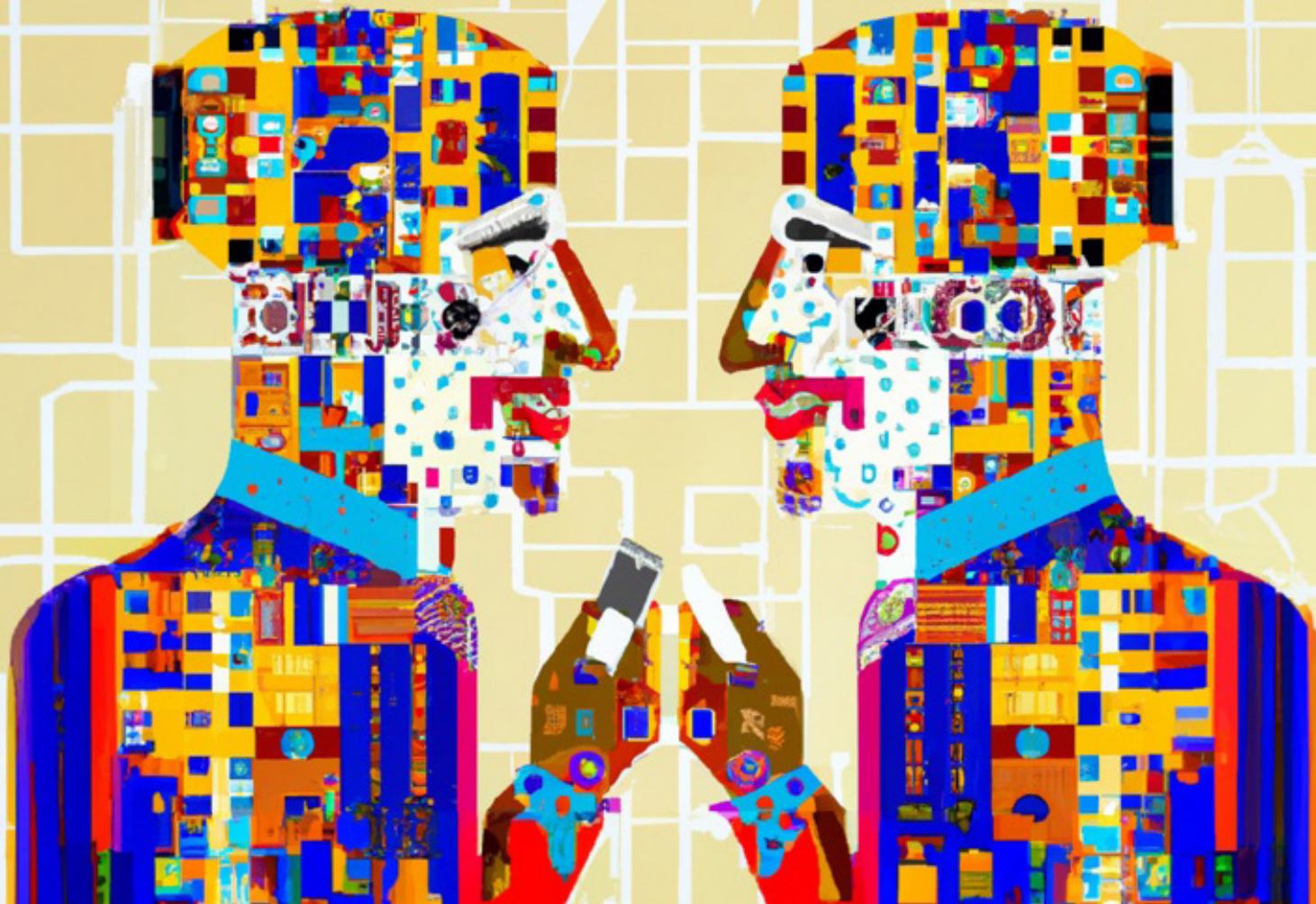




The New Sales Conversation

How AI is changing the way we sell



Cover art generated by AI: DALL-E 2 via Shutterstock.

The New Sales Conversation

How AI is changing the way we sell

BY PAUL NOLAN

For 11 out of 12 straight months, Jonathan Bragg finished in the top 10% of the more than 400 sales agents working in a call center for HomeServe USA Corp., a home-repair service company. His secret, he told *The Wall Street Journal*, is that he listens to people.

“I don’t just say stuff and read scripts. I listen to everybody, whoever you are, and I retain what it is that makes that person interested. I can get just about anybody to buy anything,” Bragg said.

