Predicts 2021: New Selling Imperatives Drive CRM Sales Technology Roadmaps

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Initiatives: CRM Sales Technology

Emerging imperatives like hyperautomation, digital selling and artificial intelligence will change the sales technology stack of every organization. This report explores five key trends for application leaders supporting sales’ need to add to their CRM sales technology roadmaps.

Additional Perspectives

- Summary Translation: Predicts 2021: New Selling Imperatives Drive CRM Sales Technology Roadmaps
  (25 December 2020)

Overview

Key Findings

- Sellers continue to experience difficulty with technology due to poor user experience (UX) or complicated business processes leading to their disengagement and lack of productivity.

- Predictive analytics improves the quality of sales analysis, but it does not improve users’ decision making.

- Implementing a multichannel B2B sales vision for postpandemic selling will ultimately require composable applications and analytics efforts.

- To overcome uncertain channel demand forecasts because of the pandemic, channel managers are assuming more control over the processes and tools for qualifying leads managed by their indirect channel partners.

Recommendations

Application leaders supporting CRM sales technology initiatives should:

- Improve sellers’ sales process execution by embedding digital adoption solutions (DAS) across their sales technology stack.
Strategic Planning Assumptions

- By 2025, 80% of organizations will use DAS across the sales stack to overcome insufficient application UXs.
- By 2025, 30% of large B2B companies will use AI predictive analytics to drive all of their sales KPIs and insights.
- By 2025, 20% of B2B companies will see revenue growth from multiexperience sales due to a well-executed “everywhere customer” vision.
- By 2025, 50% of companies with indirect B2B sales will manage prospect data for their resell partners through PRM technologies as a means for getting access to end-customer market data.
- By 2024, 80% of ordering and replenishment will be touchless for most organizations.

Analysis

What You Need to Know

In the Future of Sales in 2025 Trend Insight Report, Gartner analysts identify the transformational changes to sales processes.

Market changes, such as the fact that sellers increasingly have less access to their customers, are already well-known. Other changes are new but significant. For example, suppliers are investing in multiexperience selling because B2B buyers prefer to engage with suppliers through digital and self-service channels.

The report also examines the three technology imperatives that support these transformational changes:

- AI: Modern sales technology combines process execution and insights into a single offering. It supports the shift from highly analog decision making to algorithm-based process automation and...
To help application leaders build a roadmap that accounts for these transformational changes, Gartner presents the following predictions (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. 2021 CRM Sales Technology Predictions for the Future of Sales**

**2021 CRM Sales Technology Predictions for the Future of Sales**

By the Year 2025...

- **Organizations Will Use Digital Adoption Solutions Across the Entire Sales Stack**
  - 80%

- **B2B Sales Organizations Will Be Able to Leverage the Positive Impact of Predictive Analytics**
  - 30%

- **B2B Companies Will See Revenue Growth From Multichannel Sales**
  - 20%

- **Indirect B2B Sales Will Manage Prospect Data for Their Resell Partners Through PRM Technologies**
  - 50%

Source: Gartner (December 2020)
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The first prediction is relevant to organizations that have struggled to improve adoption of their sales technology investments. The second prediction is meaningful for organizations that have already invested in AI-based predictive sales technology. The third is pertinent to organizations that have, or plan
to invest in, multiexperience, multichannel solutions for their B2B sales programs. The fourth prediction is important to organizations with indirect sales channels, particularly those that need more visibility into the lead pipeline. And the final prediction is a replay of a 2020 prediction related to B2B digital commerce.

**Strategic Planning Assumptions**

**Strategic Planning Assumption:** By 2025, 80% of organizations will use DAS across the sales stack to overcome insufficient application UXs.

**Analysis by:** Melissa Hilbert

**Key Findings:**

Digital scalability is an emerging imperative for all sales technology programs. As digital scalability increases, so does the number of applications. Sellers already use many different point solutions in order to do their jobs every day. On average, they will have five to seven applications concurrently open on a daily basis.

