



Revenue 2.0

5 Predictions Shaping Go to Market Teams in 2021



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Introduction

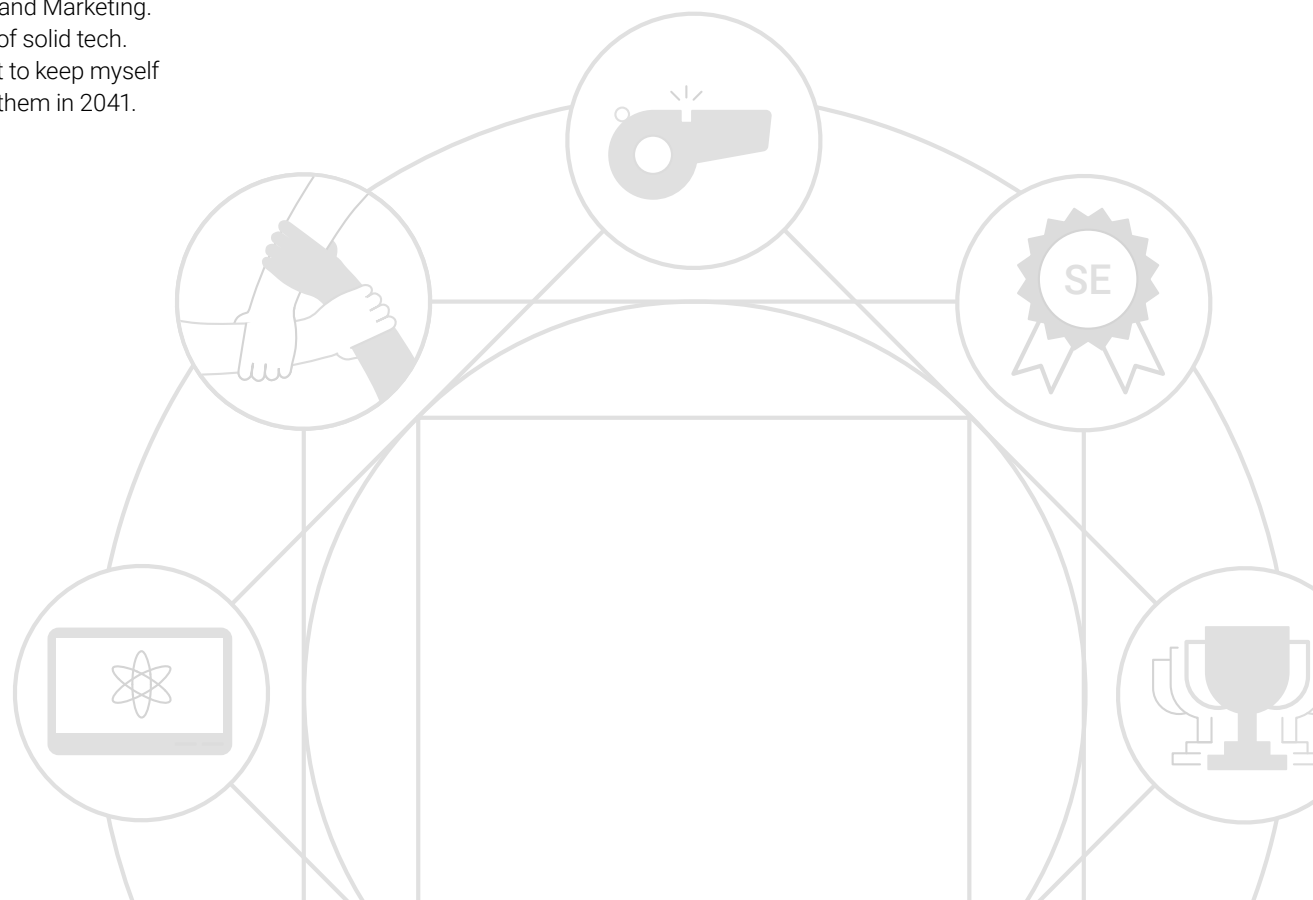
I've spent the past two decades building, marketing, and selling go to market solutions. Over the years, I've shared bold predictions that flamed out in spectacular ways. One of my favorites from the year 2000—the Palm Pilot will revolutionize CRM.