Nevertheless, Bragg’s company brought in reinforcements—an artificial intelligence-powered agent named “Charlie” that HomeServe built using a conversational AI platform featuring technology from Google and other companies. Among its duties,

Charlie screens and routes calls, listens to agents’ sales conversations and reminds them when customers are eligible for certain coverage plans. Charlie (HomeServe sought a gender-neutral name when introducing it to employees) requires agents to use certain phrasing and penalizes them when they don’t.

The *Journal* reports that Charlie is lauded by management at HomeServe USA for increasing efficiency and the effectiveness of their sales agents. The agents themselves aren’t so sure. Bragg felt the fury of a customer when he used Charlie’s recommended response against his better judgement.

“I’m a top performer. She’s not my supervisor,” Bragg said.

FEATURE STORY

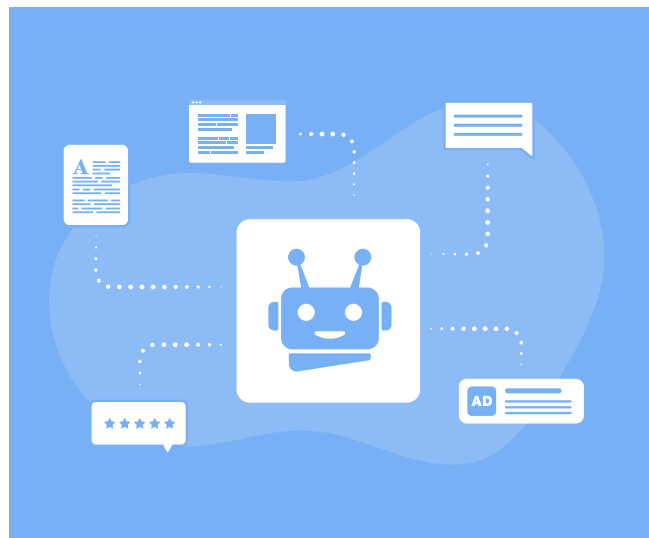
Bots In Business

Welcome to the new world of AI-influenced (some would say AI-mandated) sales conversations. The headline-grabbing ChatGPT, the wildly popular chatbot introduced late last year by OpenAI, is merely the latest tech tool that has business leaders scrambling to learn more about AI technology and how best to incorporate it into their go-to-market strategies.

A recent cover story in TIME magazine on AI technology states, “The AI boom really began to take off around 2020, turbocharged by several crucial breakthroughs in neural-network design, the growing availability of data, and the willingness of tech companies to pay for gargantuan levels of computing power.” However, there were kinks to be worked out — and there still are — enough to make Google, Meta and even OpenAI initially hesitant to make their game-changing technology available to the public.

In January 2021, OpenAI revealed DALL-E, its natural-language-to-digital-image implementation of GPT-3, and released an updated version to a limited number of users in April 2022. OpenAI released ChatGPT in November 2022 and by January it had reached 100 million monthly users, a faster rate of adoption than Instagram or TikTok. Researchers say AI’s computational power is doubling every six to 10 months.

For the moment, the fear-induced question of whether bots will come for sales and marketing professionals’ jobs has been mostly quelled. Although McKinsey & Co. estimates that 25% of work activities in the U.S. across all occupations could be automated by 2030, the consensus is that AI will supplement many professionals’ work rather than replace them.



“Part of the art of sales is the human-to-human understanding and having intuition. The message that AI is going to take over and you don’t need your content people... It’s premature to make those kinds of calls without having a firm understanding of what the technology is and how it can be wisely implemented,” Nirosha Methananda, a B2B marketing, brand and business builder, told SMM.

No one argues that groundbreaking technology such as generative AI has a role in sales and marketing, but many caution against overextending its use.

AI Will Be Both a Job Killer and a Job Creator

AI has been labeled a job killer as it replaces humans with robots for a wide range of work roles. Although thousands of jobs currently performed by humans will be handed over to tech tools that can handle them more efficiently and cheaper, experts predict that AI and the resulting “smart automation” will ultimately create more jobs than it eliminates.

The World Economic Forum predicts that automation and technology will eliminate 85 million jobs by 2025 while creating 97 million new jobs, a net gain of 12 million. Data entry, bookkeeping and payroll, and client information

and customer service jobs are expected to disappear. The need for data analysts, digital marketing and strategy specialists and digital transformation specialists is expected to increase.

