

State of sales

2021 Global Report



Virtual selling is **here to stay**.

COVID-19. Virtual selling. Remote work. Zoom calls. No frequent flyer miles. There's no argument that the world of sales has changed in the past year. The key question: 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 can we normalize," says Polly C. Heiss, Executive Director, Kerry Logistics.

Welcome to LinkedIn's fifth annual State of Sales report, global edition.

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

Through our survey of more than 3,800 buyers and 3,800 sellers in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States, 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 organization prepare for the future, which is coming at us faster every day.

#1

#2

#3

#4

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Trend #1

Virtual selling is good for sellers
and even better for buyers.



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

“The world is changing. It’s never going back to the way that it was. We will sell in a virtual world much more often. We’ll communicate in a digital world with our customers. For the sales profession, it’s time to evolve.”

Anne Sheehan

Director, Vodafone Business UK

Virtual selling is increasingly important

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 around the world 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.

As the pandemic begins to recede in parts of the world, virtual selling will remain a crucial skill, but the consensus is that hybrid selling, which combines virtual selling with traditional in-person techniques, will become prominent.

“What COVID has done is really exposed companies to the fact that digital selling is such a critical part of their business and has made them think about starting to invest in it. It's been good to see the now necessary adoption of a practice that should have been standard all along.”

Samantha McKenna, Founder, #samsales



Buyers have gone **remote**

Remote job postings on LinkedIn have increased by more than 5X globally since the start of the pandemic. As a result, buyers have been difficult to reach any way but virtually. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of buyers in the countries surveyed were working remotely more than half of the time, according to LinkedIn's survey data.

Buyers appear to like the arrangement: 71% say they would like to work remotely half or more of the time in the future. Perhaps most significantly, 55% 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. Almost half of buyers (43%) 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

71%



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

43%



of buyers say they won't be meeting sellers in person until at least the second half of 2021.

Will in-person events stage a comeback?

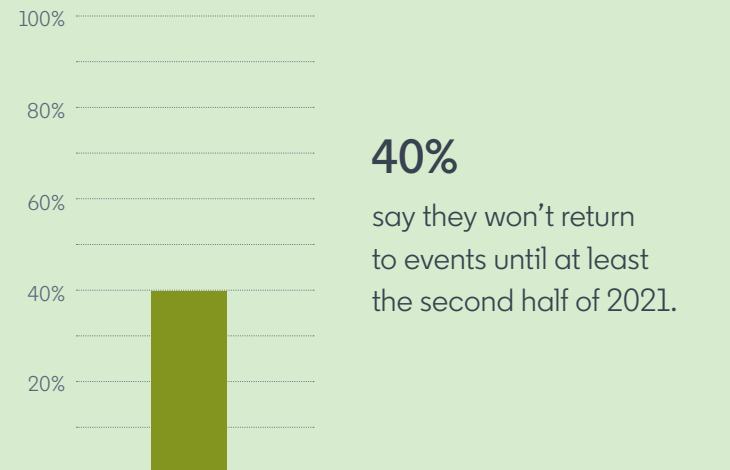
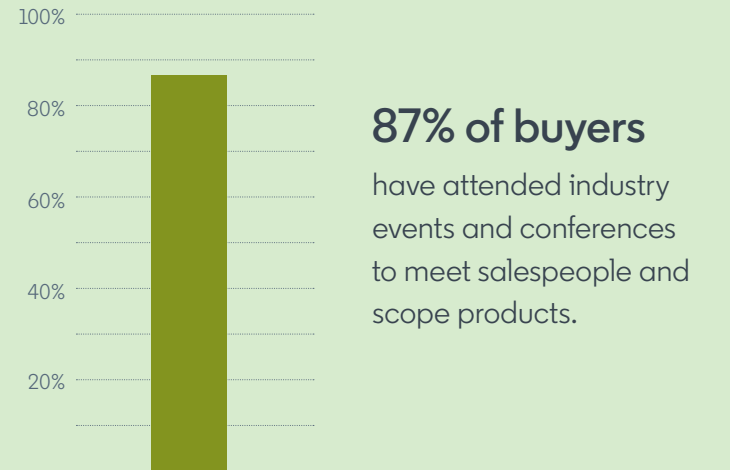
Industry events will also find it hard to draw crowds of buyers. A majority (87%) of buyers responding to our survey have used industry events and conferences to meet salespeople and scope products, but two-fifths (40%) say they won't return to events until at least the second half of 2021.

Even with the difficulty of meeting buyers face-to-face, the sales sector learned that big deals can close without a handshake. Over one-third (36%) 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."

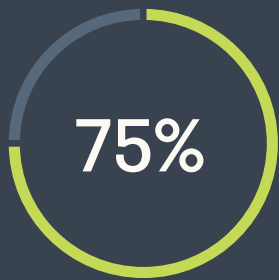
Craig Rosenberg

Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner



Trend #2

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



of sales managers say **the ability to cope with change** is more important than it was five years ago.

This number varies widely across the globe. For instance, in India, the percentage is 90% while in the Netherlands, it's just 57%. But in all countries surveyed, there's an acknowledgement that managing change is unavoidable.

“Generally speaking, sales is 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 is 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

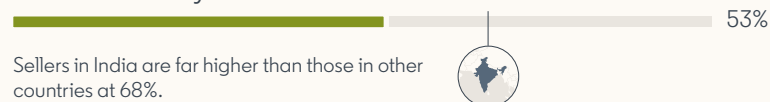
Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

The world of work is changing

COVID's appearance has helped ensure that the capability to handle change is front and center for sales managers. Sales organizations are adapting in a variety of ways. Our survey data showed that these changes are the most common cited by the sales professionals:

■ Global average percentages

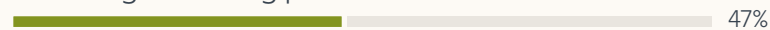
Measuring sales process and outcomes in different ways



Adding new technologies



Instituting new hiring practices



Implementing new sales technologies



Remote work is on the rise

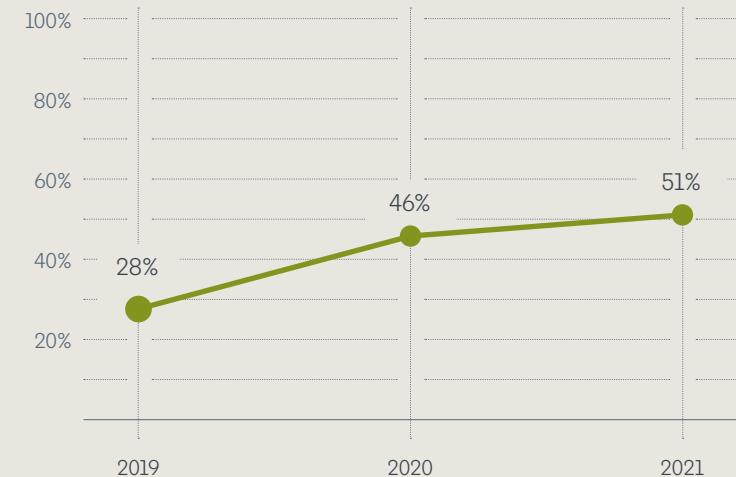
The prevalence of remote work is a key change facing sales organizations. The number of postings of remote sales jobs on LinkedIn skyrocketed in 2020. Globally, the number of remote sales jobs increased by more than 3x since the start of the pandemic.

