

State of sales

2021 Asia Pacific Edition



Virtual selling is **here to stay.**

COVID-19. Virtual selling. Remote work. Video calls. No frequent flyer miles. There's no argument that the world of sales has changed in the past year. The key question is, How much of this change is permanent?

"Everything," says Julie Thomas, CEO, ValueSelling Associates.

"All of it," says Craig Rosenberg, Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner.

"We do not see things going back to the pre-pandemic stage. It's a matter of how fast we can normalise," says Polly C. Heiss, Executive Director - Integrated Logistics, Kerry Logistics.

Welcome to LinkedIn's State of Sales Asia Pacific report.

These **7 trends** are shaping the future of sales.

Through our survey of more than 1,200 buyers and 1,200 sellers in Australia, India and Singapore, our analysis of LinkedIn platform data, and interviews with dozens of sales leaders, we've identified seven key trends for the State of Sales 2021. COVID-19 has only intensified these trends over the past year.

Read on for insights into buying and selling that can help your sales organisation prepare for the future, which is coming at us faster every day.

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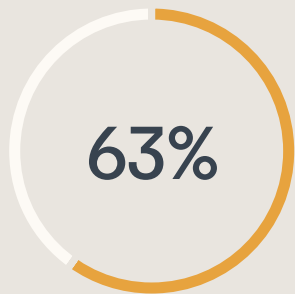
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Trend #1

Virtual selling is good for sellers;
it's even better for buyers.



of buyers say **working remotely** has made the purchasing process easier.

“I believe most of these changes are here to stay. There will be a dual model for interactions — digital coupled with traditional sales interactions and adoption of technology in sales and marketing functions. Emphasis on building trust and creating deeper customer engagement will require data-driven insights to know your customers — and their customers.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

Virtual selling is now **the norm**

While the moment when selling changed forever varies by country, it occurred at the start of 2020. That's when COVID-19 shut down offices and accelerated changes to the sales profession already in motion.

Suddenly, there was no other kind of selling: Virtual selling had, irrevocably, become selling.

Many traditional sales tools — in-person events, business trips, face-to-face meetings — were cancelled literally overnight. Many sellers were forced to embrace technology such as sales enablement and sales intelligence tools that they had previously kept at arm's length.



Trend #1

Buyers have gone remote

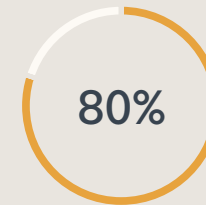
Remote job postings on LinkedIn have increased by more than 5X globally and more than 7X in APAC since the start of the pandemic. More specifically, Singapore saw a more than 5X increase, Australia saw a more than 6X rise, and India saw this jump by more than 7X.

As a result, buyers have been difficult to reach in any way but virtually. In APAC, 74% of buyers were working remotely more than half of the time, according to LinkedIn's survey data. Buyers appear to like the arrangement: 80% say they would like to work remotely half or more of the time in the future. Perhaps most significantly, 63% of buyers told us that working remotely has made the purchasing process easier.

The bottom line is this situation requiring virtual selling skills won't be changing any time soon. Just under half of buyers (44%) say they won't be meeting sellers in person until at least the second half of 2021.

"COVID has, obviously, forced a lot of people to sell virtually, but it's a trend that's been happening for a while. Like a lot of exponential changes, it was happening slowly, and now suddenly."

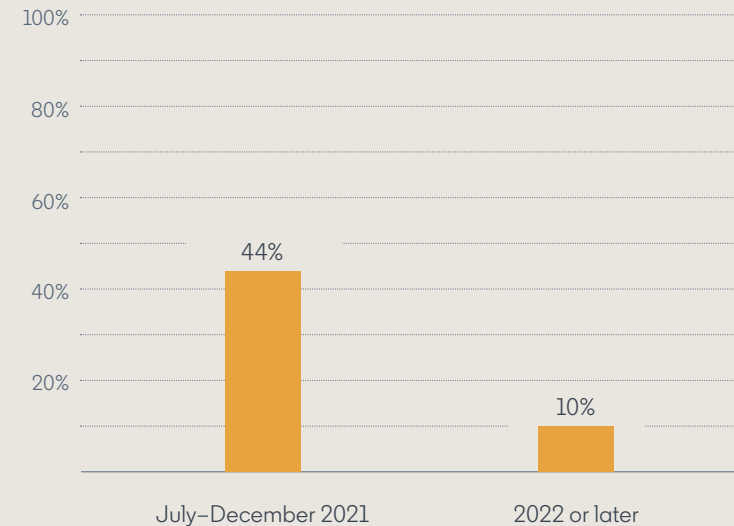
Matt Heinz
President, Heinz Marketing



80% of buyers want to continue working remotely half or more of the time in the future.

When do buyers anticipate meeting in person again?

Percentage of buyers surveyed on when they plan to attend in-person meetings again.



Will in-person events stage a comeback?

Industry events will also find it hard to draw crowds of buyers. More than 94% of buyers responding to our survey have used industry events and conferences to meet salespeople and scope products, but over one-third (40%) say they won't return to events until at least the second half of 2021.

Even with the difficulty of meeting buyers face-to-face, the sales sector learned that big deals can close without a handshake. More than one-third (37%) of salespeople responding to our survey said they had closed deals of \$500,000 or more without ever meeting the buyer in-person.

“Sellers will go back to face-to-face meetings but not remotely close to pre-pandemic levels. Digital transformation was coming no matter what. COVID-19 just accelerated everything. In other words, digital transformation is here to stay.”

Craig Rosenberg
Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

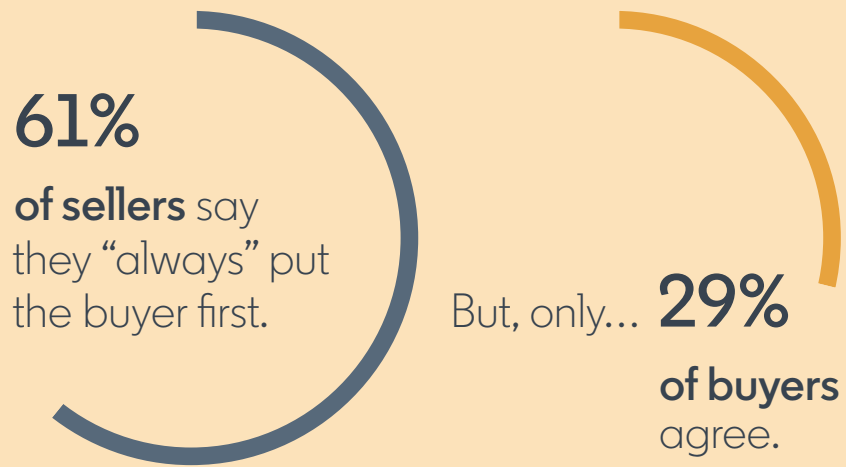


Over 1 in 3 buyers

say they won't return to in-person events until at least the second half of 2021.