Back then, we all faced a big problem—plenty of vision but a lack of mature technology to make that vision a reality. Twenty years later, I'm pleased to say that cutting edge innovation has allowed the industry to close the gap.

As 2021 kicks off, People.ai decided to share our predictions for the trends that will define this year's state of the art in Sales and Marketing. While there's some good sizzle in here, there's also a lot of solid tech. I'm confident that these predictions are on point. But just to keep myself honest, I've added a reminder to my Palm Pilot to revisit them in 2041.

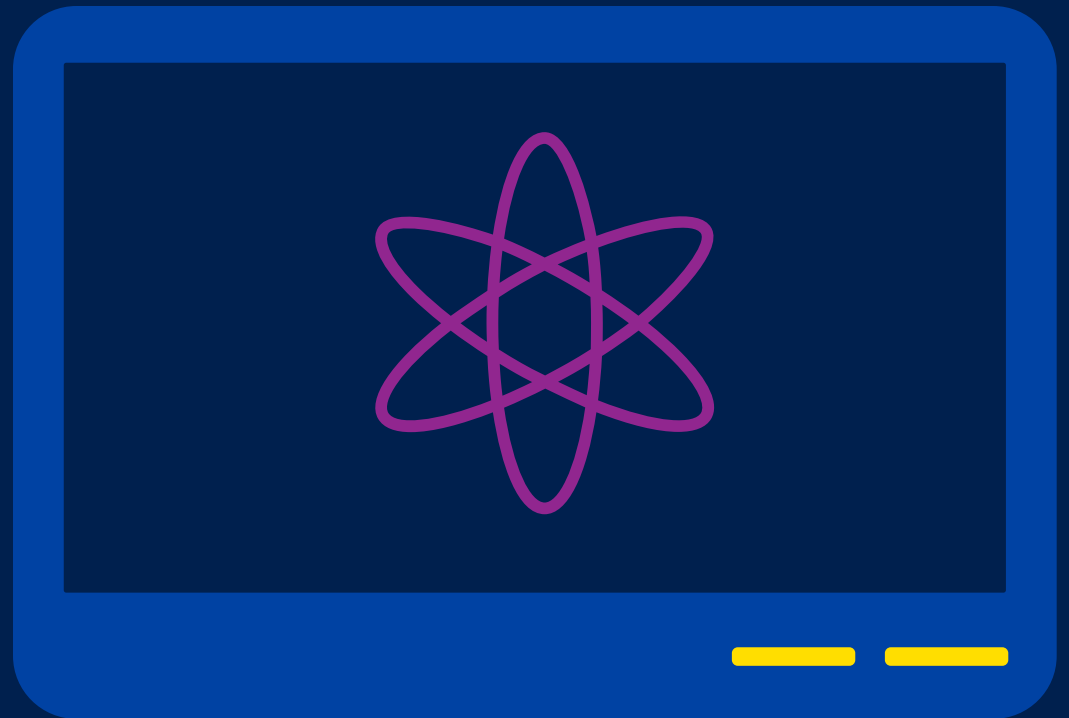
Cheers,

Justin Shriber
CMO
People.ai



Prediction 1

Out of the Lab, into the Living Room:
AI Goes Mainstream (finally)



For years, the idea of “AI” was just that—an idea. Something built for Silicon Valley but not for the broader market, at least not at the time.

Since then, AI has done some growing up. Not only have technological advancements made AI more practical for personal use (ex: “smart” speakers), but mature enough to handle the needs of a business—from chatbots that resolve customer issues before they reach agents to machine learning models powering cybersecurity. As these advancements change consumers’ and businesses’ minds, 2021 will see AI play a far more crucial role in our personal and professional lives as our comfort and trust increases.

Take smart speakers, for example. An estimated 35% of U.S. households¹ own at least one smart speaker, with forecasted projections to reach 75% by 2025. With nearly three-quarters of the US planning to incorporate AI in the next five years, it’s clear the technology has proven itself to not only be valuable but trusted enough to be included in our daily lives.