Gartner research indicates that this trend, combined with complex implementations and ineffective training, creates digital friction causing sellers to disengage. They revert back to manual processes where they can control what and how frequently they enter data. This digital friction results in poor visibility for management, as activities are not logged. Sellers may rush to upload information close to a cadence call resulting in incomplete or inaccurate data in the CRM system. This causes cadence meetings to be “update meetings” as opposed to opportunities to strategize and coach.

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**Employees with a high-quality UX are at least 50% more likely to have high levels of work effectiveness, productivity, discretionary effort and intent to stay with their current employer. Despite this positive impact, the survey found that only 29% of sales respondents reported high-quality UX.**

Consistent with Gartner research about digital friction, application leaders increasingly want to address these issues. Accordingly, Gartner inquiries on DAS and application adoption practices increased about 12% from last year.

DAS provides three primary capabilities:

- In-application guided learning
Analytics

Nudges (encourages behavioral change)

In-application guided learning is the use of contextual help, delivered as an overlay to the sales application. It is used for onboarding and training as well as monitoring and improving tool adoption. For example, a seller can complete three of seven tasks in a workflow and at the fourth step invoke the DAS solution to continue to conclusion. They can also serve as a process automation tool, supplemented with automated data entry recommendations (light RPA) to reduce data entry.

Analytics is the examination of end-user behavior. For example, at minimum, they provide how many users are using each workflow and how long each workflow takes. Most of the applications are able to continue a workflow across more than one application. Some vendors provide step-by-step usage and length of time to complete the step in the workflow. They may also suggest where users may benefit from a workflow where there is none. Some vendors also have integrations with popular business intelligence (BI) tools such as Microsoft Power BI and Tableau. This is important for application leaders who want to improve the user experience and process efficiency of the entire sales technology stack.

Nudges are configured to help users change behaviors to increase their productivity and conform to company policy. End users often fall into “bad” behaviors that, while comfortable, decrease their productivity. For example, saving a document locally where it could be corrupted and lost vs. in a cloud drive that is automatically backed up and maintained. Nudges appear to the end user as a suggestion when they start to take an action with a “how to” guidance until the end user follows the guidance.

These solutions serve to reduce process inefficiencies, reducing the time and effort that sellers have to expend entering data or deciding what to do next to complete a process step. But more importantly, they serve as a method for reducing application complexity where users must utilize many different applications every day by streamlining the guidance in and between applications.

For more detail on the capabilities and functions of DAS, see Increase Sales Productivity With Digital Adoption Solutions.

Market Implications:

Based on our analysis of inquiries, Gartner sees two paths for DAS.

First, DAS will continue to be important for sales application deployment, application training and monitoring application adoption.

The DAS applications are expanding to include some knowledge management, links to a learning management system (LMS) or light LMS functions. The captured analytic data is anonymized and aggregated while some vendors can also track individuals. This should be vetted to ensure compliance with regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Mobile capabilities are still
emerging, and organizations should investigate each vendor’s strategy and capabilities in this area. As part of an overall digital transformation strategy, organizations should thoroughly investigate the scalability of these solutions and usage or data storage needs.

Second, because our most recent DAS inquiries focus on a holistic strategy for sales applications, Gartner believes that DAS is an important strategic tool for managing usage and adoption.

Application leaders must create a strategy across the organization that prioritizes revenue-driven functional areas and areas where productivity must be increased. Doing so will create a streamlined approach for the organization for both new technology and existing deployments.

Many organizations are creating centers of excellence to manage DAS rollouts. This strategy will provide the application leaders responsible for maintaining a set of applications with the ability to take advantage of lessons learned from other areas and create a unified approach to deploying and maintaining DAS. This will enable better change management and reduce overlaps in resources.

Recommendations:

- Evaluate the global capabilities for your vendor to ensure support of volume and geography (local language, support and regulatory requirements).
- Create a DAS rollout plan for the entire sales technology stack, prioritizing high-value applications that are not widely adopted.
- Correlate sales productivity and outcomes with adoption for each application in the technology stack as well as combined overall productivity results for the sales organization.