Trend #2

Sales organisations are preventing sellers from **putting buyers first.**



“The selling process has changed to the buying process, is the best way I can put it.”

Ed Calnan
Chief Revenue Officer, Seismic

Putting the buyer first is now a must

2020 was the year that putting the buyer first moved from being a suggestion to an imperative. When COVID-19 struck APAC, the situation absolutely forced salespeople, from the very start, to consider the buyer's individual condition — economic, emotional and otherwise. Some companies, like Netflix, were high fliers. Others were in a holding pattern. And some entire industries, such as the travel sector, were grounded and unlikely to buy anything any time soon.

“Traditional sales approaches quickly became unfit in a post-COVID world. This required us to reimagine and redefine the sales playbook — we looked at leveraging our existing customers to win new ones. We also quickly realised we needed to stay connected with customers to stay relevant and redefined our customer engagement strategy. We created an online platform in ANZ that not only helps us connect with existing customers, but also collect their perspectives and insights.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

The **Buyer First** Philosophy

At LinkedIn, we define the Buyer First approach to selling with these five principles:

- 1 Learn, then define.**
Active listening is a critical foundation for the buyer-seller relationship.
- 2 Share readily.**
Buyer-first selling is about transparency and always empowering buyers with information.
- 3 Solve, don't sell.**
A buyer-first seller measures success in problems solved, as well as products sold.
- 4 Deliver value.**
It's critical to see the relationship through, long after a deal is signed.
- 5 Earn trust.**
A buyer-first seller develops long-term trusted relationships by always acting in the buyer's best interest.

Trend #2

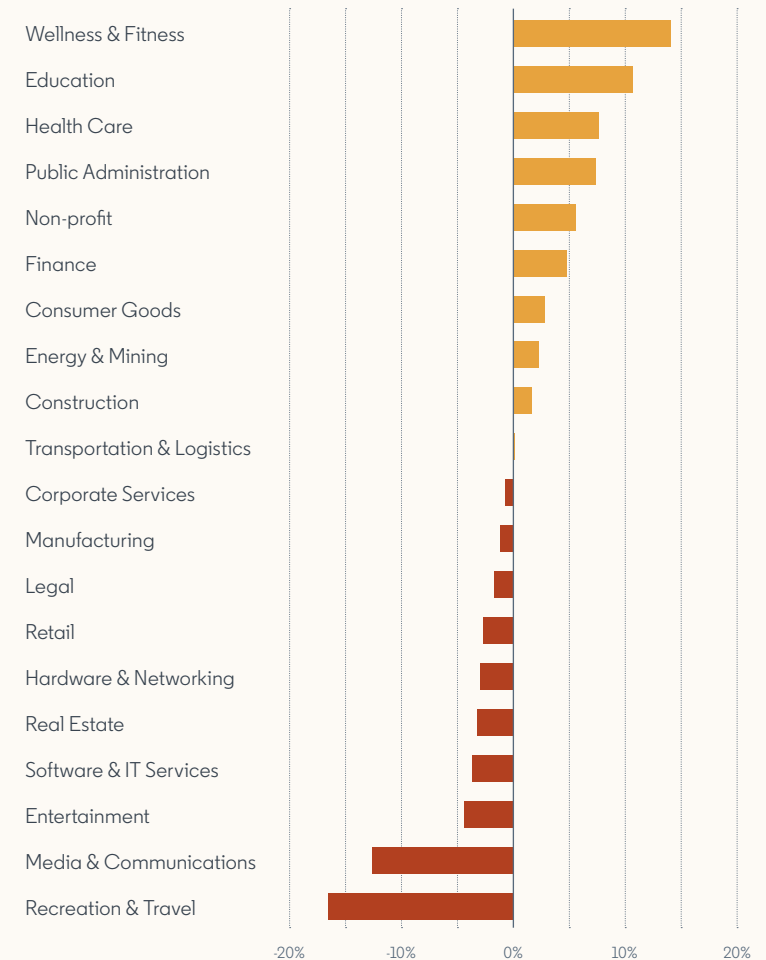
While COVID-19 hastened the rise of the Buyer First approach, the philosophy, driven in large part by the wide availability of product information on the Internet, was gaining strength even before 2020.

“A buyer-first approach is built around trust. If you build trust, customers will come. Today, customers are also changing by becoming more skilled at researching a solution, finding ballpark pricing, and quickly identifying most of the pros and cons of a product or service. Therefore, the sales process must be aligned around the way your customer buys, rather than the way you want to sell.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

From 2019 to 2020, sales growth shifted across industries

Growth Rate of Prospecting Activity, 2020 vs 2019



The disconnect between buyers and sellers over Buyer First

“To what extent do you as a salesperson place your buyer first?” It’s a simple question, but it gets at the heart of the buyer-seller disconnect.

Almost two-thirds (61%) of sellers said they “always” put the buyer first. Note that top performers (sellers who met quota by 125% or higher) are more likely to say they put the buyer first with 72% saying “always.” Notably, 86% of top sellers in India say they always put the buyer first, compared to 63% of top sellers in Singapore and 57% in Australia.

When we asked buyers how often they think sellers place buyer first, just over a quarter (29%) of buyers said that sellers “always” put the buyer first.

That’s quite a difference — with **61% of salespeople saying they put the buyer first, but only 29% of buyers agreeing with that assessment.**

Of note is the fact that 88% of buyers in India feel salespeople are essential partners (compared to 59% in Singapore and 69% in Australia).



Trend #2

To recap, most people involved in the buying and selling process will tell you that putting the buyer first is the right thing to do. So if all parties agree that it's a buyer-first world, why do buyers think sellers are often not putting them first? Our data indicates that sales organisations are putting up barriers preventing their own sellers from serving buyers' needs.

Let's dive a little deeper and explore a more precise picture of what buyer-first selling is. Based on the five Buyer First principles we outlined above, there are some specific selling behaviours that we at LinkedIn believe place the buyer first. Our survey showed that buyers definitely say these kinds of selling behaviours are important to them:

Buyers see these behaviours as Buyer First

Percentage of buyers surveyed who say the following seller behaviors are "important" or "very important."



Trend #2

The data also shows, unfortunately, that buyers perceive that sellers aren't engaging in these behaviours.

Buyer First behaviours in practice

■ Buyers who say sellers practise these behaviours "all the time."



Why does this disconnect exist between sellers seeing the value of Buyer First behaviour but not delivering on it to the same degree? The reason may lie in the sales organisation's commitment to support Buyer First activities.

