



# State of sales

2021 United States & Canada Edition



# Virtual selling is **here to stay.**

COVID-19. Virtual selling. Remote work. Zoom calls. Dwindling 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're not going to ever go back to the level of in-person selling that we saw before," says Matt Heinz, President, Heinz Marketing.

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

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

Through our survey of more than 400 buyers and 400 sellers in the United States and Canada, 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

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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 digital world is here to stay. The inefficiency of travel, of in-person business meetings, and of late-night dinner appointments will make face-to-face meetings less common and not necessary in many cases. Organizations will use more data, more video, and more telesales. I do not believe we will go back to the world that was.”*

**Shaan Hathiramani**  
CEO, Flockjay

Trend #1

# Virtual selling is now **the norm**

In North America, you can pinpoint the moment when selling changed forever: March 2020. That month, COVID-19 shut down offices in the U.S. and Canada 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 — the in-person event, the business trip, the face-to-face meeting — were canceled literally overnight. Many sellers fully embraced technology such as sales enablement and sales intelligence tools that they had previously kept at arm's length.

*“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



Trend #1

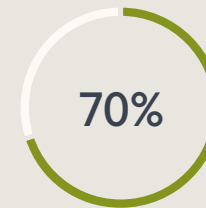
# Buyers have gone remote

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 other way but virtually. Sixty-four percent of buyers in North America were working remotely more than half of the time, according to LinkedIn's survey data.

Buyers appear to like the arrangement: 70% say they would like to work remotely half or more of the time in the future. Perhaps most significantly, 50% 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 anytime soon. Over half of buyers (65%) 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."*

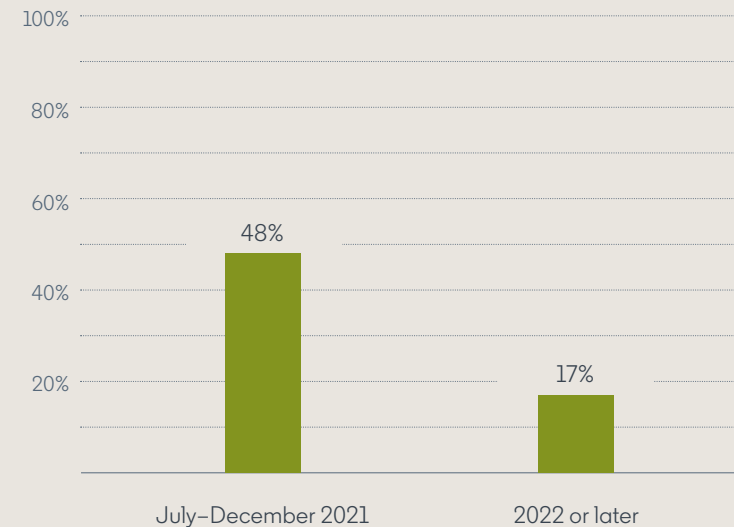
**Matt Heinz**  
President, Heinz Marketing



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. Ninety percent of buyers responding to our survey have used industry events and conferences to meet salespeople and scope products, but almost three in five (59%) 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. Almost half (48%) 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



### Nearly 3 in 5 buyers

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



Trend #2

Sales organizations and managers must  
**adjust to a remote working world** — now.

86%



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

*“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.”*

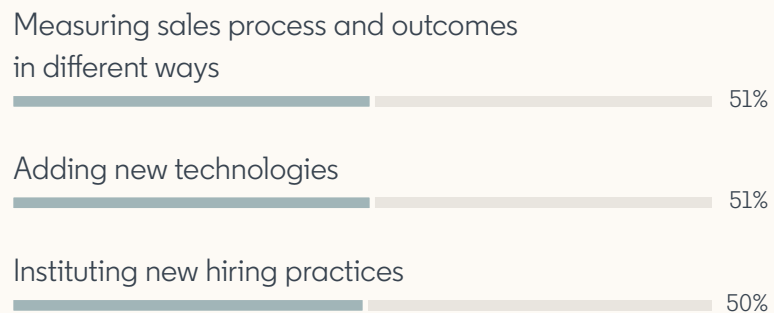
**Craig Rosenberg**

Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

# The world of work is changing

COVID's appearance has only accelerated the pace of change in the world of sales. In the last edition of the U.S. State of Sales report, 70% of sales managers agreed that the capability to handle change was more important in their job than it was five years ago. Now, in the wake of COVID-19, that figure has increased to 86%.