Of course, the barrier of entry is lower for technology that serves consumers vs. businesses. Business leaders are far more cautious in their decisions, as the effects impact the entire organization. Those concerns mixed with a limited understanding of AI have kept the technology at arm’s length from most businesses. That is, until recently. With digital transformation on the tip of every analyst’s tongue, business leaders have warmed up to the idea of AI and how it could improve strategy or processes. It’s not all market talk either—“early adopters” of AI have already seen the fruits of their labor, with revenue generated by AI hardware, software, and services reaching \$156.5 billion² in 2020, up from 12% in 2019.

Gartner

CIOs have realized that sustainable digital transformation and task automation go hand in hand. AI has become an integral part of every digital strategy and is already used in a variety of applications. Survey results show that **52** percent of telco organizations deploy chatbots and **38** percent of healthcare providers rely on computer-assisted diagnostics. Other operational use cases for AI are fraud protection and consumer fragmentation.

- Gartner

¹ Statista - <https://www.statista.com/topics/4748/smart-speakers/> | ² CRN - <https://www.crn.com/news/cloud/5-emerging-ai-and-machine-learning-trends-to-watch-in-2021/>

When it comes to AI, it's all about the possible. No matter the size of the organization or the industry, AI has found its way to serving those businesses' needs and the customers they support.

Let's take a closer look at some examples of how AI has been used to streamline go to market use cases:

- **Opportunity and Account Matching in CRMs**

Rather than relying on sales reps for manual data entry, AI can automate capturing details around time spent, activity type, and the contacts engaged more accurately from end to end while also intelligently mapping key details to the associated opportunity or account within the CRM.

- **Automated Call Transcriptions and Sentiment Tracking**

Whether it's used to onboard new reps or keep a finger on the pulse of competitor mentions, AI-powered call transcriptions and keyword tracking can surface key moments in conversations between buyer and seller, providing managers with more insights into how their reps are handling objections while positioning value.

- **Call Monitoring and Recommendations**

In the call center space, AI has taken some of the weight off the shoulders of managers monitoring and QA-ing support calls. By flagging calls 'at risk', AI helps managers focus on the calls requiring immediate attention. Keyword tracking and embedded recommendations can help guide agents towards their next action without needing manager intervention.

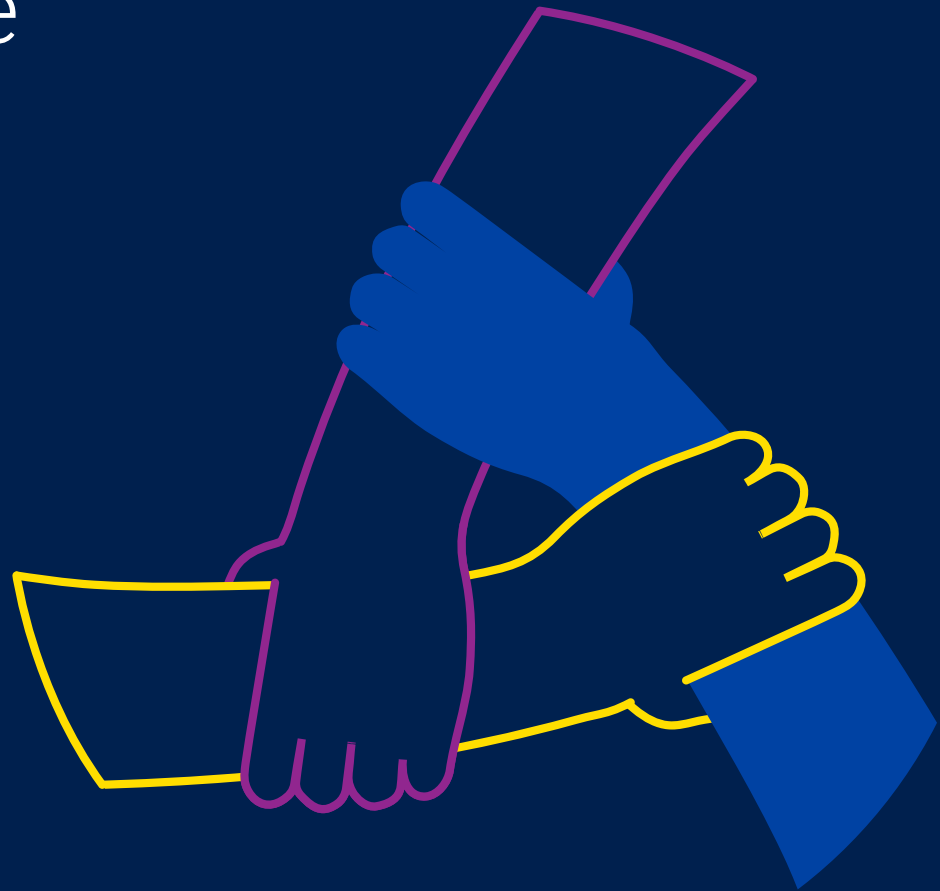
- **Deal Health and Pipeline Inspection**