A large majority of sales professionals responding to our survey say their organisations do not always practise Buyer First behaviours. This puts sellers in a position where 66% of top APAC sellers and 80% of top sellers in India feel that they have to put the buyer's needs above their own and even their organisation's.

■ Sellers who say their organisations practise these behaviours "all the time."



The barriers to Buyer First

Our survey data indicates that barriers exist to building a Buyer First sales organisation. In our survey, sellers identified their top seven roadblocks:



Percentage of sellers surveyed who identify these organisational barriers to practising buyer-first behaviours.

Adopting a Buyer First approach is more than lip service. It's also more than simple awareness that implementing a Buyer First approach is the right thing to do. The data indicates it requires a genuine change in mindset and action — at the sales organisation level.

“In a post-COVID world, most customers are asking: ‘Is your sales team here to help me, or simply here to sell to me?’ This requires moving away from the traditional sales mindset of ‘how can I close the deal?’ to ‘how can I deliver value for the customer?’. And it is a key mindset shift we must make to build long-standing relationships.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

Trend #3

Sales organisations and sales managers must
prepare for an ongoing hybrid working world.

78%

of sales managers agree that **the capability to cope with change** is more important than it was five years ago.

“Generally speaking, sales are slow to adapt. If the way sellers are doing things works, then they will keep doing it. This drastic event is driving change. Also, when the buyer changes, sales are forced to change. We often think of ‘sales’ as having to move virtual as the driver, but actually our buyers moved virtual. Ultimately, sales is going to gravitate to the buyer’s preference. In other words, it is much easier to adapt to change when you have to.”

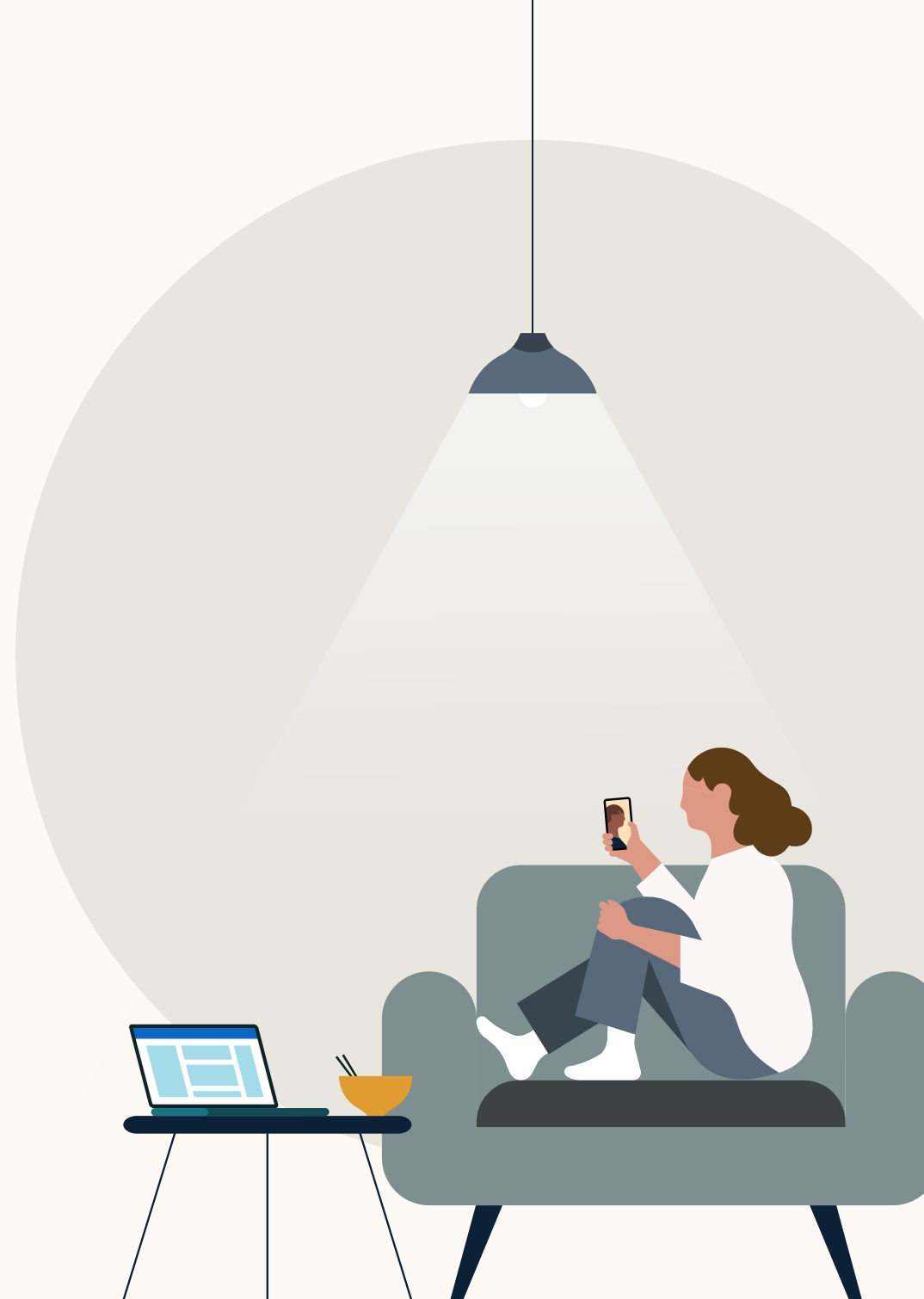
Craig Rosenberg

Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

The world of work is changing

COVID's appearance has only accelerated the pace of change in the world of sales. Across APAC, 78% of sales managers agreed that the capability to handle change was more important in their job now than it was five years ago. That figure is 75% among the top sales group in India.

Sales organisations are adapting in a variety of ways. Our survey data showed that these changes are the most common cited by the sales professionals:



The rise of remote work

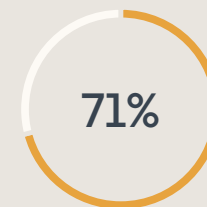
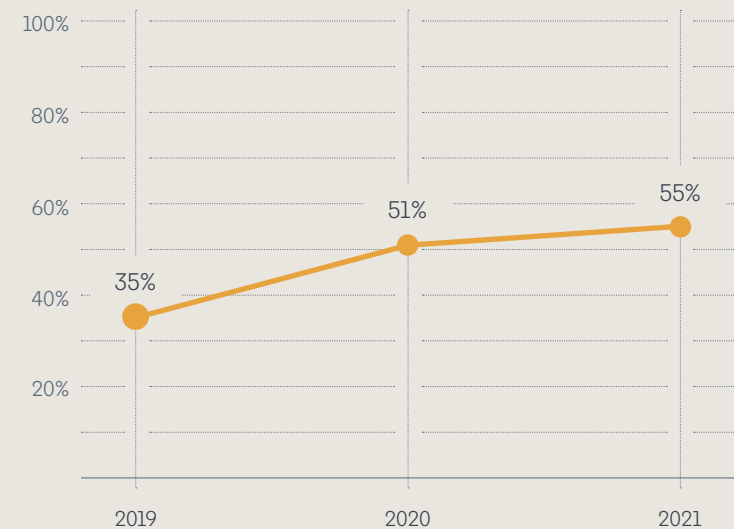
The prevalence of remote work is a key change facing sales organisations. The number of postings of remote sales jobs on LinkedIn skyrocketed in 2020. Globally, the number of remote sales jobs increased by more than 3X since the start of the pandemic. In APAC, the increase was more than 7X. Specifically, it was more than 6X in Singapore, over 7X in Australia, and more than 11X in India.