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:



Percentage of sales professionals surveyed who identify these changes in their organizations.



# Remote work is on the rise

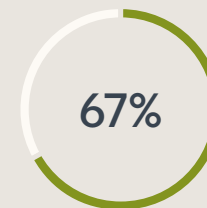
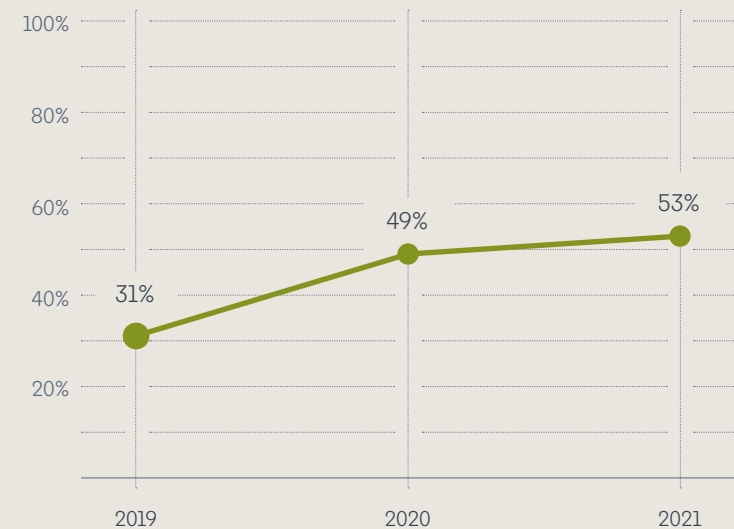
The prevalence of remote work is a transformative change facing sales organizations. The number of postings of remote sales jobs on LinkedIn skyrocketed in 2020. Globally, the number of remote sales jobs increased by 5.1X from July through September 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. The number of remote sales jobs increased markedly in both Canada (8.8X) and the United States (4.5X).

In the United States and Canada, the number of sales professionals who report working remotely 50% of the time has increased significantly since 2019, when about 31% 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 49%, and this year it's slightly higher at 53%.

Both sales managers and salespeople agree that the shift to remote work wasn't always a seamless transition. Two-thirds (67%) of sales managers say that overseeing a remote sales team is more challenging than they anticipated. Similarly, 65% 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 #2

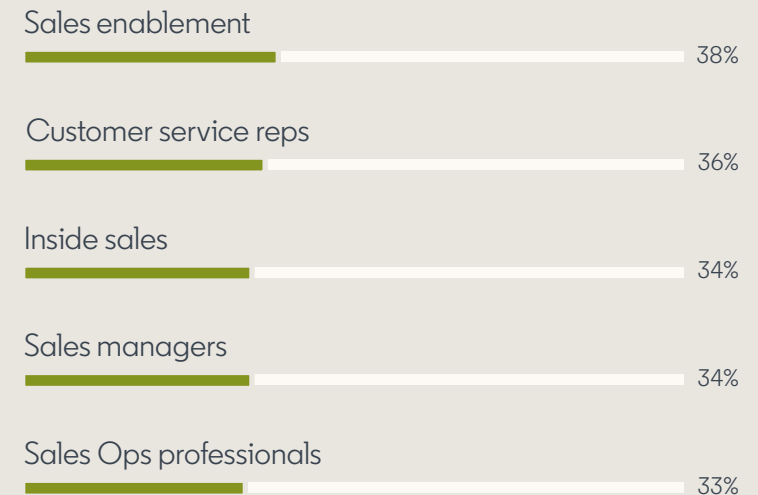
Sahil Mansuri, CEO of Bravado, notes that remote work brought with it challenges that extended beyond simply working in a different place. “Historically,” Mansuri says, “sales has been an in-person culture. You come to the office, you do a morning rally, you hit the gong, you play music, you play Red Bull flip cup, you make some calls, close some deals, and head to happy hour. The in-person culture, customer calls, and customer dinners disappeared overnight, leaving those who required adult supervision in the dust. Alternatively, the sales professionals who are thriving today are independent and self-motivated. Overall, COVID caused sales to mature and increased the expectations placed on a sales team.”

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 a 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**

Percentage of survey respondents who say they will be hiring “significantly more” in these 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, are on the road to equity. About one-third (35%) of sales professionals in our survey say their sales organization has “exceeded goals around diversity hiring initiatives.” Another 45% say their sales organization has “met” their diversity hiring goals.