Related Research:

Video: Digital Adoption Solutions

Find the Techquilibrium in Sales Enablement to Maximize Seller Productivity

Improve Employee Usage, Engagement and Productivity With Digital Adoption Solutions

Hype Cycle for CRM Sales Technology, 2020

Proven Design Principles to Deliver a High-Value Employee User Experience

Strategic Planning Assumption: By 2025, 30% of large B2B companies will use AI predictive analytics to drive all of their sales KPIs and insights.

Analysis by: Adnan Zijadic, Ilona Hansen
Key Findings:

Predictive analytics, the AI-based functionality of producing statistically valid estimates of a future business outcome, is a core component of the future sales technology programs (see The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report).

This imperative is born out of the interest in artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced analytics for sales in order to help sales organizations make good use of the data they hold in hopes of improving decision making. However, many sales organizations still struggle to obtain actionable insights from their sales analytics implementations and will continue to do so in coming years (see Figure 2).

![Perceived Effectiveness of Sales Analytics Areas](chart)

This gap can be traced to three root causes or conditions:

- Organizations lack a strong understanding of which sales key performance indicators (KPIs) they should track and how sales behaviors drive KPIs.
Most customers realize that predictive analytics from their sales technology vendors deliver insights and correlations, but they do not realize these same analytics do not suggest decisions or activities that make the insight actionable. This often leads to further sales technology investments, mostly into additional BI and augmented analytics systems.

The current state of sales analytics technology largely consists of reports and dashboards residing in native sales systems, supplemented by information portals stood up by IT. But the gap between the two is still significant; while 68% of sales organizations are using native sales system reporting for common sales KPIs, just 39% are using a BI platform integrated with one or more heterogeneous systems.¹

Many will increase uptake of out-of-the-box predictive analytics solutions and augmented analytics and BI (see How to Deploy Advanced Sales Analytics Without a Data Scientist for use cases of augmented analytics and BI). Considering this uptake, the prepackaged KPIs offered by vendors will be boilerplate at best.

Gartner does not foresee all 39% of BI platform users adopting or extending via augmented BI platforms. Therefore, the estimate of 30% is a rather conservative number for what Gartner sees in adoption of predictive analytics, which combines augmented analytics prepackaged KPIs and out-of-the-box solutions with prebuilt KPIs. For context, only 15% of organizations are able to achieve actionable insights from their sales analytics solutions, but only 3% and 5% ranked that as the first and second answer, respectively, as to where sales analytics is most effective currently.

Market Implications:

The inability to convert data generated by predictive analytics into actionable insights will impact the demand for the packaged predictive analytical capabilities provided by most CRM vendors. Customers not only need to invest into these technologies but need to be educated in order to fully explore their usage beyond the first testing project.

For example, a seller being shown, via AI algorithms, that the likelihood of them meeting their forecast commitments is not likely does not instill confidence. Furthermore, it is a problem with the predictive solution because it does not offer a way forward, despite all the underlying data used to make the prediction.

Customers must understand that the outcome of predictive analytics doesn't automatically make better decisions. It helps to unveil insights and correlations, but it needs human interaction to leverage these insights for sales decision-making processes. An example might be that predictive analytics might indicate that within four weeks, our customer churn rate will be 5% higher than ever before. This

- Organizations are not sure how to conduct insights analysis using their sales data.
- Organizations do not have a good picture of what signals they should collect in order to drive new insights and KPIs.
information is not intended to recommend actions, but to guide us toward prioritized decisions to take. Even with this predictive insight, humans fail to make a decision because they don't understand the best course of action.

Recommendations:

- Support sales organizations in assessing their use cases for predictive analytics and test upon a smaller project to understand the output.
- Set expectations for your sales organization for consuming predictive analytical insights, as they don't tell you what to do, but might point you toward prioritizing a decision.
- Designate a sales process steward to oversee how applications and algorithms interplay in the recommendations they make and use it to optimize the sales technology where necessary via a roadmap.