Globally, the number of sales professionals who reported working remotely 50% of the time has increased significantly since 2019, when 28% 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 46%, and this year it's slightly higher at 51%.

Both sales managers and salespeople agreed that the shift to remote work wasn't always a seamless transition. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of sales managers say that overseeing a remote sales team is more challenging than they anticipated. This number jumps to 87% in India. Similarly, 59% of salespeople say that working remotely is more challenging than they anticipated. Again, this number is far higher in India at 86%.

Remote sales work continues to increase

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



“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 & wellbeing 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

Trend #2

Reagan Barry, Head of Commercial Steering at Telstra, noted that structural changes are needed to support remote working: “COVID-19 has demonstrated that sales organizations 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. LinkedIn data shows that the number of Sales Ops professionals worldwide increased by 38% between 2018 and 2020. In the same timeframe, the number of Sales Ops professionals grew at a rate 4.8x faster than the sales organization as whole.

Meanwhile, customer success roles have grown more than 200% in the last two years, at a rate that is 21x faster than the sales org as a role. Sales enablement roles have grown at a similar pace (200% growth in the last two years, 18x faster than sales org growth).

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

■ Global average percentage of survey respondents who say they will be hiring “significantly more” in these specific roles.



Sales organizations need to diversify

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 organizations 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 organizations believe they have built diverse sales organizations or at least on the road to equity. Over one quarter (27%) of sales professionals in our survey say their sales organization has “exceeded goals around diversity hiring initiatives.” Note this number rises to 54% in India. Another 50% say their sales organization has “met” their diversity hiring goals. Only 34% have met their goals in the Netherlands.

In addition to sales organizations making a commitment to diversity, the majority of buyers, too, say they are supportive of diverse sales organizations.



of buyers say they would buy from a more diverse sales organization provided everything else were equal.

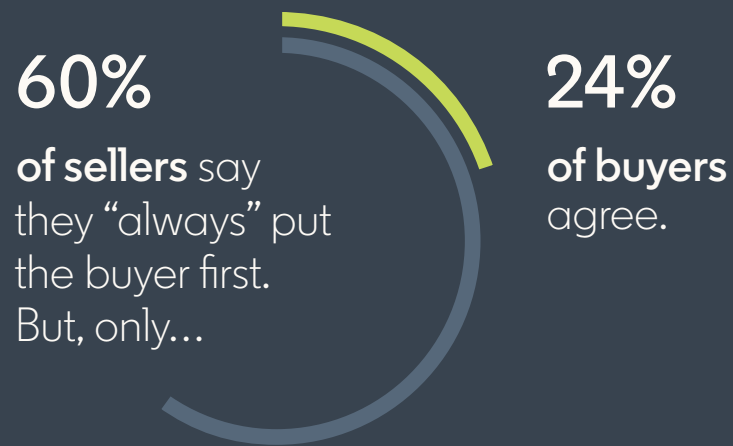
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“Clients are diverse, so prioritizing diversity in the workplace gives you access to a greater range of talent, ideas and opinions. It helps provide insights into the needs and motivations of your client base. A culture of diversity starts with the 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

Trend #3

Sales organizations 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, 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 Australia and New Zealand that not only helps us connect with existing customers, but also collect their perspectives and insights.”

Girish Ramachandran

President, Asia Pacific, Tata Consulting 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 #3

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.

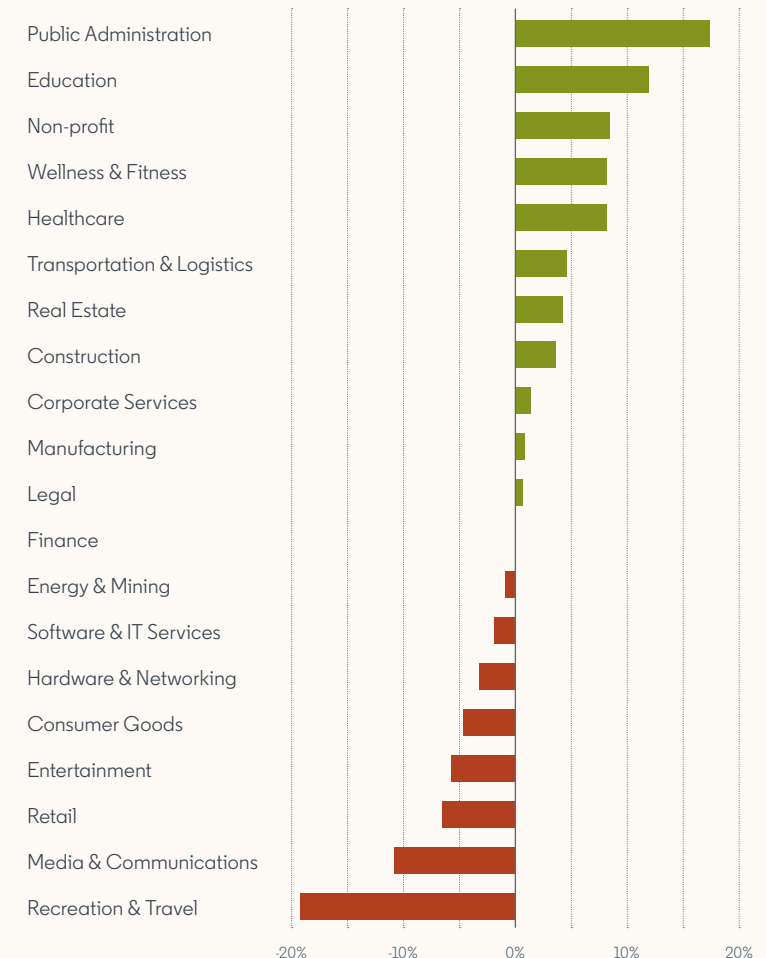
“[Customers say], ‘I don’t want to talk to anyone, I just want to click once and buy it.’ Customers have changed way faster than salespeople, especially in the B2B space. That’s a powerful acknowledgment. It means that we need to run faster, because customers are needing us less and less every single day.”