In addition to sales organizations making a commitment to diversity, the majority of buyers, too, say they are supportive of diverse sales organizations. More than four in five buyers (83%) say they would buy from a more diverse sales organization provided everything else were equal.

*“You can really go where your talent is. Even if you don’t have an office in Louisville or Austin or Sacramento, you can hire people from there and bring incredible talent to your organization.”*

**Samantha McKenna**  
Founder, #samsales

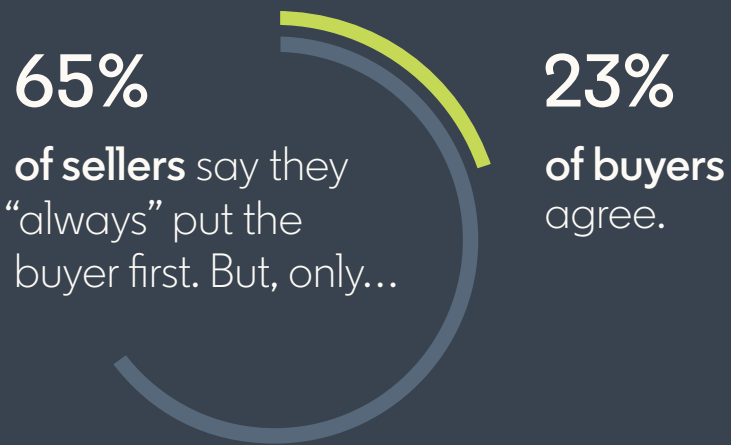
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More than 4 in 5 buyers say **they would rather buy from a more diverse sales organization** than a less diverse org with equal offerings.

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 North America, the situation absolutely forced salespeople, from the very start, to consider the buyer's individual condition — economic, emotional, and otherwise. Some companies, like Peloton, pulled away from the pack and were still in buy mode. Others were in a holding pattern. And some entire industries, such as the travel sector, were grounded and unlikely to buy anything anytime soon.

*“As soon as the pandemic hit, a lot of work went into triaging where various industries and clients were going. A lot of industries cooled down. Some budgets froze entirely. In these situations, we pumped the brakes and found new ways of nurturing those relationships instead of pushing ahead with pre-pandemic vigor.”*

**Steve Goldhaber**  
CEO, 26 Characters

## 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.

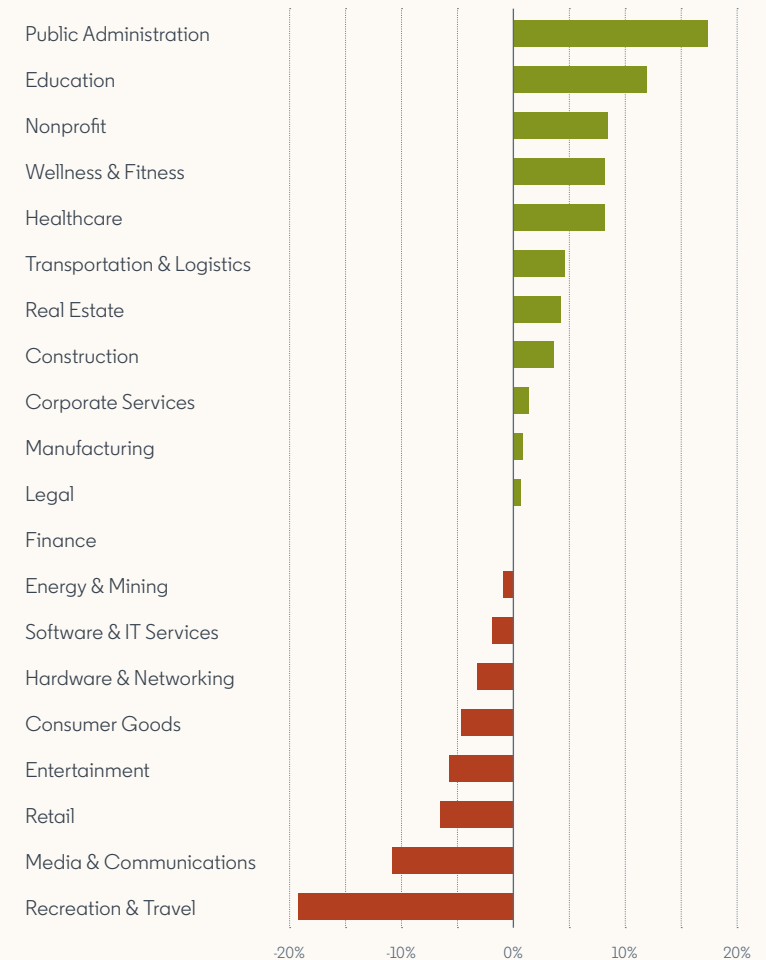
*“[Customers say], ‘I don’t want to talk to anyone, I just want to click once and buy it.’ Customers have changed way faster than salespeople, especially in the B2B space. That’s a powerful acknowledgment. It means that we need to run faster, because customers are needing us less and less every single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



## 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.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of sellers say 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.”