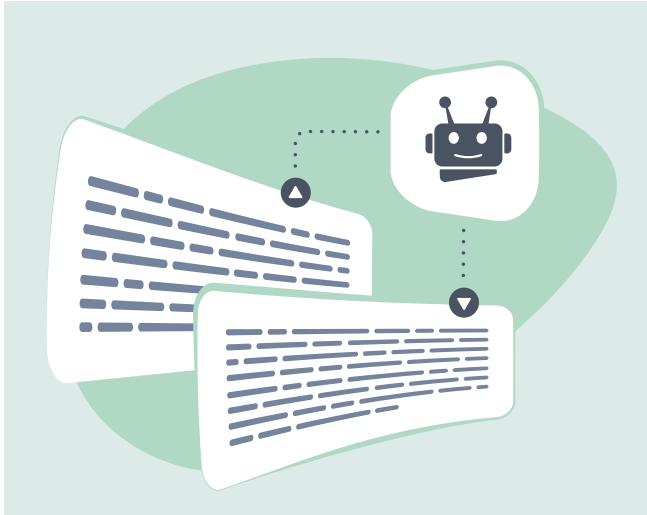
While call center jobs could decline, additional B2B sales jobs should be created simply by the creation of new companies that will offer AI-powered services.

“I think this technology is incredibly exciting. I think it’s going to result in a lot of short-term anxiety, but medium and long-term prosperity,” Scott Galloway, an entrepreneur, marketing professor

at NYU Stern School of Business and co-host of the tech-focused Pivot podcast. “The number of businesses that could be started using this technology can make you giddy if you really start thinking about it.”

A [PricewaterhouseCoopers AI study](#) projects that AI will lead to an estimated \$15.7 trillion (26%) increase in global GDP by 2030. The onus will be on business leaders to reconfigure training programs to help workers acquire both the digital and softer skills that will be demanded in the new age, the PwC report states.

FEATURE STORY



“I’ve seen people pontificating about using generative AI to completely write their sales outreach emails; to completely write their blog posts; to completely write their website copy. They’re missing the point. This isn’t a formulaic solution to create more faster; it should be a thing that we look at to serve us as humans to connect with other humans in ways that are rich and relevant,” said Lindsay Tjepkema, CEO and co-founder of Casted, a company that amplifies the business impact of B2B and B2C podcasts.

It’s widely believed that generative AI and similar technology will tackle the dull, repetitive aspects of sales (think lead screening and some CRM functions), providing more time for sellers to build strong relationships with prospects and existing customers. However, if AI tools are incorporated for tasks such as monitoring sales conversations and producing standard verbiage that must be followed, it will likely exacerbate the already-high rate of burnout and employee churn in call center sales jobs and similar work.

Your Tech Stack on Steroids

Companies like Microsoft and Google parent Alphabet continue to invest huge sums in AI technology to enhance their search engines and other products. Similarly, tech companies that create software programs for B2B sales and marketing are rushing to incorporate generative AI into their offerings. In March, Salesforce introduced Einstein GPT, which it calls the world’s first generative AI for CRM. It also created a ChatGPT app for Slack, the instant messaging program it acquired in 2021.

RFPIO, a leading response management platform, announced in March that it will offer generative AI capabilities within its software to help marketing, sales, finance and security professionals create and edit proposals, questionnaires and other responses that play a vital role in revenue growth and risk mitigation for their organizations.

RFPIO’s nearly 2,000 global clients use the SaaS platform to manage their responses to RFPs, RFIs, security questionnaires,

due diligence questionnaires and other customer inquiries. Each response can involve input from dozens of subject matter experts across the company. Company leaders say the GPT integration will allow users to the AI technology to draft, edit, refine and augment content.

Even prior to the GPT integration, the RFPIO platform allowed companies to respond quickly to RFPs and other information requests by automatically populating as much as 80% of the responses. According to Michael Londgren, the company’s chief marketing officer, the AI-powered software produces the strongest possible responses by accessing a thorough library of information that has been developed solely for whatever company submitted the request. It’s another example of a capability that AI brings to a business process that humans could never replicate.

“There was a time when sellers had the opportunity to build a relationship with a potential buyer over an extended period of time. Now, with self-educated buyers, customers are engaging much deeper into the buying cycle and they just want crisp answers back to very specific questions. Those responses are more important than ever,” Londgren said. “They need to be relevant, on-point, accurate and they need to be delivered in a timely manner. The organizations that are able to do that effectively stand out versus those that struggle.