Alejandro Cabral

Global Digital Sales Transformation Leader,
Kimberly Clark Professional

From 2019 to 2020, sales growth shifted across industries

Growth rate of prospecting activity*, 2020 vs. 2019 according to LinkedIn Sales Navigator data.



*Prospecting activity includes profile views, connections made, and content interacted with.

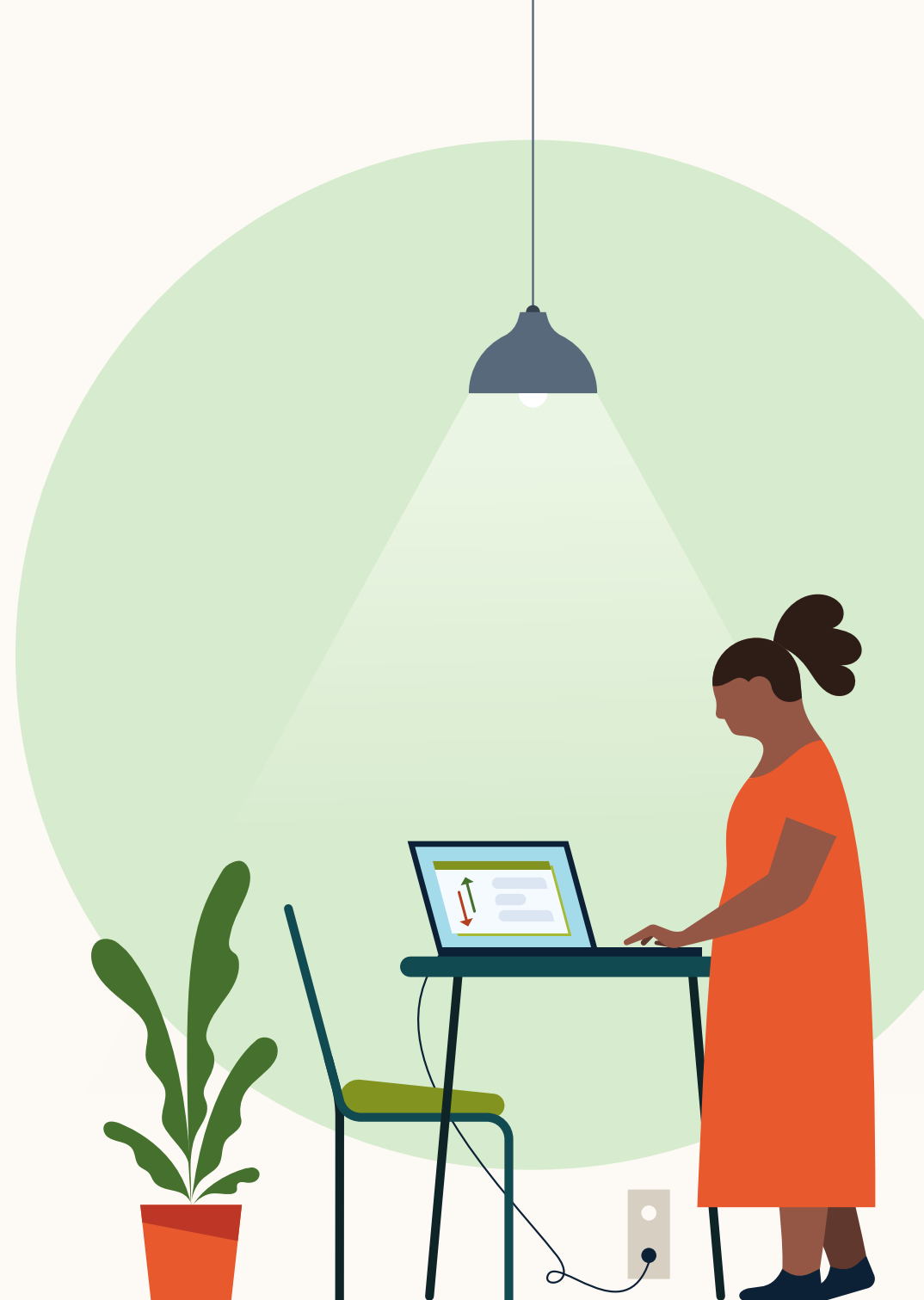
The disconnect over Buyer First

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

Three-fifths (60%) 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 67% saying “always.” Meanwhile, 77% of all sellers in India and 80% of all sellers in Brazil say they always put the buyer first.

When we asked buyers how often they think sellers place buyer first. Less than a quarter (24%) of buyers said that sellers “always” put the buyer first.

That’s quite a differential — with **60% of salespeople saying they put the buyer first, but only 24% of buyers agreeing with that assessment.**



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 organizations 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 behaviors that we at LinkedIn believe place the Buyer First. Our survey showed that buyers and sellers definitely say these kinds of selling behaviors are important to them.

Both buyers and sellers see these behaviors as Buyer First

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

■ Buyers ■ Sellers



Trend #3

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

Buyer First behaviors in practice

■ Buyers who say sellers practice these behaviors "all the time."



Why does this disconnect exist between sellers seeing the value of Buyer First behavior but not delivering on it to the same degree? The reason may lie in the sales organization's commitment to support Buyer First activities. A large majority of sales professionals responding to our survey say their organizations do not always practice Buyer First behaviors.

■ Sellers who say their organizations practice these behaviors "all the time."



The barriers to Buyer First

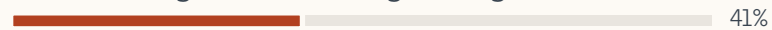
Our survey data indicates that barriers exist to building a Buyer First sales organization. Survey respondents identified their top six roadblocks:

■ Global average percentage of sellers surveyed who identify these organizational barriers to practicing buyer-first behaviors.

The emphasis on meeting short-term sales/revenue goals



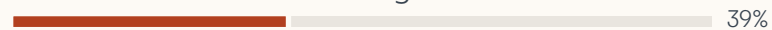
Lack of the right skillset among existing sales talent



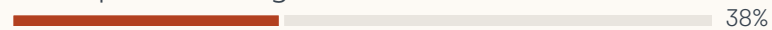
Limited budgets



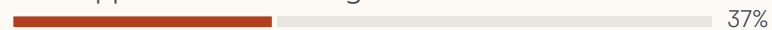
Limited commitment to training



Inadequate coaching



Poor approach to recruiting talent



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

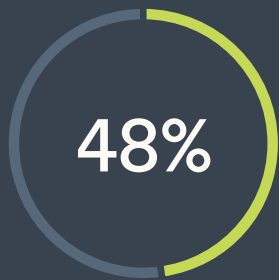
"In a post-COVID world, most customers are asking: 'Is your sales team here to help me, or simply here to sell to me?' This requires moving away from the traditional sales mindset of 'how can I close the deal?' to 'how can I deliver value for the customer?'. And it is a key mindset shift we must make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

Girish Ramachandran

President, Asia Pacific, Tata Consulting Services

Trend #4

These 6 sales behaviors are **blocking deals**.