When we asked buyers how often they think sellers place buyers first, less than a quarter (23%) of buyers say that sellers “always” put the buyer first.

That’s quite a differential — with **65% of salespeople saying they put the buyer first, but only 23% 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 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. In our survey, sellers identified their top six roadblocks:



Percentage of sellers surveyed who identify these organizational barriers to practicing buyer-first behaviors.

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 organization level.

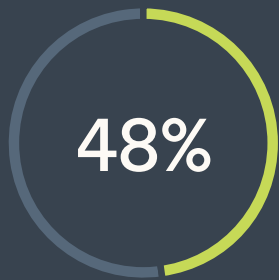
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*“What buyer first means is that the entirety of the sales organization is focused on delivering value to the customer...Everybody thinks sales’ job is to take interest and turn it into revenue. It should not be. Sales’ job is to take interest and turn it into results. That is the job of the sales function. It is to say, ‘Hey, if you have a problem, you know, your shirt is dirty. Give it to me, I’ll wash it for you and return a clean shirt to you.’ That’s the job of sales. It’s a service-based department. We serve our clients. That’s what it means to be buyer first.”*

**Sahil Mansuri**  
CEO, Bravado

Trend #4

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



of buyers won't buy from sellers who **proffer 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 behavior 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 behaviors that they don't want in the sales professionals who call on them.

*“Top-performing salespeople spend far more of their time researching their industry, learning about their competitors, understanding trends, reading about ancillary things that affect their industry, and being thought leaders and consultants in their space than they do pounding phones, sending emails, and prospecting.”*

**Sahil Mansuri**  
CEO, Bravado

## Buyers ranked these 6 behaviors as immediate deal killers

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 the purchase of a product or service. These five factors ranked consistently in the top three selected by buyers:

- ✓ Trust in the brand of product/service
- ✓ Trust in relationship with salesperson
- ✓ Price
- ✓ Return on investment
- ✓ Service after the sale

*“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 in their gut 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 three behaviors, sellers can easily address: Tell the truth, resist overindulging in cold outreach, and strive to deliver personalized, relevant messaging. The last two on the list, which involve brand power, reveal an often ignored reality of selling: Representing a trusted and well-known brand can make outreach much more successful.

Additionally, data indicates that active listening is a sales superpower. Our data shows that salespeople have turned to LinkedIn 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.**

77%



of sales professionals say their org plans to **invest 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**

