

Elevate every decision with digital inside sales

Fast-track to future-ready performance

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An aerial photograph of a city street at sunset. The street is filled with cars and motorcycles, and the buildings are illuminated. In the background, a modern city skyline with several tall skyscrapers is visible against a warm, orange and yellow sky. The overall scene is a mix of traditional urban architecture and modern high-rise buildings.

Selling smarter and faster demands digital operations

Elevate every decision with digital inside sales

Not so long ago, the process of selling complex B2B products or services was split into two basic stages. First, an unsophisticated seller, perhaps in a call center, would cold call or email a lead and qualify them using the basic BANT formula: Budget, Authority, Need and Timing. If they were successful, they would pass the lead to a field seller who would then try to close the deal. The results were usually lackluster, with valuable time and resources wasted. What's more, vendors selling services and solutions into complex organizations of any type or size—SMBs, banks or pharma giants, to name a few—used the same sales techniques instead of differentiating their approaches. Digital transformation, however, brought about major changes in how buyers researched and purchased complex B2B solutions. As buyers became more sophisticated, they demanded a change in the sales process.

Today, the marketplace is more competitive than ever, making B2B sales more complex and dynamic. Buyers have more stakeholders contributing to the evaluation and purchasing decisions, and in most cases they have already identified the solutions they want—they're educated about the options and they ask sophisticated questions. It's therefore up to salespeople to meet buyers where they are on an individual and personalized basis—matching the right product and service information to the right customer at the moment of need. They also have to accurately anticipate customers' long-term needs based on intelligence gathered throughout the buying process. The one-time deal is a relic of the past.

That's why salespeople must have an ongoing, continuously updated understanding of B2B customers and their unique needs. Those who understand their potential buyers' challenges and opportunities can expect higher conversion rates, transaction size and overall customer lifetime value. Alternatively, sellers who depend on customers to explain their needs and context, especially in a high-value transaction, will find right away that they lose credibility and miss the opportunity to offer the right product or service.

A radically changed sales landscape¹

61%

of sales executives see experience management strategies in wide use or use at scale, versus 65% of all executives

70%

of sales executives report wide use of analytics

25%

rate technology as a top challenge to growth

The sales function needs specialized talent—people who can embrace new ways of working by maximizing the potential of advanced, integrated technologies that amplify results.

Combining human talent with technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), and having them work in harmony, enables salespeople to stay in touch with and on top of their customers' evolving and ever-shifting strategies. This, in turn, allows sales organizations to innovate and pivot at the same speed as their customers, remain relevant, and continue to extract and impart value through enhanced and expanded offerings. This results in a model that can scale globally and deliver better outcomes for customers and sustained, increased profits for the business.

The Accenture Research and Oxford Economics Intelligent Operations Survey of 2020, which surveyed 1,100 C-suite and senior executives to develop Accenture's Fast-Track to Future-Ready Performance report, found that 28% of sales-function respondents named the customer experience as their top business goal. That's up from 21% just three years ago.² But that number can—and should—be significantly higher if sales organizations expect success. Sales doesn't just impact the customer experience; it is the customer experience.

Survey respondents said that sales is one of the most important functions for fueling and achieving operational growth.



Elevate every decision with digital inside sales

All this should raise the question: How or why should the sales function be prioritized for investment to accelerate its path toward intelligent, future-ready operations? Short answer: It already is.

Organizations that are slow to innovate in the sales function will face difficulties unlocking operational excellence more broadly. In fact, to have a future-ready organization, you need a future-ready sales function. Sales can lead the entire operation forward, charting the path toward a future of operational excellence in which silos break down and enterprise-wide cohesiveness increases.

Salespeople have the most intimate customer knowledge, and therefore have the power to fuel and sustain growth. That's why sales must transition to a mix of art and science that's data-driven, scalable, agile, predictive and integrated across the enterprise. The shift will deliver superior end-to-end customer experience, as well as better business outcomes for clients and the company alike.