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

In Brazil, the number is even larger: 68% of
buyers in Brazil won't purchase in this situation.



*"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 behavior makes a difference

When it comes down to individual cases, it 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 behaviors 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, Kerry Logistics

Buyers ranked these 6 behaviors as immediate deal killers

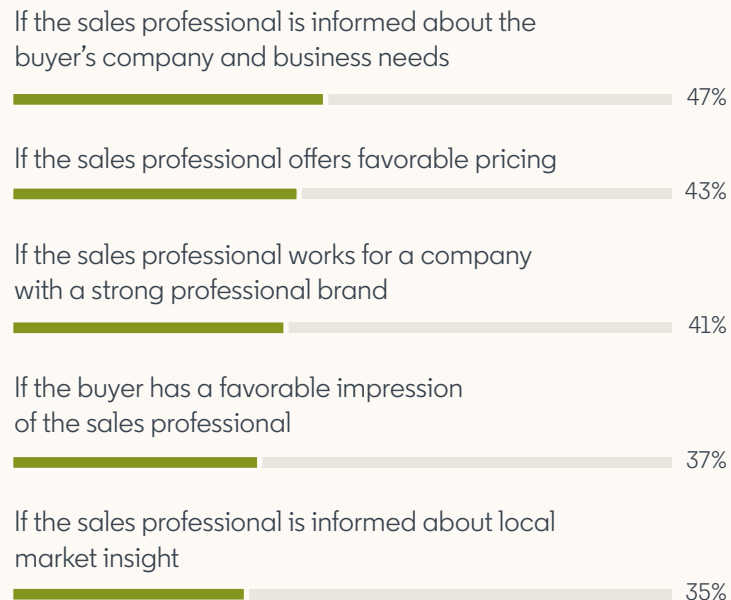
■ Global average percentage of survey respondents who say these seller behaviors are immediate deal killers.



Trend #4

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:



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

- ✓ Trust in the brand of product/service
- ✓ Price
- ✓ Return on investment
- ✓ Trust in relationship with salesperson
- ✓ Salesperson's industry knowledge

"The biggest complaint from buyers is that sales professionals don't take the time to learn about the prospect's business and therefore are pushing a product rather than addressing a recognized need."

Julie Thomas

Owner, President and CEO, ValueSelling Associates

Sales professionals are **taking note**

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



The first two behaviors, sellers can easily address: Tell the truth and strive to deliver personalized, relevant messaging. The other four on the list, reveal an often ignored reality of selling: Buyers look to sellers as the experts—ones who respect their time.

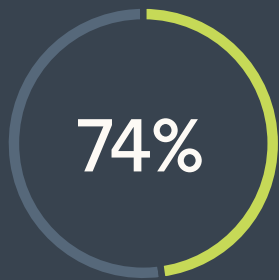
Additionally, data indicates that active listening is a sales superpower. Our LinkedIn data shows that salespeople have turned to learning courses as a response to the pandemic, and among the topics they learn more of are those on “active listening”, where minutes spent learning increased 4x in the last 12 months, 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.**



of sales professionals say their org plans to **invest more in sales intelligence tools.**

Those in France and the Netherlands are outliers and say their sales organizations plan to invest far less: 55% and 53% respectively.



“CRM is no longer just a repository of data. You really have to leverage it as a hub of insights that you can tap into to understand how buyers are interacting with you.”

Jeff Davis

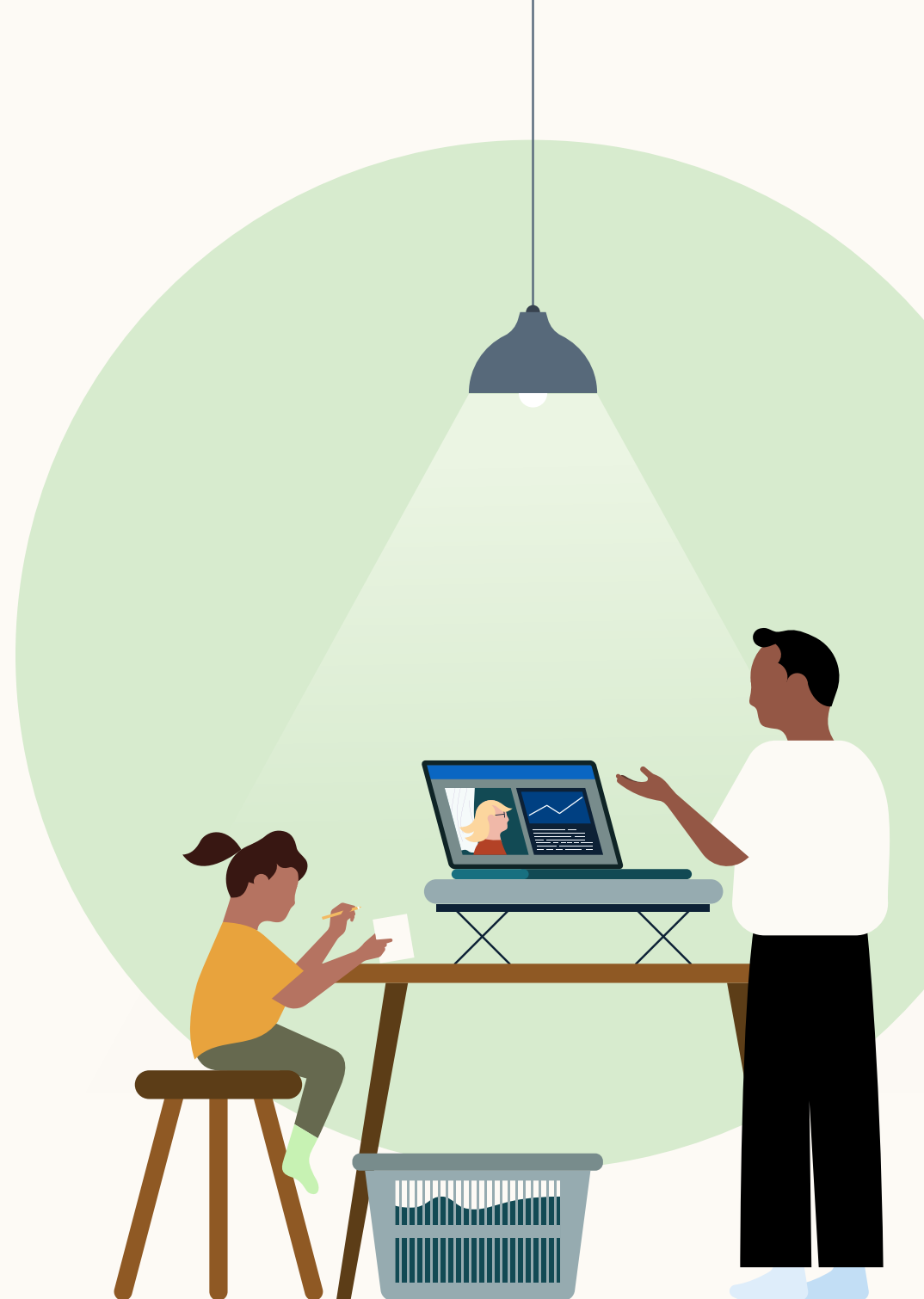
B2B Growth Strategist, Author of Create Togetherness

The importance of **trust**

At first glance, it appears that buyers harbor a distrust for the sales sector. Only 37% of buyers say that salespeople are trustworthy. Note the percentage is far higher in Brazil: 60%.