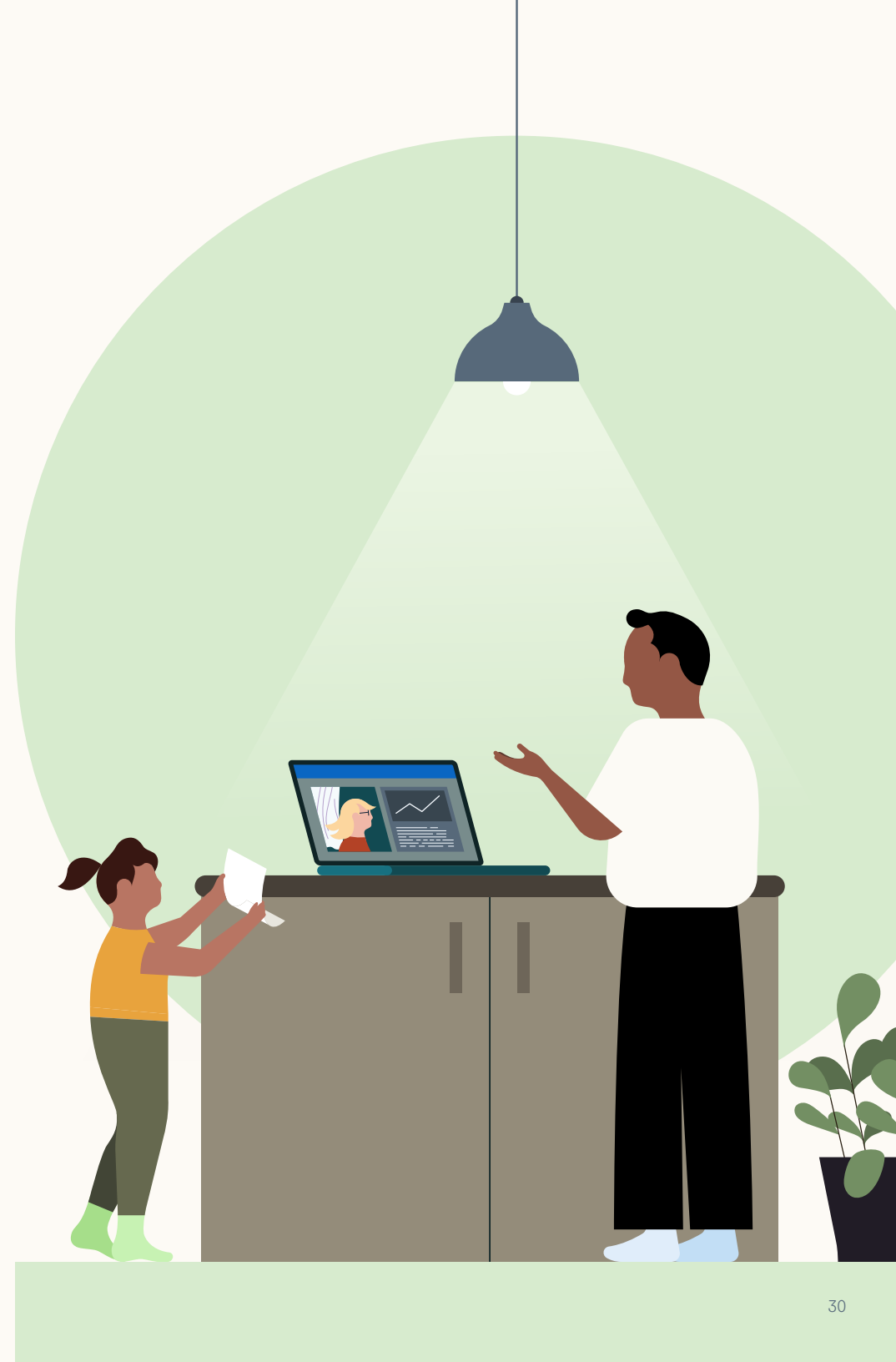
Distinguished VP-Analyst, Gartner

## The importance of **trust**

At first glance, it appears that buyers harbor a distrust for the sales sector. Only 40% of buyers say that salespeople are trustworthy.

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 58%. Second was “transparency,” a trait closely related to “trustworthy,” at 37%.

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

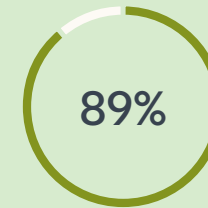
Prior to the pandemic, this trust between buyers and sellers was typically built during face-to-face in meetings, at trade shows, and over dinners. These in-person encounters were opportunities for sellers to gain trust and demonstrate understanding of potential buyers and their needs.

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 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 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.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of our survey respondents say they use sales technology once a week; almost one-quarter (23%) use it every day. Why? More than half (54%) say that sales tools enable them to build stronger relationships. The same amount says that sales tools enable them to close more deals.

## Buyers are looking for salespeople they trust



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

## Sales tech helps sellers build trust

54%

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

54%

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. Seventy percent of respondents to our survey say that their CRM system was “very important” to closing deals. Sales engagement software (69%) and sales intelligence software (69%) received similarly high marks.

And a large portion of sales professionals say they plan to use these technologies “significantly more” in 2021: CRM (49%), sales intelligence (43%), and sales planning (42%).

This increased usage is also translating into additional investment, according to our survey. More than two in five sales professionals (41%) say they anticipate investing “significantly more” in a CRM system. Sales professionals also say they are investing “significantly more” in sales intelligence (40%) and sales engagement (40%) tools.

Almost seven in 10 sales professionals (68%) expect to invest more in sales technology in the next 12 months compared with the previous year. Of that 68% who expect to invest more, almost half (49%) say they will invest 50% or more in sales technology in the same timeframe.