AI helps streamline pipeline inspection while removing ambiguity on the state of a deal or pipeline health by surfacing alerts for issues such as single-threading or executive engagement. By analyzing historic closed-won vs. lost deals, AI can identify patterns in behavior regarding activities, time spent, and contacts engaged to fuel recommended next steps.

What might have once felt like something out of a sci-fi novel, AI has quickly become a staple of efficiency in every facet of our lives. With a growing level of comfort, an unlimited number of use cases, and a road full of opportunities ahead, it's clear that AI has found its place in our homes, cars, and offices—and it's only the beginning.

Prediction 2

Sales, Marketing, Operations:
Three Become One



Perhaps one of the most promising trends of 2021 is the evolving relationship between sales, marketing, and operations. Businesses have realized that these departments must function as one when it comes to the metrics they measure, the processes they implement, and how they execute their strategy to move forward in an anything but predictable future.

SiriusDecisions

B2B organizations with tightly aligned sales and marketing operations achieved **24%** faster growth and **27%** faster profit growth over a three year period.

- [SiriusDecisions](#)

Historically, friction between sales, marketing, and operations stemmed from a lack of alignment between objectives and how to measure impact. While sales leaders look at pipeline created as an indicator of success, marketing has historically reported on MQLs and SQLs created, either of which may never make their way to the pipeline. Additionally, operations teams will measure operational efficiency—an area that, while important to sales and marketing, tends to be subordinate to top-line performance as accelerated growth often comes at the expense of profit. Factor in the additional hurdle of marrying these disparate metrics, and it's clear why these teams have struggled to align on goals or proactively identify revenue opportunities.



Sales and marketing have to be an incredible partnership, but there is this built-in friction in the two functions. Sales are quarterly driven, governed by quota and it's typically a quarterly quota. And there's really no forgiveness for them. Whereas Marketers are looking at the longer-term. A lot of our work doesn't give you a benefit in 80 days. And so there's this natural friction. Making sure both parties have some empathy for what the other is trying to accomplish and finding a middle ground is vital to a really healthy sales and marketing partnership.



Robin Matlock
Chief Marketing Officer
at VMWare

vmware[®]

Leading businesses have overcome these challenges by establishing a revenue operations team, composed of sales, marketing, and customer success. While the term “revenue operations” has been steadily growing over the past five years, 2020 has had the largest spike in search results³. The more traditional model saw marketing, sales, operations, and customer success remaining siloed within their respective departments, occasionally connected by a dotted line; RevOps models, conversely, establish their central department representing the entire go to market team journey.

As we look to 2021 and beyond, aligning sales, marketing, and operations will primarily drive the business by focusing on the following key areas:

Metric Measurement

Companies will need to align on the strategy (e.g. growth or margin) and determine the metrics that best represent progress towards that strategy. Once established, teams can assess the current metrics and data sources powering them, define their shared metrics, and confirm the measurement process, including testing, KPI alignment, and analysis.

Cross-Department Communication

To protect this newly formed alignment between departments, teams will need to proactively seek opportunities to embrace cross-department communication. One option worth exploring is expanding the Quarterly Business Reviews (QBRs) audience to include marketing and operation team members that can share their contribution to strategy and revenue. Some companies are even beginning to launch Revenue Kick Offs (RKOs) vs. SKOs, joining all go to market functions into an annual vision and strategy alignment event.