In Asia Pacific, the number of sales professionals who reported working remotely 50% of the time has increased significantly since 2019, when about 35% of sales professionals reported working remotely half the time or more. In 2020, the number of sales professionals working remotely half the time or more jumped to 51%, and this year, it's slightly higher at 55%.

Both sales managers and salespeople agreed that the shift to remote work wasn't always a seamless transition. Over two-thirds (71%) of sales managers say that overseeing a remote sales team is more challenging than they anticipated. Similarly, 67% of salespeople say that working remotely is more challenging than they anticipated.

Remote sales work continues to increase

Percentage of sales professionals who report working from home more than 50% of the time.



of sales managers say overseeing a remote sales team is more challenging than anticipated.

Trend #3

“Communication practices are essential in this new environment where you rarely engage directly or in-person with your team. Taking the time to get to know people, ensuring focus on mental health & well-being and connection across multiple levels, managers, teams, individuals and partners requires daily focus and is very different to being visible in an office environment. A disciplined approach to constructive and motivational feedback is essential, these elements have a huge impact on the motivation of all teams.”

Kevin Ackhurst
Head of Sales for APAC, HubSpot

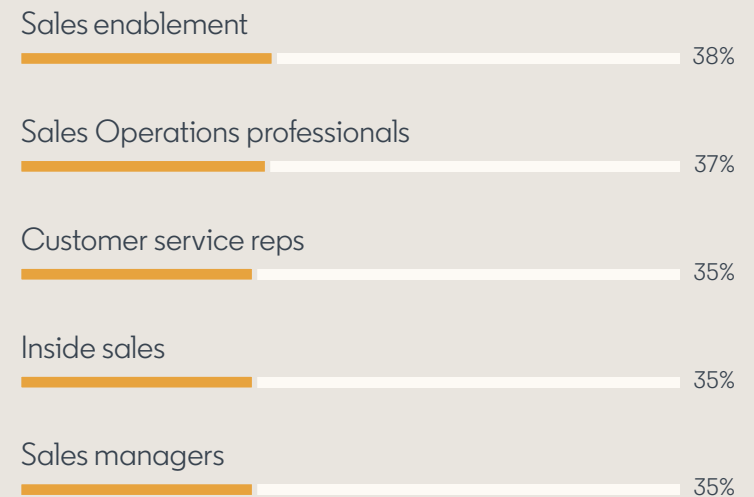
Reagan Barry, Head of Commercial Steering at Telstra, noted that structural changes are needed to support remote working: “COVID-19 has demonstrated that sales organisations can operate remotely. However, it has also underscored the need for cultural and structural changes to ensure that remote salespeople are effectively supported and able to deliver the best outcomes for our customers.”

Another way that sales teams are changing is the increasing centrality of Sales Operations, with a rise in the number of these professionals. LinkedIn data shows that the number of Sales Operations professionals in Australia, India and Singapore grew at least 2X faster than the sales organisation as a whole between 2018 and 2020.

Meanwhile, customer success roles have tripled in Australia, India and Singapore and grew at least 11X faster than the sales organisation as a whole between 2018 and 2020. Sales enablement roles are also beginning to have an increasing influence in APAC, with the number of roles more than doubling across Australia, India and Singapore.

Sales Operations, sales enablement and customer success will **remain** a hiring priority

Percentage of survey respondents who say they will be hiring “significantly more” in these roles.



Trend #3

“As leaders, we know that a broad range of mindsets, backgrounds, values and experiences leads to expanded thinking, innovation and perspectives. More importantly, we live and work in a diverse world. Our customers are diverse. Having a diverse workforce or, in fact, a workforce that simply reflects our community and our customers, is no longer a nice to have, but an essential.”

Kevin Ackhurst

Head of Sales for APAC, HubSpot

Diversifying sales organisations

Our data and interviews with sales leaders indicate that hiring may also change in two more crucial ways. First, with the rise of remote work, sales organisations will be able to hire talent from virtually anywhere in the world — not just the cities where their offices are located.

Beyond diversifying the locales of their sales professionals, companies can also expand the diversity of their sales teams when it comes to gender, race, and other characteristics.

Our survey data indicates that sales organisations believe they have built diverse sales organisations or are at least on the road to equity. About one-third (34%) of sales professionals in our survey say their sales organisation has “exceeded goals around

diversity hiring initiatives.” Note this jumps to 54% in India. Another 50% of APAC sellers say their sales organisation has “met” their diversity hiring goals. In Australia, this number is 54% and in Singapore, it is 62%.

In addition to sales organisations making a commitment to diversity, the majority of buyers, too, say they are supportive of diverse sales organisations. An overwhelming majority of buyers (91%) say they would buy from a more diverse sales organisation provided everything else were equal.

“Clients are diverse, so prioritising diversity in the workplace gives you access to a greater range of talent, ideas and opinions. It helps provide insights into the needs and motivations of your client base. A culture of diversity starts with the leadership team, and re-evaluating your hiring requirements is the first step. One way to foster a culture of diversity is by hiring a remote team based on the best talent available across the globe.”

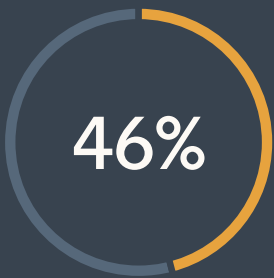
Neelay Patel

Head of Sales Asia, AON

More than 9 in 10 buyers say **they would rather buy from a more diverse sales organisation** than a less diverse org with equal offerings.

Trend #4

These are the sales behaviours **blocking deals.**



of buyers won't buy from sellers who **offer misleading information.**

“I think it’s crazy that we hire for grit, stamina, determination, and perseverance when our customers want someone who’s compassionate, kind, trustworthy, a great listener, and an expert in their field. It’s like there’s almost no overlap between what customers want from a great sales rep and what a VP of Sales wants from a great sales rep. It all comes back down to putting customers first or buyers first.”