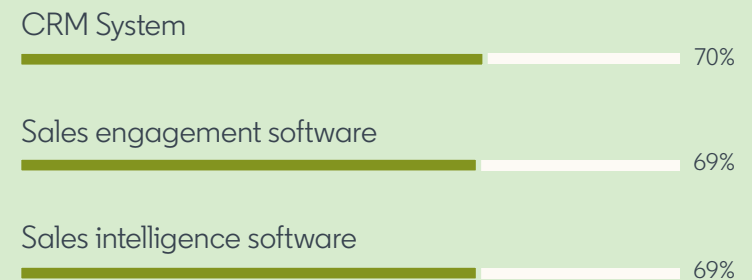
*“Top-performing salespeople are willing to take the leap of faith and embrace new technologies in order to educate and engage with prospects and customers. This is key as more millennials now begin to enter the job market; these individuals have a new way of communicating. Salespeople need to change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

**Paul Lewis**

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

## The tools helping sales professionals **close deals**

Percentage of survey respondents who say these technologies are “very important.”





Trend #6

For sales organizations,  
**data is more crucial than ever.**

85%



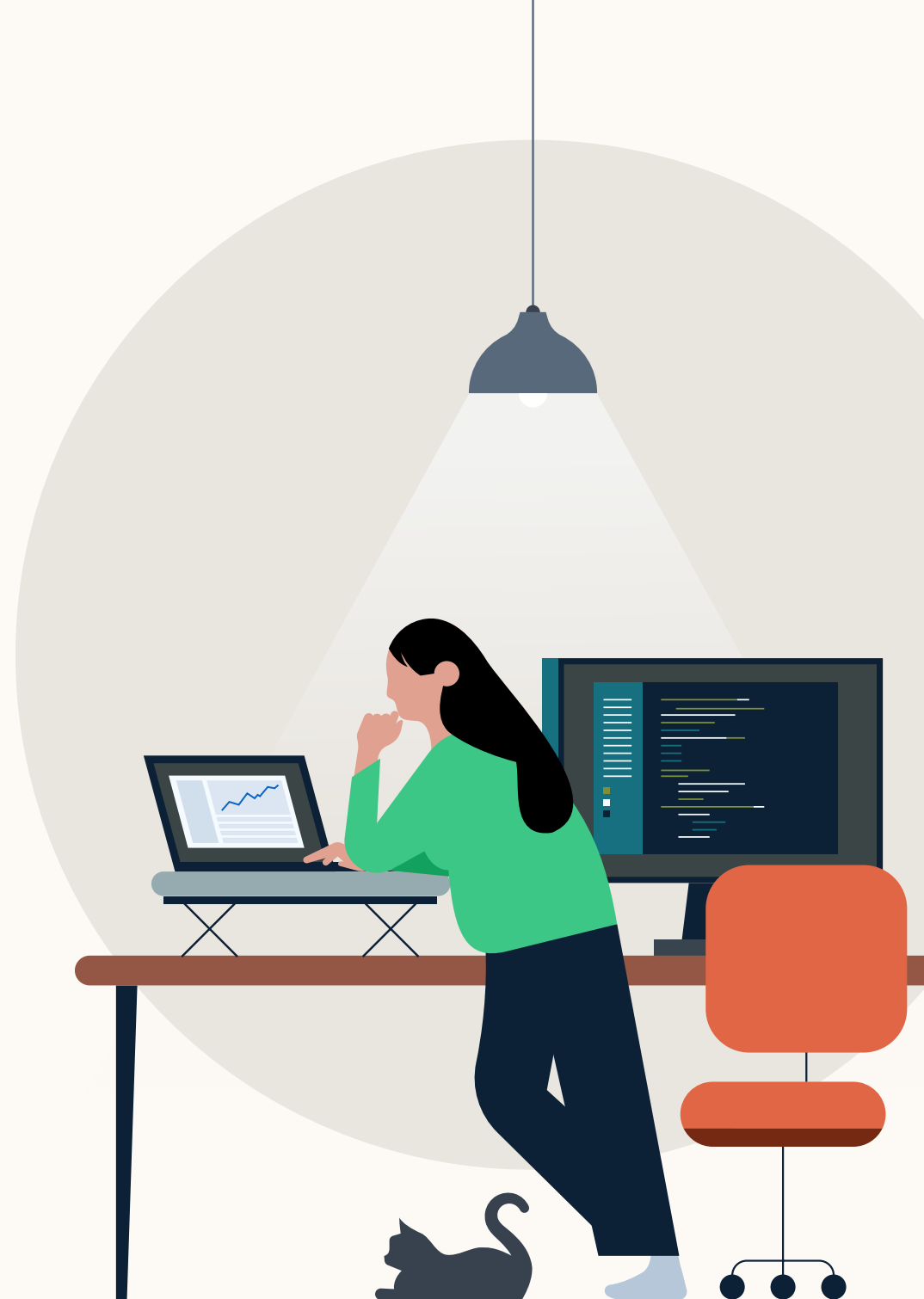
of sellers say they **lost or delayed a deal** in the last year because a key client stakeholder had changed jobs.