Lead Management

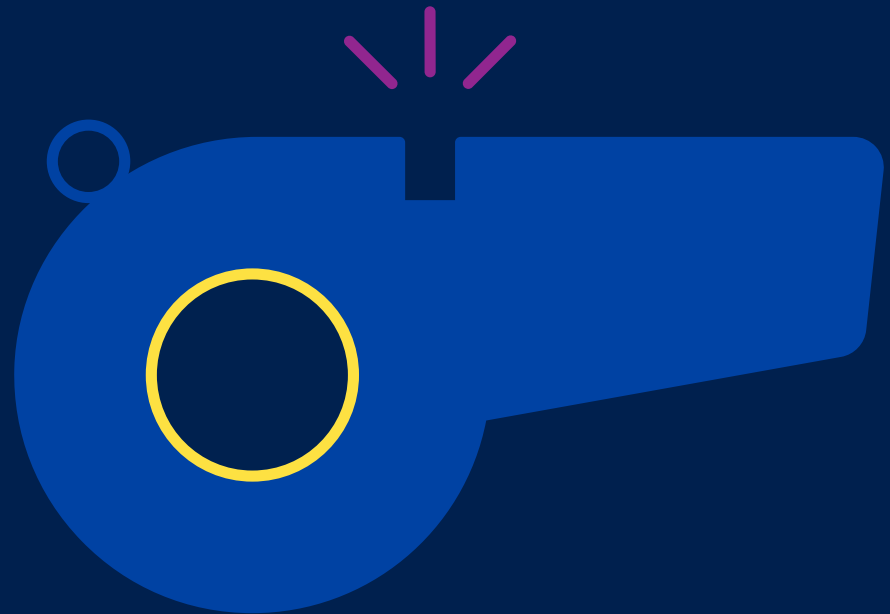
Creating lead management rules of engagement and service-level agreements (SLAs) across sales, marketing, and ops will help businesses take great strides in fostering alignment across GTM teams. Much like shared metrics, teams will need to assess their current lead management process (e.g., conducting gap analysis) before setting expectations, aligning lead response SLAs, or implementing and reporting. Additionally, a ‘GTM interlock’ meeting can ensure that teams are routinely examining the health of the entire pipeline chain from inbound demand generation to outbound BDR activity and the efficiency of sales handoffs. To monitor this, teams can leverage a set of dashboards that track key metrics representing a holistic view of pipeline progression.

Although the transformation of how sales, marketing, and operations work together is still in its early stages, it is already clear that the dynamic between all three departments is quickly becoming one of the most impactful alliances that will bear fruit far beyond 2021.

³ Google - <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=Revenue%20Operations>

Prediction 3

Data-Driven Coaching: Moving the Conversation from Reactive to Proactive



Sales coaching is cited as one of the most impactful roles a sales manager can play in their rep's life, yet it's often the most significant point of tension between the two. For either party to unlock real value from coaching sessions, managers and reps will need to adopt a data-driven approach if either hopes to ensure forecast accuracy, maintain quota attainment, or improve win rates.



Deals win rates for companies whose managers spent more time on coaching than selling is **8.2%** higher, and overall revenue attainment is **5.2%** higher.

- The Center for Sales Strategy

Most of the challenges surrounding sales coaching boil down to three key areas:

1. Sales coaching is reactive rather than proactive
2. Sales managers are diagnosing systems, not the underlying cause
3. Sales coaching is fueled by gut instincts or anecdotes rather than data

In the absence of real sales data, managers are left to run through a checklist of questions focused more on lagging outcomes rather than leading indicators. Not only does this compound the issue of reactive sales coaching but reps are left missing the guidance they need to course-correct deals before it's too late. The end result is a growing frustration on both sides, with nearly two-thirds of reps⁴ questioning whether or not they should stay at the company.



Sales teams often rely on lagging indicators like closed deals and revenue to coach reps, measure success, and work deals. In our recent ebook, *The Power of Managing with Leading Indicators*⁵, we explore how managing past outcomes has kept teams stuck in a reactive mode and why looking ahead, rather than behind, is unlocking more opportunities for predictable and accelerated revenue growth.