Related Research:

- Improve Revenue Forecast Accuracy With Emerging Forms of Sales Forecasting Technology
- Advanced CRM Sales Analytics Requires Trust-Based Data and Analytics Governance
- Use a Data-Driven Approach to Improve Sales Analytics
- How to Get Started With Artificial Intelligence in CRM B2B Sales
- Optimize Sales Execution With Artificial Intelligence for B2B Guided Selling
- Use AI to Improve B2B Sales Revenue and Optimize Costs
- Infographic: AI Use Case Prism for B2B Sales

Strategic Planning Assumption: By 2025, 20% of B2B companies will see revenue growth from multiexperience sales due to a well-executed “everywhere customer” vision.

Analysis by: Adnan Zijadic

Key Findings:

As noted in The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report, hyperautomation is an essential component of a successful B2B sales program and process. It is important for application leaders because it combines two overlapping technology principles: sales process design that accounts for the
buyer experience, combined with customer-facing, self-service technology such as B2B digital commerce.

Recent studies indicate that self-service digital commerce is indeed gaining importance with application leaders and chief sales officers (see Leverage B2B Digital Commerce for Cost Optimization, Improved CX and Revenue Growth).

But investment in customer experience, and particularly in the concept of engaging customers in the channel that they most prefer, is lagging. A recent analysis of almost 24 months of inquiries by CRM sales technology analysts indicates that only an estimated 3% involved B2B buyer experience design. That is a far lower number than Gartner expected.

The effort to support the “everywhere customer” vision will ultimately require composable applications and analytics efforts. The concept of the “everywhere customer” will cross many personas; however, it is up to selling organizations to identify these types in order to evangelize the multiexperience sales model inside the organization. Differing personas will increase a vast array of applications, analytics needs and enterprise architectures.

These will make internal decision engines even more complex, especially since the majority of sales processes will not be ironed out in time to support such experiences seamlessly. Additionally, composable applications and analytics are built around the personas of the buyer and the seller, dependent on which tools are being considered.

**Market Implications:**

The change to embed tools to support multiexperience is happening in parallel to an eventual convergence of digital marketing and digital commerce capabilities inside sales organizations. This has three implications for sales organizations in the next five years:

- Current and near-future sales applications and analytics landscapes do not take into consideration this eventual convergence toward delivering a multiexperience sales model enabled and led by self-service digital commerce capabilities.

- To obtain actionable insights, sales organizations will need to rely on multiple advanced analytics vendors that also play seamlessly with digital marketing and digital commerce, along with those already embedded in the coming years within existing sales processes.

- The convergence of multiple lines of business creates risk within AI-based applications due to narrow and pointed use cases and data signals not designed to provide actionable recommendations on the everywhere customer, thus increasing complexity.

To clarify some of the implications above, certain buying and selling activities (data signals) consistently crop up within AI models used by competing and noncompeting vendors, such as email
data, marketing or sales collateral and website visits. This ultimately pins two or more vendors who may have a completely different use case serving up a unique set of recommendations, which can be conflicting when trying to decide how to progress a deal forward.

This is similar to the game of “prisoner’s dilemma” (analyzed in game theory), whereby each AI model acts in self-interest of the vendor’s solution and not the optimal outcome for the buyer or seller.

Multiexperience sales requires complete cooperation among data signals, algorithms and applications in order to achieve a win-win scenario for buyers and sellers alike. A key fact to keep in mind is that the majority of sales will be using off-the-shelf packaged applications and AI solutions, which are usually inflexible in supporting such a sales model.

Furthermore, digital commerce data (such as conversational AI) and digital marketing data will increasingly be used as sales data signals dependent on which channel the buyer will engage. Additionally, the buyer might be a “thing” not an individual. Gathering this data is necessary but will come with complexities to be solved through the technologies supporting multiexperience models. Gartner believes that customers are not yet ready to compose the applications and AI-based models which might be required to run multiexperience sales profitably. Sales opportunities will become increasingly complex as buyers dictate the paths of their purchasing decisions more than ever before.