*“Data is table stakes now. I mean, you can’t sell without data.”*

**Matt Heinz**  
President, Heinz Marketing

## 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. More than half (53%) of sellers in our survey say they 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. In our survey, 85% 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. One-third of sellers say they had lost or delayed at least three deals due to a stakeholder leaving.

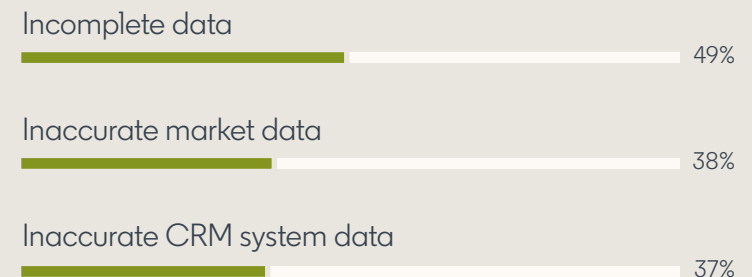
*“Data informs every step we take. Predictive analytics are helping us to identify potential sales leads. Intent data and social listening are helping us to identify new opportunities. We are also using data for propensity scoring and lead scoring.”*

**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**

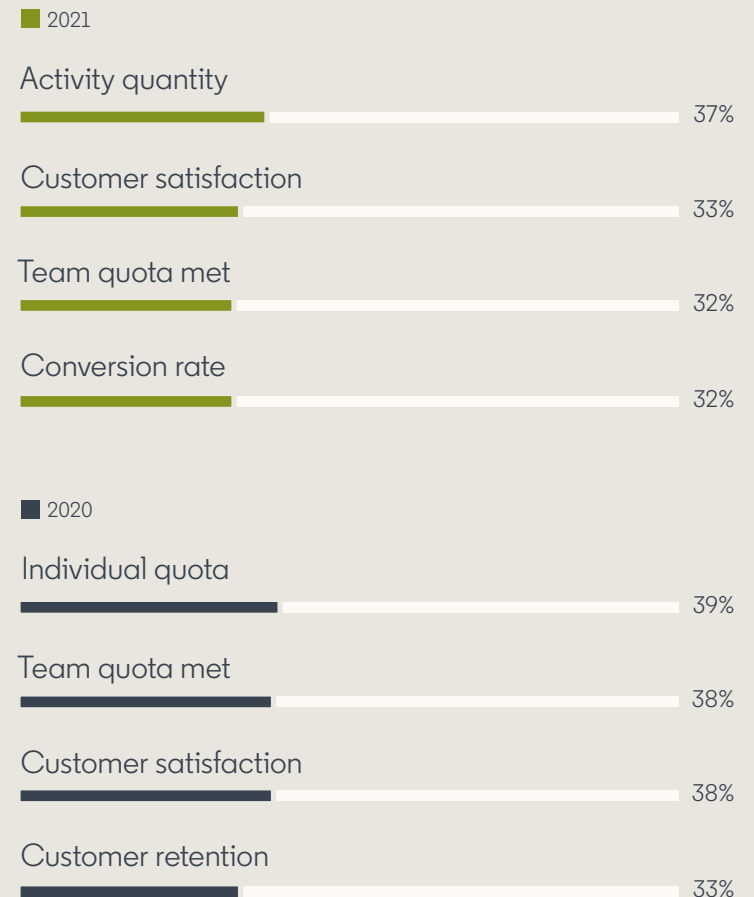
In using data to measure performance, there is a general shift in what data and metrics sales organizations are using to gauge their sales professionals. Last year, our survey of sales professionals in the United States showed a trend toward using metrics focused on the customer rather than traditional sales metrics, such as individual quota or team quota. In the 2020 U.S. edition of State of Sales, which didn't include data from Canada, the top two metrics that sales organizations relied on were customer satisfaction (43%) and customer retention (40%).