Sahil Mansuri
CEO, Bravado

Seller behaviour makes a difference

When it comes down to individual cases, it often remains a mystery why a particular buyer responds to a specific sales pitch and another buyer doesn't. In our survey, however, buyers did identify some general behaviours that they don't want in the sales professionals who call on them.

“How many times are we guilty of selling without understanding what the customer needs? I’m a true believer of asking ourselves the why — i.e., the customer value. Clients should feel that you’re really resonating and listening to what they need and expect. When we do virtual selling, we get more information about how the company is tracking, the new expansion markets or new products that our customer is launching, etc. That means we can address whether there is a need for support or a logistical solution, and this enables a more informed engagement.”

Polly C. Heiss

Executive Director - Integrated Logistics

Kerry Logistics

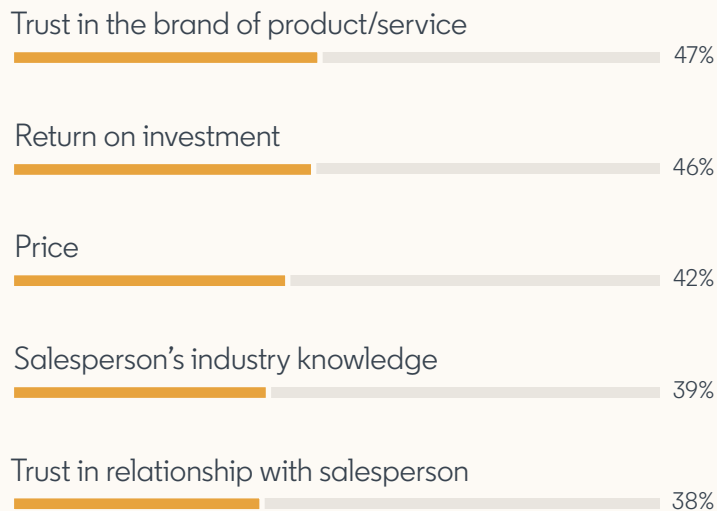
We asked buyers to identify what factors would make them more likely to select a sales professional's company as a vendor.

Here are the top five:



Trend #4

In our survey, buyers also ranked the factors that are important in influencing the purchase of a product or service. These five factors ranked consistently in the top three selected by buyers:



“Customer aspirations are changing every day and it is important that as a salesperson, one perceives this and adapts to this.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

Buyers ranked these 7 behaviours as **immediate deal killers**

Percentage of survey respondents who say these seller behaviours are immediate deal killers.



Sales professionals are taking note

Sales professionals suspect in their gut that some outreach approaches are less effective than others. Our survey found that when sellers identified the top five behaviours that they believe immediately turn off buyers, their assessment closely mirrored the buyers' own viewpoint:



Sellers can easily address these five behaviours: Tell the truth; strive to deliver personalised, relevant messaging; get up to speed on their company's offerings and prospects; and resist overindulging in cold outreach.

Additionally, data indicates that active listening is a sales superpower. Our LinkedIn data shows that salespeople have turned to learning courses as a response to the pandemic, and among the topics they learn more of are those on "active listening", where minutes spent learning increased 4X between March 2020 and March 2021, and for good reason.

Top-performing salespeople **listen more than they speak** on sales calls.*

*According to Gong data

Trend #5

Sales technology provides the key pathway to **building trust.**

84%



of sales professionals say their organisation plans to **invest “significantly more” or “more” in sales intelligence tools.**

“Overall, virtual selling has driven rapid digital transformation in sales. Early adopters were ready technologically for the sudden move to virtual, and now laggards are investing in technology infrastructure to support their reps. The early days of the pandemic were really the ultimate test.”

Craig Rosenberg

Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

The importance of trust

At first glance, it appears that buyers harbor a distrust for the sales sector. Only 41% of buyers say that salespeople are trustworthy. In India, we see the highest percentage (51%) of buyers saying salespeople are trustworthy, while only 37% of buyers in Australia and 36% in Singapore feel this way.

At the same time, buyers say that trusting a salesperson is a top factor in selecting which salespeople they do business with. When we asked what qualities buyers value in a sales professional, buyers ranked “trustworthy” as the No. 1 trait at 44%. Second was “responsive” at 35%, closely tied to the concept of being reliable – a precursor to trust.

In our survey, 89% of buyers describe the salespeople they ultimately do business with as “trusted advisors.” In India, 97% of buyers consider their salespeople trusted advisors. In Singapore, 87% of buyers feel this way and in Australia, 86%. So it seems clear that for sales professionals getting past that initial distrust is crucial to getting deals done. The question, of course, is how to get from a point of distrust to a level of trust.



Trend #5

Prior to the pandemic, this trust between buyers and sellers was typically built during face-to-face in meetings, at trade shows, and over dinners. These in-person encounters were opportunities for sellers to gain trust and demonstrate understanding of potential buyers and their needs.

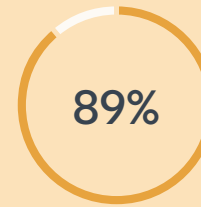
Even before the pandemic, sellers were able to use sales technology to understand the potential customer before any outreach had taken place. For instance, sellers could use Gong or Chorus to analyse transcripts of sales calls to understand the typical customer's state of mind and to anticipate their objections. Additionally, sellers could use online searches and tools such as LinkedIn to gain insight into the specific buyers they planned to target.

With in-person meetings limited, sales technology provides a key pathway to gaining insight and understanding into potential customers. It's no surprise, then, that our survey indicates that both usage of and investment in sales technology are increasing.

Nearly three quarters (71%) of our survey respondents say they use sales technology at least once a week; almost one-quarter (27%) use it every day. Of note: 57% of top sellers in India use sales technology at least once a day.

Why? Nearly all sellers in APAC (97%) say that sales tools enable them to build stronger relationships. Almost the same number (96%) says that sales tools enable them to close more deals. Of the three APAC countries, India comes in highest with 89% of top-performing sellers there saying sales technology is very important to helping them close deals.

Buyers are looking for salespeople they trust



of buyers describe their sales reps as “trusted advisors.”

Sales tech helps sellers build trust

97%

of sellers say sales tools enable them to build stronger relationships with buyers.