“We are seeing organizations find ways to get their martech and sales tech stacks to work effectively so they can operate as one go-to-market team in a very collaborative way, and leveraging emerging technologies in a holistic manner with multiple teams tapping into those capabilities.”

Automating Top-of-Funnel Tasks

In an era of self-educated buyers and buying teams, generative AI is expected to help create comprehensive marketing content that will serve the informational needs of prospects, mostly near the top of the sales funnel.

“As potential buyers move closer to making a purchase decision, sales or customer success representatives will want to be closely involved to ensure that prospects are getting the specific information they need,” said Stephanie Shreve, chief marketing officer at PowerChord, which offers lead distribution software.

Shreve added, “We have written chatbot scripts for client websites to quickly guide visitors to more information. The goal of our AI chatbots is to provide immediate feedback to website visitors, but we also recognize that some questions require a human to fully meet or exceed the customer’s expectations. We are trialing various ways to seamlessly transfer a chatbot conversation to a human to help move the prospect across their purchase journey.”

Early reviews of ChatGPT have been critical of its penchant to drift off topic or provide incorrect information. Shreve and others emphasize that quality assurance reviews and fact checking are a must for any generative AI-produced content.

FEATURE STORY

“From the marketer’s standpoint, ChatGPT should be used to make content creation faster and in some cases, provide a fresh perspective, but should not replace critical thinking and reviews on behalf of the marketer,” Shreve said.

There are widespread ethical concerns that the rush to incorporate AI into daily life will result in its misuse (spreading false or misleading information among other things). And companies are cautioned not to repeat poor decisions for monetary reasons like some of those made when social media emerged. Many of the issues swirling around AI are more societal than business-oriented, but experts agree that caution is necessary when bringing the technology into your business practices.

And then there is the matter of pushback from workers who feel overly controlled by AI-powered programs. “When humans turn over decision making to a machine, they no longer use their own knowledge and experience,” *The Wall Street Journal* article on AI in the office stated. A researcher at Cornell University discovered that humans who are asked to forfeit control to an algorithm are more likely to get burned out and find it harder to solve customer problems.

The introduction of AI-powered platforms that take decision-making away could be at odds with the renewed emphasis on providing a sense of meaning to every worker, in part through increased autonomy. Lise Hildebrand Stern, a lifetime worker in customer service, left her job at Spectrum less than a year into it because the company’s AI performance-scoring system caused her too much stress. She told *The Wall Street Journal* she felt she was unfairly penalized in automated performance reviews even though her supervisor listened to her calls and said she was doing well.

“It’s very hard for a robot with no emotions to truly judge how a call is going,” Hildebrand Stern said. “My metrics suffered because this system was unable to judge me based on my attitude, unlike a human being would be able to do.”

Proceed with Caution

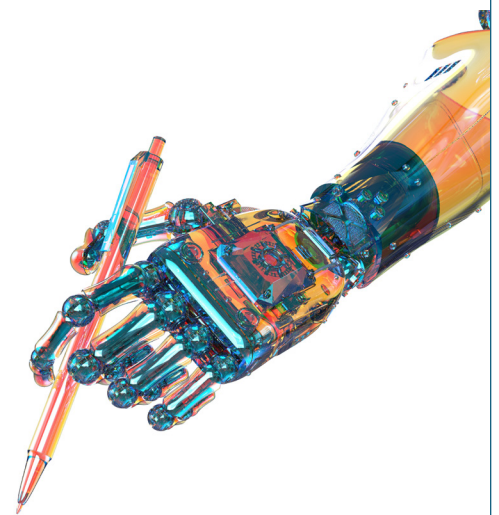
With Chatbot360, OpenAI as well as larger companies such as Microsoft and Google have decided that releasing AI tools while still ironing out glitches is a workable model. Such wide-scale testing provides a treasure trove of data on how people use this technology. With that in mind, its incumbent upon adopters to implement some of their own guardrails.

“AI has consistently been a core part of our product development strategy, but we’re not making product decisions based upon hype,” Londgren of RFPIO said. “We’re making product decisions based purely on what best meets the needs of our customers while staying at the forefront of leveraging AI.”

Sales and marketing leaders should demand as much from their IT vendors and also keep themselves in check.