⁴ Taskdrive - <https://taskdrive.com/sales/130-sales-statistics-to-guide-you-in-2020/> | ⁵ People.ai - <https://people.ai/resources/the-power-of-managing-with-leading-indicators/>

For the manager-rep relationship to effectively shape performance, two things need to happen: one, reps need constructive feedback and strategic advice stemming from real sales data delivered in real-time. Two, managers need reps that aren't just open to input but proactively seek it out. With no certainty whether coaching will return to in-person vs. virtual, how should managers pair data and a real-time mindset and apply that to the most strategic coachable moments? Let's take a closer look at a few examples:

Manager and Rep 1:1s | Weekly

As one of the most crucial interactions between managers and reps, sales managers will need to restructure the 1:1 to reflect the new realities of remote work and the increasingly mature buying group, including:

1. Get the facts before the conversation starts. Asking reps for background info is a waste of valuable time and if you've already automated the data, that should be available before the conversation happens
2. Shortening meeting times (from 30 mins to 20; from 60 to 45) to allow reps to digest what was discussed and reset before hopping on their next call
3. Leverage AI to help focus on the right questions, and limit that to a maximum of three as more than that runs the risk of diluting the conversation
4. Drive to action and ensure follow up. Define next steps, document them, and use the technology available to ensure they're completed

Team Meetings and Forecast Calls | Weekly

Deal insights gleaned from individual 1:1s can be the basis for larger group discussions on what's working and what's not. Having access to a shared activity dashboard that aggregates the entire team's activity data can be a useful backdrop to coaching conversations.

New Age Ad Hoc Coaching | Real-Time

Real-time coaching will primarily happen through collaboration hubs as 2021 promises no certainty of returning to the physical office. Thanks to real-time access to the latest activity data and AI-driven insights, managers need not worry that coaching done through these platforms somehow carries less weight than sessions previously held in person.

There's no doubt that there are pressures placed on the shoulder of sales managers and reps. Despite the challenges that may lie ahead, sales teams will undoubtedly rise to the occasion as the manager-rep relationship adopts an increasingly data-first, proactive approach that arms them with the intel needed to drive predictable revenue.

Prediction 4

The Enterprise's New MVP: The Rise of Sales Enablement



With more participants, great diversity of objectives, and more consensus driven purchasing decisions, the buying process has increasingly become more demanding. Facing pressure to reduce customer acquisition costs (CAC), companies have turned to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of every rep as their go-to solution. This has opened the door to deepening the roles and responsibilities of sales enablement as we look ahead in 2021.

Today's information that was once held close by sellers is now fair game to anyone with an internet connection. What's more, buyers only spend a fraction of their time (17%)⁶ meeting with sellers when considering a purchase. This changing dynamic between sellers and buyers has forced organizations to reconsider what value their sellers bring and at what stage in the buyer's journey they should be delivering it. Within these areas, enablement can provide the most significant impact for the business as they possess an acute understanding of the buyer, their journey, and the ability to align that with a sales process.

As more organizations realize the untapped potential within their own sales enablement teams, the perception of the role in the eyes of managers and reps has gradually shifted away from an 'enforcer' to a strategic selling partner that can serve the needs of leadership, management, and individual contributors. Listed below are just a few examples of the steps teams have taken to change that perception, as well as some recommended next steps:

Shift from a Cost Center to Revenue Generator

Positioning sales enablement as a revenue generator instead of a cost center minimizes any confusion around the real purpose and value the team provides. Instead of tracking the % of reps certified, organizations need to shift their measurement of sales enablement effectiveness to ramp time, average revenue per rep, and total sales capacity.

ABERDEEN

Aberdeen found that companies with excellent successful Sales Enablement programs have:

32% higher team sales quota attainment

24% better individual quota achievement

23% higher lead conversion rate

- Aberdeen Group

Sales Enablement = Buyer Enablement

Sales organizations have started to realize that sales enablement is simply the other side of buyer enablement. Mapping the buyer journey and modeling the sales process around it rather than asking buyers to conform to a sales process that's optimized for internal factors will result in a far more positive experience for both the buyer and seller.