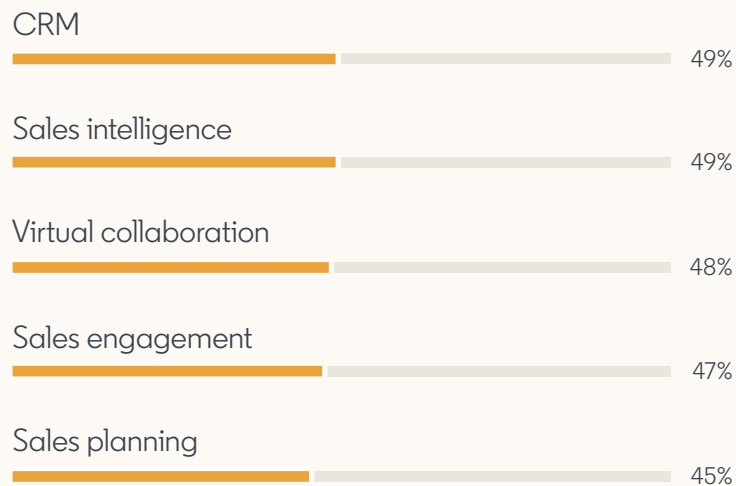
96%

of sellers say sales tools help them close more deals.

Sales technology helps sales pros **build trust**

In general, sales professionals see sales technology as crucial to their jobs and to building the trusted relationships that ultimately result in closing business. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents to our survey said that their CRM system was “very important” to closing deals. Sales engagement software (61%) and sales intelligence software (65%) received similarly high marks. An even higher percentage – 68% – of top sellers in India say sales intelligence tools are extremely critical to closing deals.

And a large portion of sales professionals say they plan to use these technologies “significantly more” in 2021:



This increased usage is also translating into additional investment, according to our survey. Nearly half of sales professionals (46%) say they anticipate investing “significantly more” in a CRM system. Sales professionals also say they are investing “significantly more” in sales intelligence (42%) and sales engagement (43%) tools.

Over six in 10 sales professionals (61%) expect to invest more in sales technology in the next 12 months compared with the previous year. Of that 61% who expect to invest more, two-fifths (41%) say they will invest 50% or more in sales technology in the same timeframe.

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“The rise of Millennial buyers has accelerated the change in buying, how buyers want to interact, and how the buying and selling motion works. Millennials demand organisations to be flexible, online, accessible anytime, anywhere. Adapting to and understanding the need for a clear digital strategy and interactions aligned to changing behaviours will determine success.”

Reagan Barry
Head of Commercial Steering, Telstra

Trend #6

Evolving Sales Operations roles are **reinforcing data-driven strategies** in sales organisations.

2X

The number of Sales Operations professionals in Australia, India and Singapore **grew at least 2X faster** than the sales organisation as a whole between 2018 and 2020. (LinkedIn data)

“Sales Operations have traditionally played reporting and operational roles, but progressively play a key role in guiding and steering the sales force to drive efficient and effective outcomes and performance. By leveraging data aligned to customers and markets, an effective Sales Operations function should be providing proactive direction on potential opportunities and guidance to the sales force.”

Reagan Barry

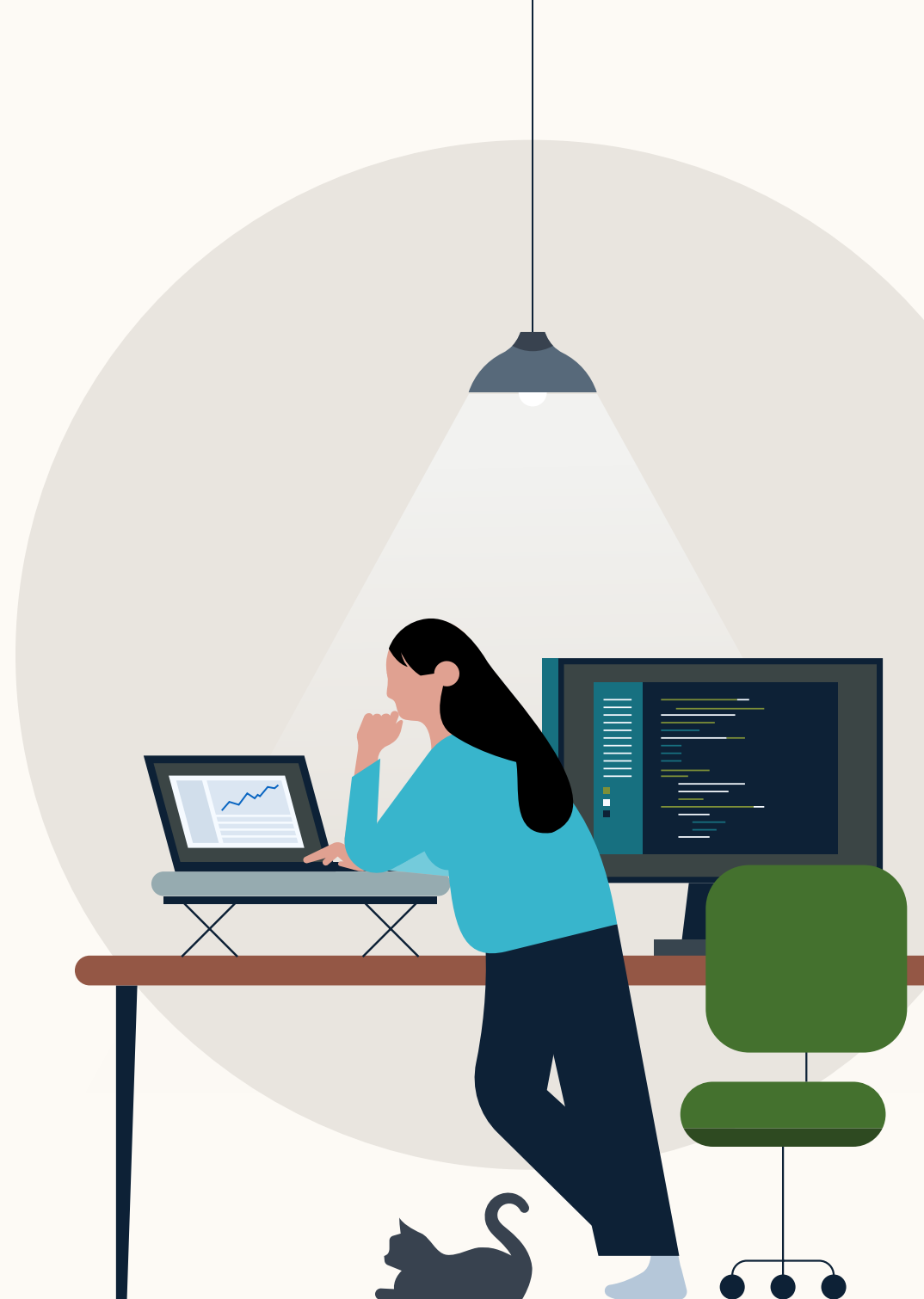
Head of Commercial Steering

Telstra

For sales orgs, data is more crucial than ever

Data is now more crucial than ever — especially with the rise of the Sales Operations function and their growing role in strategic planning.