“I think the technology is mind-blowing and extremely powerful, and it obviously has huge potential,” added Tjepkema, co-founder of Casted, the podcast-amplifying company. “What frustrates me as a marketer is that I know that the most human

brands — the ones that best generate trust and real relationships with their audience — are the ones that win. Generative AI will inevitably create more noise in already very noisy marketplace. We have the opportunity with technology like that, to ask, ‘How do we use it to serve our audience? How do we harness its power to be inspired in ways that are going to be even more relevant to our audience? How do we use the data that this technology provides to create those human connections in a way that matter even more?’” **SMM**



Art Director’s Note

Part of the job of an art director is finding or creating images to illustrate stories. With an unlimited budget and plenty of lead time, we could enlist a trusted artist to help bring our vision to life, using our concept, their creativity and some amount of back-and-forth editing. But who has an unlimited budget and plenty of lead time?

Our cover art for this Focus Report was generated in a matter of seconds by DALL-E 2, the GPT-3 natural language processing program created by OpenAI. I simply asked for an illustration depicting “conversation between two business people using new technology tools.” The generator responded back with four options...and four more...and four more, until I had reached my quota.

The technology is great fun to play with and can be tremendously beneficial to publishers. However, there are ethical concerns, just as there are with ChatGPT, the headline-grabbing AI chatbot also released by OpenAI. For starters, one must consider how this technology affects human artists. Their livelihood is already being impacted by AI, and there is serious potential for copyright infringement. And, at least for now, DALL-E 2 doesn’t seem to do humor, emotion or subtlety well — maybe we will always need the human touch. — *Susan Abbott*

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3 Ways to Increase Sales Reps' Use of Marketing's Content

Showcase support from top sellers

BY GINNA HALL

You've seen the stat: Sellers don't use 60-70% of marketing content. The marketing team creates content for sales, but sellers don't use it. In this uncertain economy, no company can afford to waste time, resources and effort this way.

Sellers don't like the content, they are unaware of new content, they can't find the new content when they need it, or they don't know how to use it.

Allego and B2B DecisionLabs wanted to solve this problem. They conducted two real-world behavioral studies to learn what increases sellers' willingness to use a new piece of marketing collateral. They found that *who* shares the content with sellers greatly affects their likelihood of using it.

Future State: Sellers Want to Use Marketing Content

Research published in Allego's report ["Getting Sellers Engaged: What Motivates Sellers to Use Your Content,"](#) found that sellers are over two times more likely to use marketing-created content if it's recommended by a high-performing peer.

The field trials observed over 300 sellers working at two enterprise sales organizations. Sellers split into groups and watched a recorded video of a sales manager, a product marketer or a high-performing seller using the same script to introduce new marketing collateral.

The data revealed three interesting findings:

- Sellers are much more likely (61%) to use content when they learn about it from a high-performing peer vs. a sales leader or marketer.
- Sellers are significantly more likely (111%) to use content after watching a high-performing peer provide basic details and demonstrate how to use the content.
- Sellers that make a plan for how they will use new collateral are much more likely (98%) to use it.

3 Steps to Get Sellers to Use Marketing Content

- 1. Enlist high-performing sellers.** Don't ask a sales leader or a product marketer to present new content to your sellers — recruit an all-star seller. Research shows that learning from a high-performing peer leads to much higher use intentions.
- 2. Demonstrate the conversation.** Don't just give your sellers an overview of the asset; include a demo of how to use it in a sales conversation. Sellers are significantly more likely to use new content after watching a role-play demonstration from a high-performing peer.



- 3. Help sellers plan.** Ask sellers some reflective questions after they watch the presentation such as, "How will you use this content?" and "What type of buyer is this a fit for?" Research shows that asking sellers to think about their personal plans for the content increases their motivation to use it.

Go the Final Yard

All the effort marketers put into crafting the most compelling collateral is wasted if you can't persuade your sellers to use it. Worse yet, when sellers don't use what marketing provides, they often spend hours every week recreating their own content to use in customer conversations.

It's not enough to simply make new assets available — sellers must know how to use these resources. In addition to enlisting a high-performing seller to introduce new assets, you can activate sales collateral by pairing it with messaging, talk tracks and winning-the-sale stories to highlight the best use cases.

The research shows that even if you start with identical content, the presenter you choose — and the story they tell — significantly affects your sellers' willingness to use it. While it may be easier to simply share a new solution brief, eBook or report, following these three additional steps will ensure that sellers get the most value out of every new asset.

Ginna Hall is director, content & communication, driving brand awareness via content marketing, PR, and social media at Allego, the complete sales enablement platform that accelerates performance for sales and other teams.

Do you need to increase your sellers' engagement with marketing's talking points? Download the Allego report on [getting sellers engaged](#).