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 43%. This trait also ranked No. 1 in North America but at a far higher rate: 58%. Second was “transparency,” a trait closely related to “trustworthy,” at 36%. Buyers in Brazil ranked “transparency” second at 54%.

In our survey, 89% of buyers describe the salespeople they ultimately do business with as “trusted advisors.” 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 point A (distrust) to point B (trust).



Trend #5

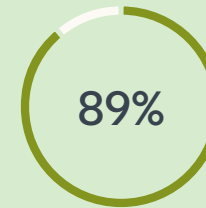
Prior to the pandemic, sellers and buyers typically built this trust in face-to-face meetings, at trade shows, and over dinners. These in-person encounters were opportunities for sellers to gain trust and demonstrate understanding of potential buyers and their needs.

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 analyze 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 provided a key pathway to gaining insight and understanding into potential customers. It's no surprise, then, that our survey indicated that both usage of and investment in sales technology are increasing.

Three-quarters (75%) of our survey respondents say they use sales technology at least once a week; almost one-third (30%) use it every day. Sellers in Brazil, India, and Mexico use at far higher rates every day: 59%, 50%, and 47% respectively.

Buyers are looking for **salespeople they trust**



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

Sales tech helps sellers **build trust**

93%

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

94%

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 7 in 10 (68%) of respondents to our survey said that their CRM system was “very important” to closing deals. That said, only 47% of sellers in the Netherlands feel CRM is “very important” for closing deals.

Sales engagement software (62%), sales intelligence software (62%), virtual collaboration/demo tools (62%), and sales planning (60%) received similarly high marks. Outliers were 77% of sellers in Brazil rating sales intelligence “very important,” and only 31% of those in the Netherlands rating it so.

And sales professionals say they plan to use these technologies “significantly more” in 2021: CRM (42%), sales intelligence (40%), and sales planning (39%). Sales professionals in India plan to use these technologies at far higher rates: 57% for CRM, 62% for sales intelligence, and 59% for sales planning. Sellers in France only plan to use them “significantly more” at these rates: 27% for CRM, 22% for sales intelligence, and 22% for sales planning. Those in the Netherlands are planning similarly low rates: 25% for CRM and 18% for sales intelligence.

The tools helping sales professionals **close deals**

■ Global average percentage of survey respondents who say these technologies are “very important.”



Trend #5

While the percentages vary by country, the overall increased usage is also translating into additional investment. Nearly two in five sales professionals (38%) say they anticipate investing “significantly more” in a CRM system. Sales professionals also say they are investing “significantly more” in sales intelligence (35%) and sales engagement (35%) tools.

Perhaps no surprise that sales professionals in France plan to invest less in this regard: Just 22% plan to invest “significantly more” in CRM, 18% for sales intelligence, and 19% for sales planning. Sellers in the Netherlands similarly plan lower rates of investment when it comes to plans for “significantly more:” just 20% for CRM and 20% for sales planning.

Almost six in 10 sales professionals (58%) expect to invest more in sales technology in the next 12 months compared with the previous year. Of that 58% who expect to invest more, almost four in 10 (36%) say they will invest 50% or more in sales technology in the same timeframe.

The plans are much higher in India, where 76% plan to invest more in the coming 12 months. Of those 76%, nearly six in 10 (56%) will invest 50% or more. At the same time, only 37% of sellers in the Netherlands plan to invest more, and of those, just 20% will invest 50% or more.



of sales pros globally expect to invest more in sales technology in the next 12 months.

“Top-performing salespeople are willing to take the leap of faith and embrace new technologies in order to educate and engage with prospects and customers. This is key as more millennials now begin to enter the job market; these individuals have a new way of communicating. Salespeople need to change their ways and embrace new technologies or face being left behind.”

Paul Lewis

Global Social, Digital Marketing, and Sales Enablement Lead,
Pitney Bowes

Trend #6

For sales organizations,
data is more crucial than ever.

80%



of sellers say they **lost or delayed a deal** in the last year because a key client stakeholder had changed jobs.