Recommendations:

- Define your vision for the everywhere customer now, and identify which technologies, processes and people will be equipped to support the multiexperience sales model.
- Collaborate with key stakeholders in sales and enterprise architecture to flush out requirements to support a multiexperience sales model.
- Scrutinize your sales technology vendors’ roadmap and look for signs of developing capabilities that allow support for self-service commerce capabilities.
- Minimize packaged off-the-shelf analytics purchases where necessary unless the vendor is demonstrating via roadmap the ability to support the everywhere customer.

Related Research:

- Leverage B2B Digital Commerce for Cost Optimization, Improved CX and Revenue Growth
- Future of Applications: Delivering the Composable Enterprise

Strategic Planning Assumption: By 2025, 50% of companies with indirect B2B sales will manage prospect data for their resell partners through PRM technologies as a means for getting access to end-customer market data.
Analysis by: Ilona Hansen

Key Findings:

As noted in Pandemic Recovery: Key Sales Roles and Technology Impacts for B2B Sales, the pandemic has been disruptive for all types of sales organizations. For producers with indirect sales channels, the dual disruptions of upended demand forecasts, combined with their own supply issues, have exposed the cracks in many go-to-market models.

Prior to COVID-19, it seemed quite common for producers to regularly meet with their resell partners and discuss market opportunities. These conversations helped producers understand which customer segment, or even which prospects, their resell partners were addressing. As no in-person interactions are taking place for more than six months now, producers find themselves without an understanding of which markets their resell partners are engaging with. Most producers have reported to have literally no or significant less interactions with their resell partners, today. Even in cases where communication with the resell partner was moved to digital channels, many producers claimed that the discipline for showing up or even having all stakeholders in the call is lacking. In most cases, phone calls to individuals at the resell partner organization are seen as the only communication channel.

Gartner has noticed an increase in producer inquiries regarding how to access prospects and market segments from resell partners to overcome the information gap. Most resell partners won't just share this sensitive data, believing that a producer might want to take net new business away from them by selling directly to their prospects. For overcoming reseller partners’ reluctance, producers are sponsoring the technology and process for qualifying resell partners’ prospects. This takes away a heavy investment load from many resell partners and grants producers access to early market data, allowing them to understand end-customer dynamics. And it is satisfying for both parties: The producer gets access to market data and the resell partner doesn't need to qualify its prospects, which tends to require investments into not only resources, but also technology.

Market Implications:

As noted in the research about hyperautomation, The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report, producers need to offer services their resell partners would appreciate. These possibilities include capturing, cleaning, prequalifying and even nurturing reseller partners’ prospects. Full-suite partner relationship manager (PRM) applications come with many lead management capabilities, which include managing prospects from identification to distribution among partners. But prior to COVID-19, these capabilities were not considered in most cases when investing in PRM applications, missing an opportunity to address resellers concerns.

By offering to work the unqualified contact data for resellers, converting them to leads and distributing them back to resellers, producers can overcome reseller resistance. By qualifying the contact data generated and collected by resellers, producers can understand which prospect segment resell partners are addressing and access the market dynamics.
Recommendations:

- Invest in digital partner technologies, such as lead capturing, nurturing and distribution capabilities for your resell partners.

- Assess your indirect sales teams’ information gaps. Channel managers are struggling to understand their resell end-customer markets due to missing direct contact.

- Consult with your channel managers to overcome the lack of insights through providing additional services to your resell partners.

Related Research:

- Market Guide for Partner Relationship Management Applications

- Toolkit: Choosing the Right Partner Relationship Management Vendor

- 3 Essential Elements of Effective Partner Sales Enablement Content

Replay Prediction

Strategic Planning Assumption: By 2024, 80% of ordering and replenishment will be touchless for most organizations.

Analysis by: Mark Lewis

Key Findings:

Digital commerce technologies now support the sale of complex goods and services for a small fraction of the cost of the direct sales channel. At the same time, small businesses and the purchasing departments of large businesses are under pressure to reduce costs and acquire services and materials more quickly. They are looking to shift more of their postsourcing purchasing transactions to faster, lower-priced digital channels. Most purchasing departments already set goals for the percentage of transactions performed through digital channels.