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Forget Call Centers, Contact Centers are the Future

Data driven, multi-channel contact centers elevate the customer experience

BY RENAUD CHARVET

Fans of “Friends” may recall the episode in which Phoebe gets work as a call center agent for Empire Office Supplies, and reads from a script to desperately try to sell as much copy toner as possible. Luckily, the times of isolating cubicles and reams of contact lists are over. Data-driven contact centers are the way forward.

The U.S. remains a global competitor in the call center market. In fact, Statista reports that over 100 call centers opened across the nation in 2021, more than any other region worldwide.

Call centers’ primary industries include financial services, technology, media and telecommunications. The South is particularly significant for call and contact center operations. Texas has the highest employment in telemarketing with approximately 22,500 employees, followed by Florida with 15,000 workers. But times are changing for many of these facilities. We’re seeing a shift away from the traditional call center toward the notion of a contact center.

Instead of relying on just one communication channel—the telephone—contact centers are multi-channel facilities that use several forms of communication to talk to their customers. They rely on advanced analytics to learn more about the people they’re contacting and dig deeper into data to inform their decisions. So how can a call center become a contact center?

The Relationship Hub

Call centers have long been a means of making sales and dealing with customer problems. General strategy has been to react to the needs of the customers rather than adapt. A contact center goes beyond the immediate goals of making sales and managing complaints, and is instead, positioned as a hub for all forms of customer relationship.

A contact center is where all critical communication from customers comes in; everything customers tell agents inform a business of what their customers are like, how they’re feeling, and what is and isn’t working. That doesn’t mean contact centers aren’t making sales calls and dealing with customers—the key difference is that they’re capturing data from customer interactions and using it to benefit all areas of the business.

Data-Driven

In a contact center, data is king. A customer relationship management (CRM) infrastructure is an essential piece of contact center technology that’s used to track, compile and analyze all areas of communication. CRM stores information such as who has been contacted, how many times they’ve

spoken to an agent and whether they’ve made a purchase in a single system.

Generally, a data-driven contact center gathers relevant data from multiple channels—be it via the phone, email, webchat or any other platform. This data allows contact center agents to gain insights on their target audiences, allowing them to offer personalized services.

Typically, a contact center team will have an overview of not just who they have contacted, but other data, including what stage a sale may be at, who their direct contact person is, how this person prefers to be contacted, what language they speak and what information was previously provided. This data, and having easy access to it, sits at the heart of any successful contact center.

Rise of the Super-Agent

If a bot can do it, why should a human? The “super-agent” is the idea that using technology and automation can move every agent in the contact center up a notch, elevating their level of expertise. The process of creating super-agents involves automating administrative tasks that take up valuable employee time and gives agents time to focus on more advanced responsibilities.

A good CRM system that’s linked to the contact center’s calling system also helps create super-agents. Aligning a center’s CRM with its cloud-calling system means customer data can be updated in an instant, without manually adding in details. Some CRMs even have automated features that listen in to phone calls and make transcripts for the contact agent to review later.

Promoting better business relationships can be further enhanced by implementing an advanced call routing software solution like Ringover’s. Having call routing software connects callers with qualified agents that have the skillset required to best assist the customer, without needing to bat them between agents before reaching the right person.

Call, or rather contact, centers continue to play a crucial role in building better relationships. But there is no need to opt for yesterday’s rows of desks and endless printed contact lists à la “Friends”’ Empire Office Supplies. Embracing the contact center allows employees and customers to have simpler, more meaningful conversations. **SMM**

Renaud Charvet is CEO of [Ringover](#), a leader in cloud communications.



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Harnessing New Trends In Social Media To Achieve Sales Goals

BY LUKE SMITH

The lingering effects of Covid-19 lockdowns, the persistent supply chain disruptions and increasing fears of a global recession have injected a great deal of uncertainty into the market. At the same time, the turn toward digitalization has had significant impacts, both positive and negative, on B2B enterprises. On the one hand, digitalization has dramatically increased market reach. On the other, it has introduced unprecedented levels of competition, requiring B2B organizations to contend not only with rivals down the street or in the next town, but also on the far side of the world.

In order to survive and thrive, B2B concerns must not only effectively adapt to ongoing market volatility but also to an increasingly crowded and competitive operating environment. The good news is that, while market conditions may be more challenging than ever before, the marketing tools available to business leaders are dramatically improved.

Among the most powerful of these tools is also the most ubiquitous. Social media is not just a platform for entertainment and socializing, nor are its marketing capacities limited only to business-to-consumer (B2C) endeavors. Rather, social media can be an incredibly effective tool for helping B2B businesses meet and exceed their sales goals. This article describes best practices for tapping into social media trends in order to galvanize sales.