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 top sales org metrics in U.S. & Canada in 2020 vs. the top sales org metrics in U.S. & Canada 2021.





*“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.”*

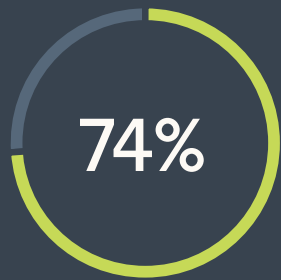
**Chris Kaufield**, Chief Revenue Officer, Alitheon

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 prioritizing quota, which was often impossible to reach, sales organizations, wisely, looked to metrics such as activity and customer satisfaction to gauge the performance of their teams.

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.

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 indicated they have increased 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. More than half (51%) of sellers say they plan to write many more articles for LinkedIn this year. Additionally, 40% say they are sharing “much more” third-party content, 36% 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 400% in the last two years — 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

*“Posting content to LinkedIn and engaging with others on LinkedIn is my primary source of demand generation. So many people see LinkedIn as a waste of time or see LinkedIn as not an opportunity to drive true business development when, in fact, it couldn’t be more the opposite. LinkedIn gives me an opportunity to share my subject matter expertise on a daily basis.”*

**Samantha McKenna**  
Founder, #samsales

## 64%



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

## 82%



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

Top-performing salespeople (defined as meeting 125% or more of quota) are more likely to find that LinkedIn yielded high conversion-to-opportunity rates than average performers. Thirty-seven percent of top performers say that LinkedIn yielded a high conversion-to-opportunity rate, while just 20% of average performers agreed.

Sellers are using LinkedIn, in part, because buyers are also boosting their reliance on the platform. More than four in five (82%) buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson they're working with has an informative LinkedIn profile. Similarly, 76% of buyers are more likely to consider a brand if the salesperson reaches out via LinkedIn.

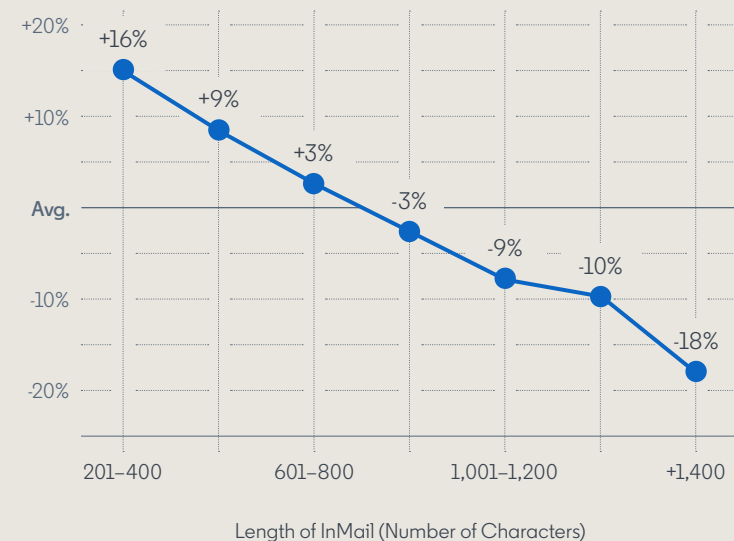
*“You can't look at a platform with over 700 million members and go there's one way to use it...As we've gone through 2020, there are not a lot of other opportunities to network and connect in real life, and, used correctly, LinkedIn does become a place that we can have the conversations that we might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



# 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 adjust to a remote working world — now.
- #3 Sales organizations are preventing sellers from putting buyers first.
- #4 These 6 sales behaviors are killing 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.

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## A note on methodology

This United States and Canada edition of the State of Sales 2021 report is the first installment of the global State of Sales project, which includes eight other reports: Asia Pacific (encompassing Australia, India, and Singapore); Brazil; France; Germany; Mexico; the Netherlands; the United Kingdom; and a global report. For each country, we surveyed 400 buyers and 400 salespeople and sales managers.\* For the entire State of Sales project, we surveyed more than 7,500 people globally. The other individual country and regional reports, as well as a global report, will roll out over the next few months.

For the United States and Canada 2021 survey, Market Cube, 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 from the LinkedIn platform relating to the sales profession. We also conducted dozens of interviews with sales professionals and influencers.

\*For the Netherlands, we surveyed 200 buyers and 200 salespeople and sales managers.

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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