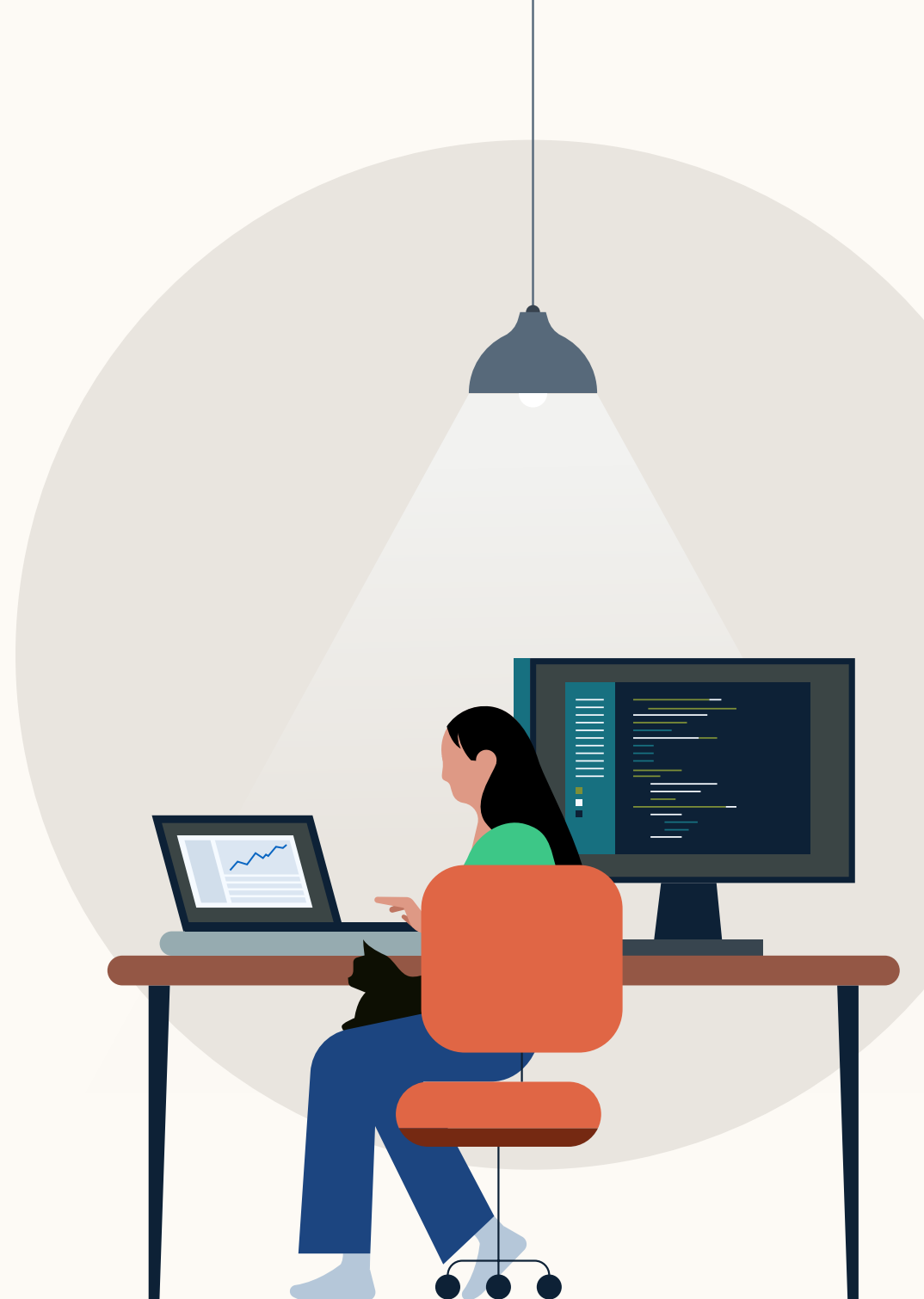
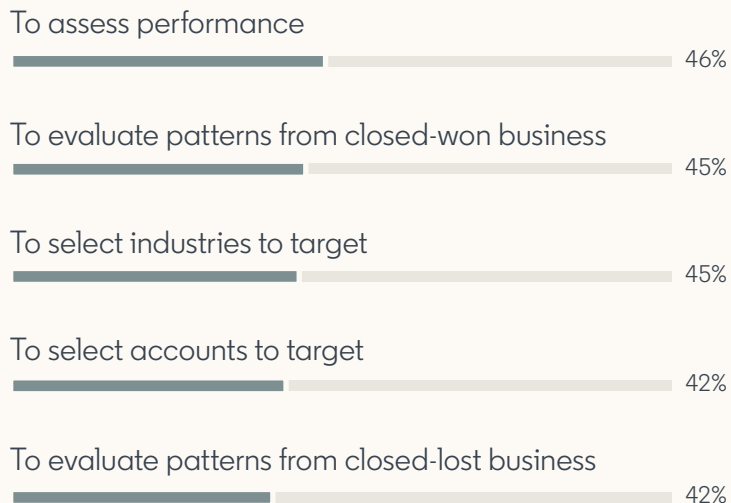
“We use data as a tool to inform our ability to foresee or influence customer behaviour and buying patterns of existing and potential customers. For existing customers, a data-driven approach enhances the customer experience because it allows us to focus on the end-to-end customer journey and not just 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 Consulting Services

For sales orgs, data has become table stakes

For the sales organization, data is more crucial than ever — especially with the rise of the Sales Operations function. Led by Sales Ops, sales organizations 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:



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

For sales organizations, the CRM is a key source of data. Overall, sellers are confident in the efficacy of this data. Almost half (45%) of sellers in our survey say they are “very confident” in their CRM data. The percentage of sellers in Brazil and India who are “very confident” is far higher: 61% and 65% respectively. Only 20% of sales professionals in the Netherlands are “very confident” in their CRM data.

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 mentioned before, 80% of sellers say they lost or delayed at least one deal in the past year because a stakeholder had changed jobs. Over one-third (36%) of sellers say they had lost or delayed at least three deals due to a stakeholder leaving.

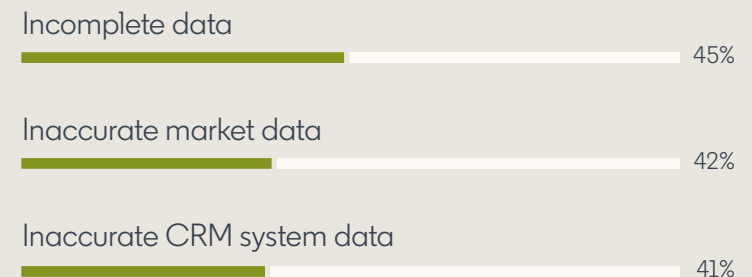
“Data informs every step we take. Predictive analytics are helping us to identify potential sales leads. Intent data and social listening are helping us to identify new opportunities. We are also using data for propensity scoring and lead scoring.”

Paul Lewis

Global Social, Digital Marketing, and Sales Enablement Lead,
Pitney Bowes

Sales pros rank their top three challenges with data

Percentage of survey respondents who identified these challenges.



Sales performance metrics are **shifting**

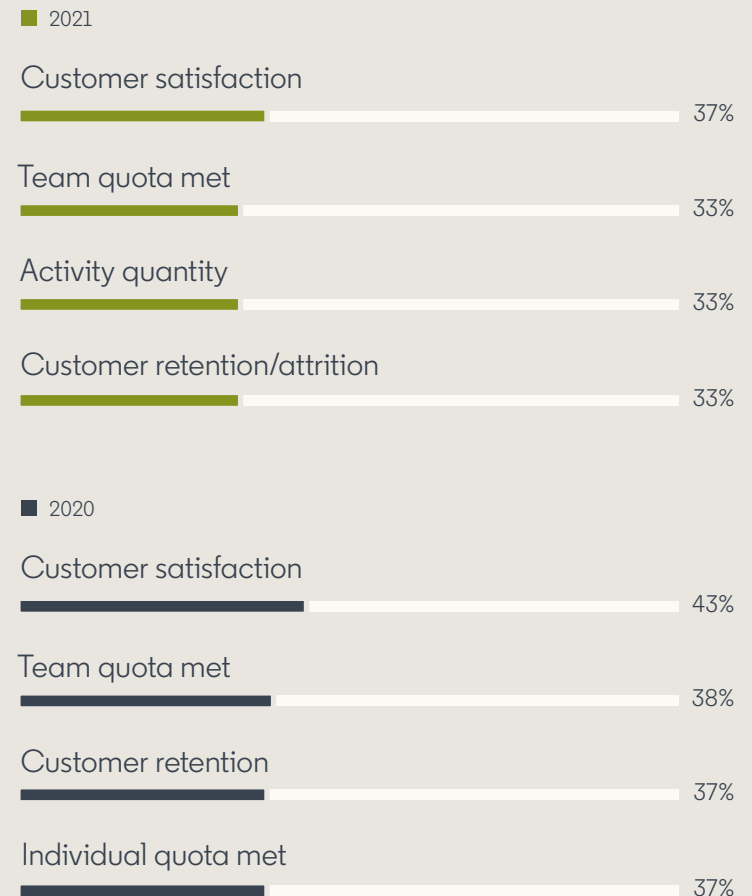
In using data to measure performance, there is a general shift in what data and metrics sales organizations are using to gauge their sales professionals. Last year, our survey of sales professionals in the United States showed a trend toward using metrics focused on the customer rather than traditional sales metrics, such as individual quota or team quota. In the 2020 global edition of State of Sales, two of the top three metrics that sales organizations relied on were customer satisfaction (43%) and customer retention (37%).