Flexibility, Differentiation, Segmentation and Alignment

One of the most significant benefits of using social media to support B2B sales is the flexibility and responsiveness the channel provides. Today's wide variety of social media platforms gives



[marketers unprecedented capacities for customer segmentation](#) and targeting.

For instance, using social media analytics, you can not only more effectively and efficiently define who your target customer is, but also how and where to reach them online. LinkedIn, for example, is a particularly [important platform for B2B marketers](#), with an overwhelming majority of B2B marketers citing the platform as their preeminent lead generation tool.

But while LinkedIn is certainly one of the most important channels for B2B marketing, it is by no means the only viable platform. Indeed, an effective

social media marketing strategy requires both differentiation and flexibility, the capacity to go where customers are, and to align messaging strategies to their needs.

This requires B2B marketers to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the [most critical social media sites](#), the audiences who use them, and the messaging strategies specific to them. If you find that a significant segment of your target customer base deploys platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or TikTok for business research, your messaging must adapt accordingly.

This means, ultimately, that your social media strategy must be flexible enough to align with the behaviors, expectations and content standards of each platform. Thus, you may find yourself constructing robust, research-supported, text-heavy content for LinkedIn and brief explainer videos for YouTube in order to deliver essentially the same message.

Timeliness and Trendiness

No matter how effective your content development and channel strategy may be, if you don't time your campaigns well, you're not going to get the results you want. This is because social media, more than any other marketing channel, is incredibly dynamic.

There is so much social media content generated every second of every day that you must be strategic if you want to stay in view of the target customer. The effectiveness of your social media marketing depends in large part on understanding who your audience is, which platforms they use, and, especially, when and how they use them.

It's imperative, for example, to align your posting schedules with the day and time your audience is likely to be most active on the site in order to increase the likelihood that the post will be seen. If your goal is to increase sales, you simply can't assume that your target audience will scroll long enough to find you. Timing is everything in the ever-changing world of social media.

That also includes timing your entrance into new channels and platforms to remain on-trend and to ensure you're always meeting your target audience where they are and where they're going. [The metaverse](#), for example, though still very much under development, is already emerging as a crucial platform that B2B marketers will ignore at their peril.

Cultivating a robust presence in the metaverse today will solidify one's position as a leader and pioneer in this channel. As increasing numbers of consumers, entrepreneurs and business leaders transition to the platform, having an established brand in the metaverse provides a distinct competitive advantage. Your sales funnel can already be up and seamlessly running before your rivals even show up to the party.

The B2B marketplace is more crowded and competitive than ever before. However, thanks to the tremendous power of social media, B2B marketers have an unprecedented capacity to reach a truly global market. By tapping into social media trends through the creation of flexible, timely, differentiated and responsive social media marketing strategies, business leaders can exceed the loftiest sales goals. **SMM**

Luke Smith is a writer and researcher turned blogger. He enjoys writing on a variety of topics, but business, technology and digital marketing are his favorite.

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Podcasts Are More Common in Today's Sales Conversations

BY PAUL NOLAN

How would you feel if a prospect or current customer reached out to you with an offer to spend half an hour talking about your brand, having you share insights about industry trends or seeking your thought leadership? It may sound too good to be true, but it's being accomplished routinely — possibly by your competitors — through B2B podcasting.

A critical step in sales is getting the right information to the right decision-makers. According to a [report from Sapio Research](#), virtually all business decision-makers in the U.S. spend at least an hour per week consuming business-related content. Among the 502 B2B and B2C decision-makers surveyed in the U.S., approximately 43% reported getting their business-related or thought leadership content from business podcasts. That ranks podcasts atop the list of business content



B2B Podcasts Work

Organizations with branded podcasts saw:

- **89%** higher awareness
- **57%** higher brand consideration
- **24%** higher brand favorability
- **14%** higher purchase intent
- **16%** higher engagement

Additionally, listenership is relevant to B2B brands:

- **52 million** US households listen to business podcasts.
- **54%** of podcast listeners consider buying brands they hear on podcasts.
- **66%** of podcast listeners have college degrees and an average income of \$75,000 per year.

SOURCES: BBC, NIELSEN, EDISON, BUZZSPROUT, VIA CASTED

sources, equal to three other sources of business information — email newsletters, webinars/virtual calls and social media influencers in their respective sectors.