Segmentation and Specialization

Beyond ensuring reps are trained on how to position features, handle objections, or thread key personas, sales enablement needs to also focus on the processes, tools, and methodologies they use. To effectively deliver on these key areas, organizations should consider segment enablement teams around areas like systems and tools, intervention programming, or diagnostics and design to drive impactful results as well as foster a more customer-centric approach to selling.

With a 343% increase in adoption in the past five years⁷, businesses have made their feelings clear: enablement as a platform is here to stay. By shedding any former perceptions, enablement has slowly become a respected and critical piece of the go to market strategy that will continue to develop and evolve well beyond 2021.

6 Gartner - <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/future-of-sales-2025-why-b2b-sales-needs-a-digital-first-approach/> | 7 Highspot - <https://www.highspot.com/resource/state-of-sales-enablement-2020/>

Prediction 5

Multi-Threading: Smart Sellers
Will Build Many Champions



The gradual shift from singular buyer to the buying group has resulted in teams of all sizes struggling to adapt. In the past when reps could focus on one buyer, the path to close was much more straightforward. Marketing could hone in on use cases, sales enablement could train on a linear buying path, and managers could anticipate objections or next steps with more ease. Although not a given, the path to a yes or no buying decision appeared well defined.

While traditional methodologies focused on finding and cultivating a champion, today's buying process has evolved far past that. What might have once been single-handedly influenced by one champion has now been eclipsed by diverse buying groups that represent multiple business units. Sellers can't afford to have deals hinge on an individual. Instead they must learn to build multiple champions, a new muscle that many still struggle to flex.

To effectively deliver a solution to the broader group, sellers will need to reconsider how they think about and leverage buyer relationships to move deals ahead. Here are a few recommendations to consider heading into 2021:

Gartner®

When surveyed, **75%** of customers agree or strongly agree that their purchase involved people from a wide variety of roles, teams, and locations.

- Gartner

Replace Org Charts with Relationship Maps

Not only will it be essential to know who is who in a deal but who knows who. While traditional org charts do not capture those details, teams will look at relationship maps to fill the knowledge gap. By surfacing every engaged contact, reps can use details around hierarchy or support roles to effectively strategize around the next steps.

Objectively Define Levels of Influence

Rather than leaning on anecdotal evidence, managers will need to verify that reps are objectively defining and documenting the level of influence between contacts on deals. Automating contact capture, which can also capture information around title, seniority, or department avoids any subjectivity that reps may bring to the perspective and ensures neither manager nor rep is caught off guard by buyer blindspots.

Engage The Right Contacts

While relationship maps surface engaged stakeholders, reps should remember that it's not always the most senior individuals that hold the keys to the kingdom. By removing these assumptions and leading with real activity and contact data to inform who are the right people to engage at each stage, reps will have a much easier time navigating the relationships and internal politics across their opportunities.

How buying groups will impact the future of B2B selling is still unfolding before us. Still, one thing is sure: the relationship between buyer and seller, no matter the number of champions or stakeholders, is precious and should be treated as such. While buying groups seem to only grow in diversity, complexity, and power, reps will need to remind themselves that preserving the delicate balance between seller and buyer will go a long way in helping them navigate deal roadblocks and hit revenue targets in 2021 and beyond.

Conclusion

From practical AI applications surfacing in new industries to the rise of RevOps driving internal alignment across multiple departments, 2021 will most certainly see businesses turning the lessons from the previous years into actionable (and measurable) next steps that drive results. A vital part of that success will ultimately come from access to, and trust in, business activity and contact data.

People.ai is the only revenue operations and intelligence (ROI) platform that provides data automation, insights, and persona specific productivity tools companies need to hit their number. With People.ai, sales, marketing, and revenue operation teams gain unprecedented visibility into their business's health with AI-generated insights that increase rep productivity, drive strategic coaching sessions, and deliver predictable growth quarter after quarter.

Interested in how People.ai helps businesses capitalize on the predictions outlined in this ebook? Visit people.ai for more information.

Are You Ready to Meet Your New Revenue Co-pilot?

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