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.

In this year's State of Sales survey, the metrics shifted considerably, apparently driven by the realities of the pandemic.

The top metrics used to measure salesperson performance

Comparing global top sales org metrics in 2020 vs. the top sales org metrics in 2021.



Trend #6

In a year upended by COVID-19, sales organizations adopted different metrics to measure the performance of their sales teams when many industries were brought to temporary standstills. Rather than quota, which was often impossible to reach during the pandemic, being the top priority, sales organizations wisely looked to metrics such as activity and customer satisfaction to gauge the performance of their teams. Even in midst of COVID, their focus is on more mature, longer-term priorities that align better with strategic company goals and sustainable business.

Chris Kaufield, Chief Revenue Officer at Alitheon, says that the most useful sales data should aspire to view the world through the customer's eyes — not the sales org's. "Some data just tells me where my sales teams are busy. It's not anywhere near as useful as when I see performance in the field of our products, showing that a customer is likely to be receiving value at any given moment — but that varies based on maturity of the product. These days even companies that make wheel bearings for cars are digitizing everything they're doing. I think this is a universal point: Everybody wants to know data, not about how a salesperson perceives the world, but how are customers responding to what a salesperson did," Kaufield says.



Brazil outranks all other countries for focus on meeting quota.

Team quota met



Individual quota met



*"I think this is a universal point: Everybody wants to know data, not about how a salesperson perceives the world, but **how are customers responding** to what a salesperson did."*

Chris Kaufield,
Chief Revenue Officer, Alitheon

Trend #7

Buyers and sellers are **ramping up** their use of LinkedIn.



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

“Once you show someone how their LinkedIn profile can become a sales tool that’s working seven days a week, 24 hours a day attracting customers, you just need to get them started.”

Alejandro Cabral

Global Digital Sales Transformation Leader,
Kimberly Clark Professional

Trend #7

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

On the sales side, nearly seven in 10 (69%) of sellers say they are committed to expanding their LinkedIn network in 2021. Two-fifths (40%) of sellers plan to write many more articles for LinkedIn this year. Additionally, 37% say they are sharing “much more” third-party content, 38% say they are sharing “much more” of their own company’s content, and 34% 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% over the past year — a surge that indicates sales professionals are investing in their own growth and have 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 Australia and New Zealand 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 Tata Consulting Services’ 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 Consulting Services

64%

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

79%

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

In 2020, LinkedIn analyzed how salespeople were using the platform to identify the most effective behaviors. Of all the actions we analyzed, 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 favorable 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

Sellers are on LinkedIn, in part, because buyers are also boosting their reliance on the platform. Nearly four in five (79%) buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson they're working with has an informative LinkedIn profile. Similarly, 73% of buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson reaches out via LinkedIn.

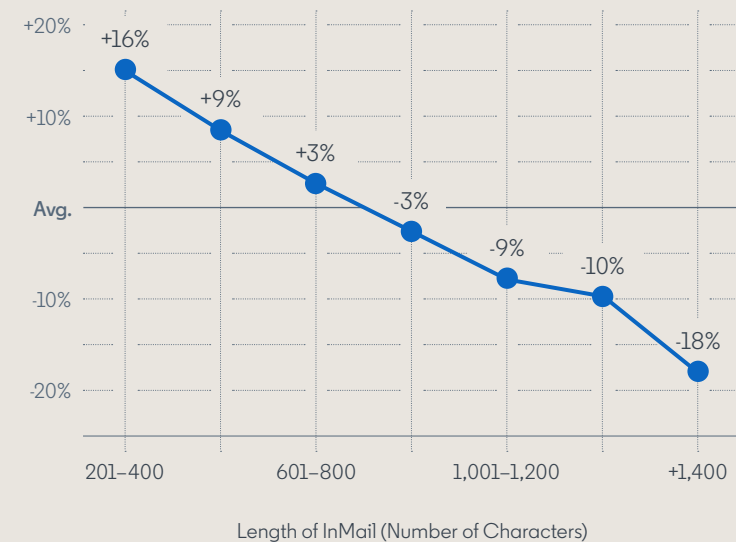
"You can't look at a platform with over 700 million members and go there's one way to use it...As we've gone through 2020, there are not a lot of other opportunities to network and connect in real life, and, used correctly, LinkedIn does become a place that we can have the conversations that we might have had at the conference, cocktail hour, or the Chamber of Commerce networking event."

David J.P. Fisher
President, Rockstar Consulting

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

Shorter InMails get **above-average** response rates

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

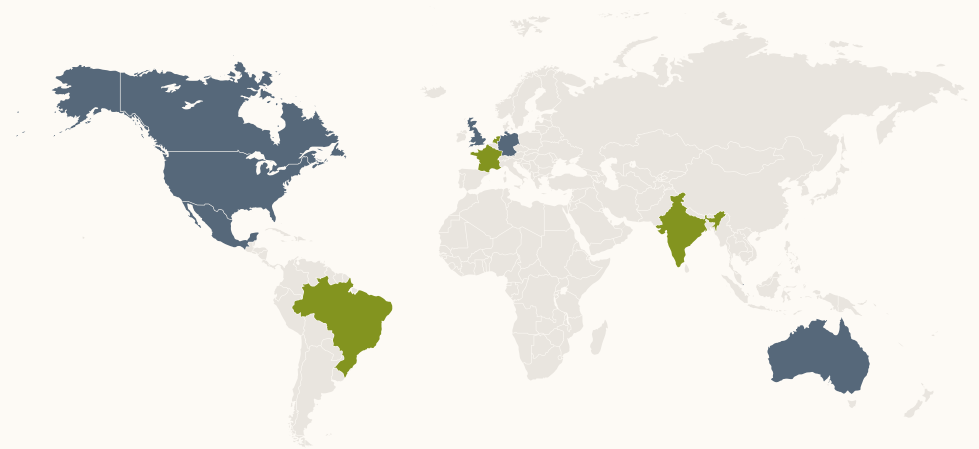


Outliers

How selling in India, Brazil, France, and the Netherlands differs from the rest of the world

Our survey results show, in general, that there is widespread agreement across the globe about the future of sales. Sales professionals agree that virtual selling is a necessity, sales technology is essential, data is only growing more important, and the buyer-first approach is ascending.