Led by Sales Operations, sales organisations increasingly use data for a range of tasks, such as sales planning and setting the sales strategy. Our survey found the top five uses of data by sales orgs – many of them new since last year’s survey:



But, data is only as good as its **source**

For sales organisations, CRM is a key source of data. Overall, sellers are confident in the efficacy of this data. Half (50%) of sellers in our survey say they are “very confident” in their CRM data. By country, the numbers are: India 65%, Australia 45%, and Singapore 37%. Across top sellers, it’s 62% for all of APAC, and 78% for those in India.

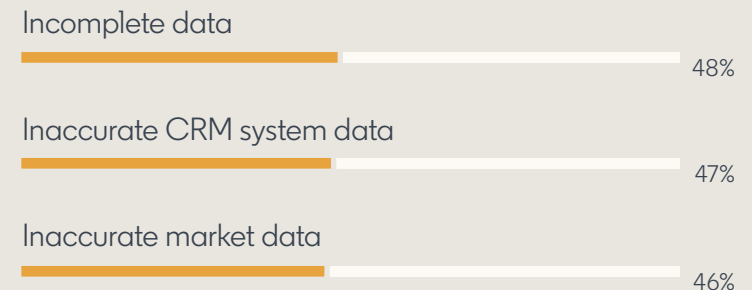
But sellers are also keenly aware that any CRM data has a shelf life. Research shows that about 25% of buyers change roles every year. It’s crucial for sellers to stay on top of this data. As a reminder, 82% of sellers say they lost or delayed at least one deal in the past year because a prospect or key client stakeholder had changed jobs. More than one-third (38%) of sellers say they had lost or delayed at least three deals due to a stakeholder leaving.

“We use data as a tool to inform our ability to foresee or influence customer behaviour and buying patterns of existing and potential customers. For existing customers, a data-driven approach enhances the customer experience because it allows us to focus on the end-to-end customer journey and not just individual transactions. At the other end of the spectrum, appropriate use of customer data can indicate the potential for losing or retaining a customer. The entire sales team works with a data-driven mindset and is focused on unlocking insights about customers.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

Sales pros rank their top three challenges with data

Percentage of survey respondents who identified these challenges.



Sales performance metrics are **shifting**

In using data to measure performance, there is a general shift in what data and metrics sales organisations are using to gauge their sales professionals.

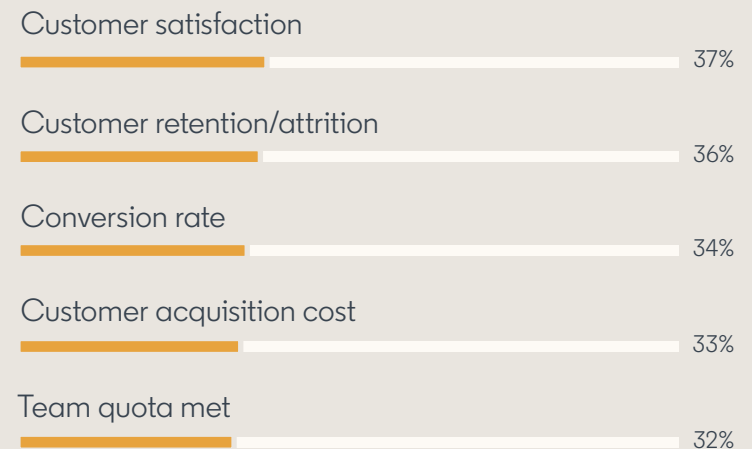
Last year, our survey of sales professionals in APAC showed a trend toward using metrics focused on the customer rather than traditional sales metrics. In 2020, the top two metrics that sales organisations relied on were customer satisfaction (43%) and customer retention (41%).

Even in the midst of the pandemic, their focus is on more mature, longer-term priorities that align better with strategic company goals and sustainable business.

Data from *Forbes* indicates that 65% of a company's business comes from existing customers, and increasing customer retention by 5% increases profits by 25% to 95%. Thus, sellers are investing more in keeping customers happy. Aside from the significant increase in the customer success function in the sales org, salespeople are also starting to learn skills to improve customer centricity. In the last five years, customer service has ranked the top skill added by sales professionals to their LinkedIn profiles.

The top metrics used to measure salesperson performance

In this year's State of Sales survey, we see that customer centricity has clearly become foundational in sales organisations in APAC, as evidenced by long-term stats that continue to focus on the customer. Here are the top metrics used to measure salesperson performance, according to this year's survey:



Trend #6

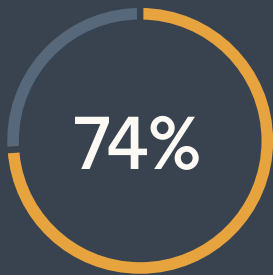
“Metrics and targets progressively evolve to drive the desired outcomes for the business with the right guide rails and direction for the sales team. We have evolved core performance metrics for our sales force to adopt a greater focus on a new and renewal targeting approach linked with our key products and solutions.”

Reagan Barry
Head of Commercial Steering
Telstra



Trend #7

Buyers and sellers are **finding greater connection** on LinkedIn.



of sellers say they are committed to **expanding their LinkedIn** network in 2021.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has really transformed the sales landscape. Our ability to meet and connect with clients in traditional ways is now limited. Social selling has become an important way to connect with them, and LinkedIn Sales Navigator is one of the best platforms for that. Colleagues can narrow down and find ideal client profiles based on geography, industry, company size, function and many additional fields. The LinkedIn platform also allows us to gain powerful sales insights, such as job changes and company updates.”

Neelay Patel
Head of Sales Asia, AON

Trend #7

Both buyers and sellers are indicating they are increasing their reliance on LinkedIn since the pandemic started.

On the sales side, almost three-quarters (74%) of sellers say they are committed to expanding their LinkedIn network in 2021. Even more (84%) of sellers plan to write many more articles for LinkedIn this year. This percentage is 67% across all top sellers in APAC, and 77% for top sellers in India.

Additionally, 45% of APAC sellers say they are sharing “much more” third-party content. The numbers are higher for top sellers across all of APAC and in India: 58% and 68%. Further, 43% say they are sharing “much more” of their own company’s content, and 38% say they are interacting (sharing, liking, and commenting) with “much more” content.

These figures indicate a robust usage of LinkedIn among salespeople, who are sharing content to position themselves as thought leaders in their industry.

Additionally, self-bought Sales Navigator licenses have increased 60% year over year, a surge that indicates that sales professionals are investing in their own growth, and a willingness to use sales tech even if not prescribed by their company. Our own LinkedIn data also shows that 59% of the Forbes Global 500 companies, and 64% of the Forbes fastest-growing companies are Sales Navigator users.