These pressures on vendors and purchasers mean that an increasing proportion of B2B postsourcing sales transactions will be captured via digital commerce channels initiated either by a person or, in the longer term, by intelligent purchasing chatbots (see 2019 Strategic Roadmap for P2P: Catching the Next Wave of Technology Innovation).

Market Implications:
Gartner predicts that sellers will shift technology investment to digital commerce solutions. Guided selling and visual configurators will enable more complex products to be sold online. In the long term, sales intelligence technology combined with chatbots will enable simple negotiations online.

Purchasing departments are investing in tools that compare online prices across many vendors. In the long term, as online sales bots appear on vendors’ websites, Gartner anticipates that purchasing bots will emerge to automate and optimize the negotiation of terms with more vendors than would be feasible for a human purchasing agent.

**Justification:**

This is a replay prediction because it aligns with the market’s movement to B2B digital commerce solutions.

**Recommendations:**

Sellers should:

- Survey their customers to understand their current appetite for digital commerce. In particular, identify which product lines customers are most likely to purchase online and enable those first. Also, identify which customer segments are most open to using digital channels.
- Recognize that their customers’ attitudes will evolve over time as they become more comfortable with the digital commerce channel.
- Invest in digital commerce solutions today to shift as many low-complexity, postsourcing transactions as possible online.
- Select quote-to-cash solutions that support all target channels of interaction, including digital commerce.
- Simplify product offerings and implement guided selling with live help and product configuration technologies to ensure that as many products as possible can be offered online. Ensure that product configurators are easy enough for a customer to use.
- Incentivize customers to use the digital commerce channel by offering preferential pricing that shares the cost saving between the seller and the buyer.
- Invest in price optimization and broader sales intelligence technologies that are available now, and that will eventually underpin sales chatbots.

Purchasers should:

- Update their channel buying strategy by using spend analysis tools to identify goods and services that can be purchased online at competitive, transparent prices.
- Identify goods and services for which vendors will extend preferential terms for online purchases.

- Invest in strategic sourcing and procure-to-pay applications that streamline the process of price comparison and purchasing from online vendors.

- Implement punch-out purchasing portals to enable employees to acquire simple consumables directly from vendors.

- Set and track targets for procurement via digital channels, including digital marketplaces such as Amazon Business and Ariba.

Related Research:

Magic Quadrant for Configure, Price and Quote Application Suites

Critical Capabilities for Configure, Price and Quote Application Suites

The replay prediction is a prediction from a previously published report that is so significant that it is being republished here.

A Look Back

In response to your requests, we are taking a look back at some key predictions from previous years. We have intentionally selected predictions from opposite ends of the scale — one where we were wholly or largely on target, as well as one we missed.

On Target: 2017 Prediction — By 2018, 20% of large B2B organizations will build business graphs of their sales processes to improve their sales execution.

This prediction highlighted the use of business graphs as the foundational technology behind predictive forecasting, predictive opportunity scoring, predictive call-down lists and predictive lead scoring. In the 2019 Magic Quadrant for sales force automation (SFA) survey, 25% of respondents used their SFA vendor’s native capabilities for sales acceleration, 36% used their SFA vendor’s native pipeline inspection capabilities and 34% used advanced analytics.

Missed: 2017 Prediction — By 2020, 25% of organizations using a sales performance management (SPM) solution will optimize the design and maintenance of their sales compensation plans using advanced analytics solutions provided by their SPM vendor.

The majority of SPM vendors have not sufficiently added advanced analytics capabilities to incentive compensation plan design scenario planning. As a result, compensation analysts revert back to manual efforts to run scenarios, applying human resources instead of utilizing machine learning and advanced analytics techniques.
Acronym Key and Glossary Terms

| DAS       | Digital adoption solutions |

Evidence

1. 2020 State of Sales Analytics

Recommended by the Authors

Video: Digital Adoption Solutions Improve Employee Productivity

The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report