But in some cases, a particular country's responses range outside the typical answers and reveal a different perspective on the buyer-seller relationship. Here is a look at some of the most prominent outliers and thoughts on what these differences might mean in the buying process.





India

India is home to a fast-growing economy and is especially sensitive to change in the business world.

.....

The survey responses by sales professionals in India revealed some key differences between that country and the rest of the world. For one thing, sellers in India say they “always” put the buyer first by a margin of 77% to 60% when compared to the global results. Placing the buyer first is a pathway to outperform in a competitive environment.

India, which is home to a fast-growing economy, also seems more sensitive to change in the business world. Sales managers in India, by a margin of 90% to 75% when compared to the rest of world, say that the capability to cope with change is more important than it was five years ago.

Eighty-seven percent of sales managers in India found overseeing a remote sales team more challenging than they anticipated. Overall, the number was 62% globally. Overseeing a remote sales team may be more challenging in India due to the sheer size of the country.

Sales professionals in India appear to embrace sales technology more than their counterparts around the globe. Almost six in 10 sellers in India (59%) use sales technology at least once a day compared with 30% who do so globally. More than three-quarters (76%) of sellers plan to invest more in sales technology in the coming 12 months compared with just 58% of sellers globally. Additionally, 85% of sellers in India are committed to expanding their LinkedIn network in 2021 compared with just 69% globally. Consumers in India are technologically savvy, and sellers appear to sense a need to keep pace with their customers and prospects.



Brazil

For Brazilian buyers and sellers, trust is crucial to the buying process.

As in India, sellers in Brazil are more likely, by a margin of 80% to 60% over their global counterparts, to say they always place the buyer first. In Brazil buyers have placed their trust in sellers, and trust is crucially important to the buying process. In fact, trust is such a given in the buying process that almost seven in 10 (68%) of buyers say they won't buy from sellers who proffer misleading information. Globally, that number is just 48%. Brazilian buyers also tend to trust salespeople, with 60% of buyers describing salespeople as "trustworthy." Just 37% of buyers globally describe sellers in the same way.

In Brazil, sellers are believers in the power of sales technology. Globally, 30% of sellers says they use sales tech every day. In Brazil, 50% of sellers use sales tech on a daily basis.



France and the Netherlands

Sellers in France and the Netherlands place an emphasis on relationships.

France and the Netherlands are planning to invest more in sales technology, albeit at lower rates than their colleagues in other countries. For example, 74% of sales professionals globally say their sales organization plans to invest "significantly more" or "more" in sales intelligence tools. Those in France and the Netherlands are outliers and say their sales organizations plan to invest less: 55% and 53%, respectively.

While both countries continue to take a more traditional approach to sales and place an emphasis on relationships, they are nonetheless embracing technology. The Netherlands, for instance, was the only European country in our survey to rank "connecting on LinkedIn" as the number one outreach technique in terms of conversion-to-opportunity rate.

Looking to the future

For sales organizations, 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 organizations move forward. To stay a step ahead of change, remember these seven trends. Embrace them. And act on plans to leverage them.

Organizing your sales organization 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 and even better for buyers.
- #2 Sales organizations and sales managers must prepare for an ongoing hybrid working world.
- #3 Sales organizations are preventing sellers from putting buyers first.
- #4 These 6 sales behaviors are blocking deals.
- #5 Sales technology provides the key pathway to building trust.
- #6 For sales organizations, data is more crucial than ever.
- #7 Buyers and sellers are ramping up their use of 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.

Kevin Ackhurst, Head of Sales for APAC, HubSpot

Reagan Barry, Head of Commercial Steering, Telstra

Clay Blanchard, VP-Sales Operations, Collibra

Tamika Brunetti, Digital Experience Evangelist,
Lumen Technologies

Alejandro Cabral, Global Digital Transformation
Leader, Kimberly Clark Professional

Ed Calnan, Chief Revenue Office, Seismic

Cherilynn Castleman, Chief Learning Officer,
Sistas in Sales

Jeff Davis, B2B Growth Strategist, Author of "Create
Togetherness"

Joseph DiMisa, Senior Client Partner, Korn Ferry

Jeremey Donovan, SVP-Sales Strategy, SalesLoft

David J.P. Fisher, President, Rockstar Consulting

Steve Goldhaber, CEO, 26Characters

Lee Hacohen, Senior VP-Growth, Collective[i]

Shaan Hathiramani, CEO, Flockjay

Matt Heinz, CEO, Heinz Marketing

Polly C. Heiss, Executive Director, Kerry Logistics

Morgan J. Ingram, Director of Sales Execution
and Evolution, JB Sales Training

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Tyler Johnson, Director of Revenue Operations, CB Insights

Chris Kaufeld, CEO, Alitheon

Paul Lewis, Global Social, Digital Marketing, and Social Enablement Lead, Pitney Bowes

Sahil Mansuri, CEO, Bravado

Samantha McKenna, Founder, #samsales

Andy Mowat, Advisor, Culture Amp

Neelay Patel, Head of Sales Asia, Aon

Willie Pierson, Senior Director of Sales and Business Development, Gong

Girish Ramachandran, President, Asia Pacific, Tata Consulting Services

Lori Richardson, Founder, Women Sales Pros

Craig Rosenberg, Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

Jason Sacks, EVP-Business Development & Philanthropy, Practice Coaching Alliance

Shirin Sharif, Head of Sales Operations and Strategy, Amazon Web Services

Anne Sheehan, Director, Vodafone Business UK

Julie Thomas, CEO, ValueSelling Associates

Tim Washer, Founder, Ridiculous Media

A note on methodology

This global edition of LinkedIn State of Sales report is based on a survey conducted by Schlesinger Group, a research panel company, of more than 7,500 people in 11 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In January and February 2021, Schlesinger Group surveyed 400 salespeople and 400 decision makers in each country (with the exception of the Netherlands, where 200 salespeople and 200 decision makers were surveyed).

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 from the LinkedIn platform relating to the sales profession. We also conducted dozens of interviews with sales professionals and influencers from around the world.

LinkedIn Sales Solutions makes it simple to tap into the power of LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network of nearly 740 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 organization 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 organization.

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