Clearly, podcasts have become a part of the sales conversation. “Over the last four years, the sentiment regarding B2B podcasts has shifted from ‘Is it going to be a thing for branding?’ to ‘It’s absolutely a thing,’” said Lindsay Tjepkema, CEO and co-founder of Casted, a SaaS platform that helps clients amplify the reach of their in-house podcasts.

Tjepkema said 40% of the Cloud 100 companies, the top privately held cloud companies in the world, now have podcasts, and nearly half of all B2B decision-makers in the C-suite are using podcasts to make buying decisions. Notable brands such as Caterpillar, HubSpot and Salesforce create podcasts targeted to their business clients.

The ‘Why’ of Podcasts

“As a marketer, you’re always looking for the eyeballs: Who is my audience? Who are my customers? Who are my prospects? In this case, those earbuds are in podcasts,” Clayton Ruebensaal, executive vice president and chief marketing officer of global business-to-business marketing at American Express, told [Fast Company](#). “Sixty percent of our small business owners that we target listen to podcasts — and over half of the 60% are listening to business podcasts.”

American Express expanded its content marketing strategy during the Covid pandemic, introducing podcasts aimed at small-business owners. “The Next Chapter” is a six-part podcast featuring interviews with top business book authors, including Priya Parker, author of “The Art of Gathering,” and

Angela Duckworth, author of “Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.”

Backers of B2B podcasts tout the intimacy they provide with listeners. Podcasts are frequently consumed while listeners are multitasking. That may seem like you’re getting only part of a listener’s attention, but Tjepkema says neuroscience data shows that passive consumption of content hits the brain in a different (and positive) way. “Your guard is let down and your trust tends to go up, especially when it’s a conversation between two thought leaders,” a common format for B2B podcasting, she said.

Making Sense of Metrics

Podcasts can work similarly to other types of marketing content, expanding brand awareness, engaging prospects through education, and establishing your executives as thought leaders. By featuring satisfied customers who you have helped, podcasts can also build trust and serve the same purpose as referrals.

Tjepkema emphasizes that producing a podcast is merely the initial step in a comprehensive, multiplatform marketing campaign. Introduced in 2019, the Casted platform helps podcast producers amplify the effectiveness of podcast episodes. This includes posting episode transcriptions on your website so that content can be found by search engines, as well as sharing audio clips from the episode in social media posts. Sales reps can send the same audio clips to prospects and customers, and a podcast episode archive becomes a one-stop content treasure trove that sales reps can point prospects to when they have questions that have been addressed in-depth in podcast episodes.

“If you produce a podcast, the next questions become how are you going to activate sales with it? How are you going to

create those human connections with it in a way that actually impacts the brand and impacts the business? How are you going to use it to maximize your reach and to generate measurable impact through brand growth and revenue impact?” Tjepkema said.

In the crowded world of consumer podcasts — there are over 5 million podcasts and 70 million episodes — only one-quarter generate more than 100 downloads in the first week. Because podcasts are long-form content that require an investment of time, generating thousands or even hundreds of downloads is not the key objective, the experts agree.

A niche podcast that draws a hyper-targeted audience can be tremendously successful. Remember, podcasts can drive listeners to your website to gather more information or generate additional interaction. As the team at [The Podcast Host](#), a podcast consultancy, states, “Asking the question, ‘What’s a good number of downloads for a podcast?’ is similar to asking, ‘How long is a piece of string?’”

Casted created what it calls the [B2B Podcast Maturity Curve](#) to help business leaders better understand the stages of incorporating podcasts into the marketing mix. The five stages of the maturity curve begin with channel experimentation — creating a few starter episodes — and ends with marketing amplification — maximizing podcast content to produce measurable business value. **SM**

Editor’s note: Sales & Marketing Management produces a podcast on a (mostly) biweekly basis in which we talk with B2B sales and marketing thought leaders. The episodes are 30 minutes or less and designed to inform sales and marketing professionals on trends, innovation and strategies that will help them excel. You can find our [podcast episode archive here](#).

Podcasts Now a Top Channel for B2B

40%

of the Cloud 100 companies have their own branded podcast.

43%

of decision makers saying they use them to get business related content as a top channel for B2B content.

44%

of C-suite executives, VPs, and department heads consume podcasts.

Podcasts tie with email newsletters, webinars, and social media as the most preferred channels for buyers. They beat-out industry-specific publications (39%), newspapers (36%) virtual industry events (35%), and in-person conferences (9%).

SOURCES: VENTUREBEAT, LINKEDIN, VIA CASTED



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