Using LinkedIn effectively

Read below for insights on how LinkedIn can work for you.

Trend #7

“Our sales organisation in ANZ has a team that uses Sales Navigator during the RFP process to identify and connect with key influencers and decision makers from the client organisation, and to share TCS’ point of view and relevant content with them. Sales Navigator has enabled the team to tap into the vast networks that our employees have developed. As a result, the team can make connections with prospects and current customers, reducing sales cycles.”

Girish Ramachandran
President, Asia Pacific
Tata Consultancy Services

64%



of the *Forbes* fastest-growing companies are using LinkedIn Sales Navigator.

85%



of buyers are more likely to consider a brand if their salesperson has an informative LinkedIn profile.

In 2020, LinkedIn analysed how salespeople were using the platform to identify the most effective behaviours. Of all the actions we analysed, we found that profile completeness is a primary determinant to salesperson success. **Our data indicates that having a complete LinkedIn profile could increase your chances of meeting or exceeding your sales targets by more than 2X, and it can increase InMail acceptance rates by as much as 87%.**

Another action that we found relevant was the number of account and lead searches. Spending a few hours online to learn about and define your target buyers and determine their needs, and executing at least 15 account and/or lead searches per day, could improve your chances of meeting sales targets by 2X.

Our results also show that mass outreach — shown by the number of InMails sent and the number of content pieces shared on LinkedIn — does not necessarily contribute to favourable outcomes for the sales professional.

However, quality outreach — InMails that are sent and accepted (or pending acceptance), or shared content that generated high engagement — was found to be impactful to sales targets being met or exceeded. This is a strong indication that salespersons ought to be mindful of the value to the customer before sharing content or sending an InMail.

Trend #7

Top-performing salespeople (defined as meeting 125% or more of quota) were more likely to find that LinkedIn yielded high conversion to opportunity rates than average performers. More than one-third (36%) of top performers say that LinkedIn yielded a high conversion to opportunity rate, while just 33% of average performers agreed.

Sellers are on LinkedIn, in part, because buyers are also boosting their reliance on the platform. More than four in five (85%) buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson they're working with has an informative LinkedIn profile. Similarly, 81% of buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson reaches out via LinkedIn.

“We can project our credibility effectively on LinkedIn by sharing information about our professional history, capabilities, as well as projects we've worked on. Building our LinkedIn profile and showing a professional photo speaks volumes. That's the starting point in terms of building trust.”

Polly C Heiss

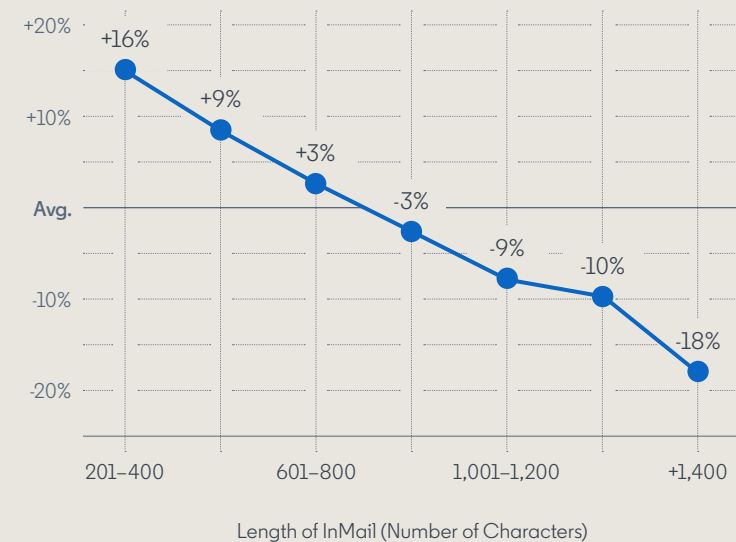
Executive Director - Integrated Logistics

Kerry Logistics

When sending InMails, always choose quality over quantity: keep it short, personalised, and conversational.

Shorter InMails get above-average response rates

Response rates for different lengths of InMail vs. overall average.



Looking to the future

For sales organisations, change is coming fast. COVID-19 has only accelerated the pace of change, making it increasingly important that sales professionals are able to thrive in a world that is in flux.

The seven main trends identified in our State of Sales offer a map to help sales organisations move forward. To stay a step ahead of change, remember these seven trends. Embrace them. And act on plans to leverage them.

Organising your sales organisation to take full advantage of these trends will prepare you for a future that is approaching faster every day.

- #1 Virtual selling is good for sellers; it's even better for buyers.
- #2 Sales organisations are preventing sellers from putting buyers first.
- #3 Sales organisations and sales managers must prepare for an ongoing hybrid working world.
- #4 These are the sales behaviours blocking deals.
- #5 Sales technology provides the key pathway to building trust.
- #6 Evolving Sales Operations roles are reinforcing data-driven strategies in sales organisations.
- #7 Buyers and sellers are finding greater connection on LinkedIn.

Thank you to our contributors

We interviewed dozens of sales professionals and influencers who helped shape this State of Sales report. We'd like to thank them for their time and insight.

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A note on methodology

This Asia Pacific edition of the State of Sales 2021 report is the latest installment of LinkedIn's global State of Sales project, which includes eight other reports: Brazil; France; Germany; Mexico; the Netherlands; the United Kingdom; United States/Canada; and a global report.

For this APAC edition, we surveyed 400 buyers and 400 salespeople and sales managers in each of three countries: Australia, India, and Singapore. For these countries, Schlesinger Group, a research panel company, conducted two online surveys in January 2021, one of sales professionals, the other of decision makers.

Both samples include respondents over 21 years old who are employed at companies of different sizes and industries. The report also references a group of "top sales professionals" who are defined as sales professionals who report that they exceeded their sales target by at least 25%.

In addition to the survey, we drew on relevant data for the report from the LinkedIn platform relating to the sales profession. We also conducted dozens of interviews with sales professionals and influencers.

LinkedIn Sales Solutions makes it simple to tap into the power of LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network of nearly 756 million members, empowering every salesperson to put buyers first. Our portfolio of Sales Solutions, including [LinkedIn Sales Navigator](#) and now, [LinkedIn Sales Insights](#), leverages this people-powered data and insights to allow your sales organisation to focus on the accounts with the most opportunity and your sellers to develop and grow relationships with buyers at scale. LinkedIn Sales Insights helps sales operations plan smarter while Sales Navigator allows your sales teams to target, understand, and engage the people and accounts they need to bring those plans to life seamlessly. With LinkedIn Sales Solutions you can create deep and trusted relationships with buyers to fuel growth for your organisation.

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