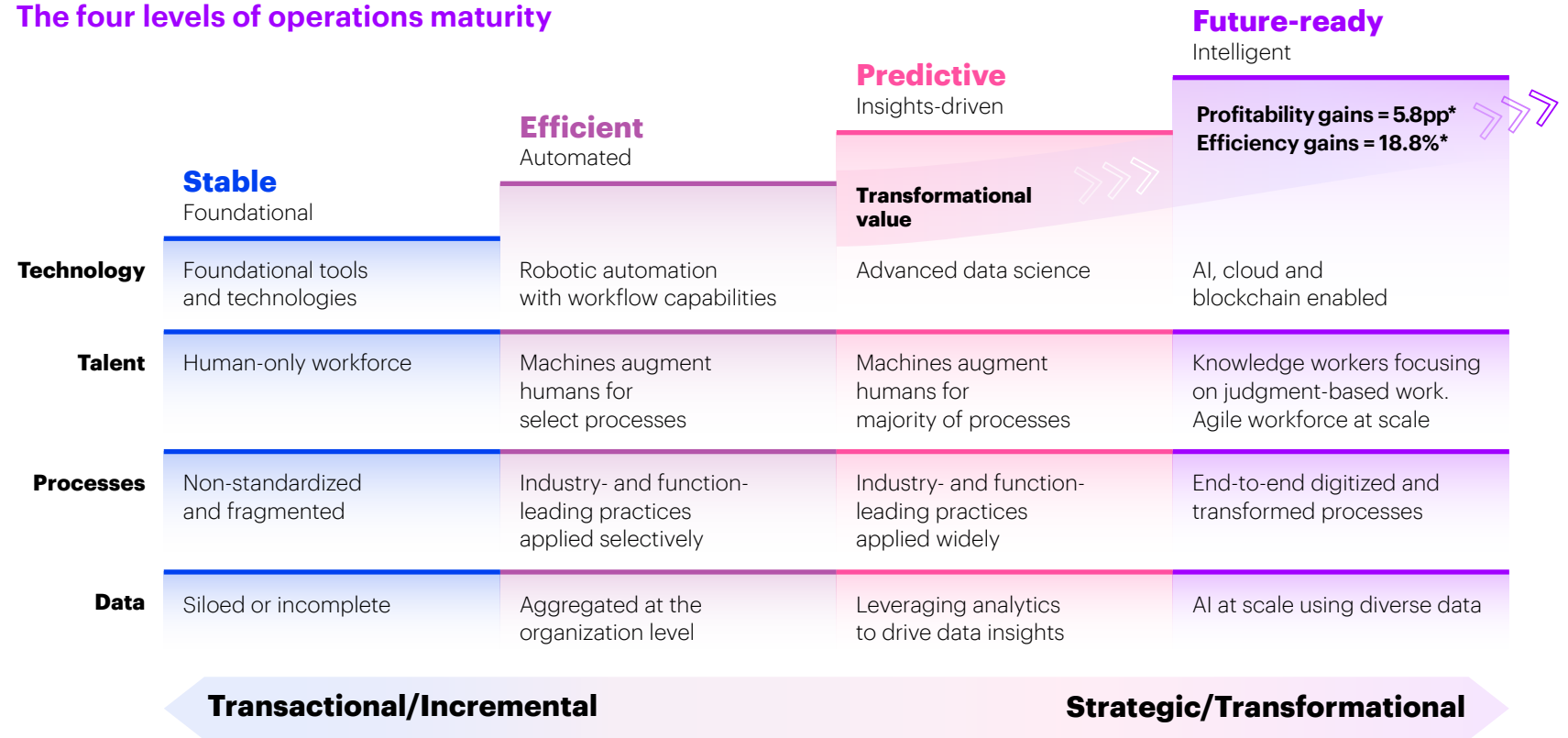
The journey begins here and now.

A futuristic, curved hallway with a purple and blue color scheme. The walls and ceiling are composed of multiple parallel, curved panels that create a tunnel-like effect. The floor is a dark, polished surface. In the distance, a person is walking away from the camera. The overall atmosphere is sleek and modern.

Future-ready organizations need future-ready sales

Our global, cross-industry research clearly demonstrates the connection between business operations maturity and performance. The research, combined with our experience, shows that there are four levels of operational maturity: **stable, efficient, predictive** and **future-ready**.

Figure 1.
The four levels of operations maturity



*Accenture Research and Oxford Economics Intelligent Operations Survey, 2020

Accenture experience shows that additional productivity and efficiency gains up to 50% can be seen in organizations displaying future-ready characteristics.

Stable companies are just beyond the starting line; efficient organizations are using automation to their advantage; and predictive companies are using data to make better, smarter decisions that enhance the customer experience. All of these are good positions to be in—but all should be viewed as stepping stones. Every organization should have its long-term eye on being future-ready.

The select few organizations already in the future-ready tier, just 7% overall, are experiencing nearly double the efficiency and three times the profitability of their peers.

Future-readiness in the sales function, however, is in itself a goal worth striving toward. Here's a look at the key characteristics of sales organizations at the various levels of operational maturity, and how they measure up in terms of their technology, data, processes and talent:

Stable Sales Organizations

They deliver expected outcomes with traditional business applications and sales models. They have data-driven teams and tools, and are able to measure sales performance and benchmarks effectively. Organizations looking to enter this tier should have an eye toward enhanced rigor, reporting, efficiency and visibility, as well as increased measurement of processes for sustained improvement and benchmarking against the competition. While sales has a direct line to other parts of the organization, siloing still prevents the sharing of information and insights that could lead to product enhancements and a superior customer experience.

Efficient Sales Organizations

These teams have a leg up. They have optimized processes, significant automation and segmentation of sales roles. These cost-focused improvements could allow people to spend up to 15%³ more time selling—and they are able to do it more effectively by trusting the data. Gathering of information to prepare for outreach to prospects is largely automated, and poor leads are automatically disqualified. In addition, technologies such as Salesforce are fully utilized and augmented with AI capabilities that save on costs (but don't necessarily enhance capabilities within or beyond the sales team, to other parts of the organization).

Predictive Sales Organizations

Sales teams at this level enjoy clear advantages over their competition. They use advanced data and analytics to develop insights that inform operations, and have deep performance and channel insights for segmentation and treatment strategies that result in greater optimization and better customer and seller experiences. Salespeople in predictive teams are always learning and improving on both the individual and function levels. AI- and machine learning-driven technologies automate medium complexity tasks such as resolving order exceptions and improving lead generation and qualification. These capabilities also analyze and help increase seller performance, as well as capture and harvest competitive insights. Perhaps most importantly, errors or barriers to sales completion are proactively identified and remedied.

Future-Ready Sales Organizations

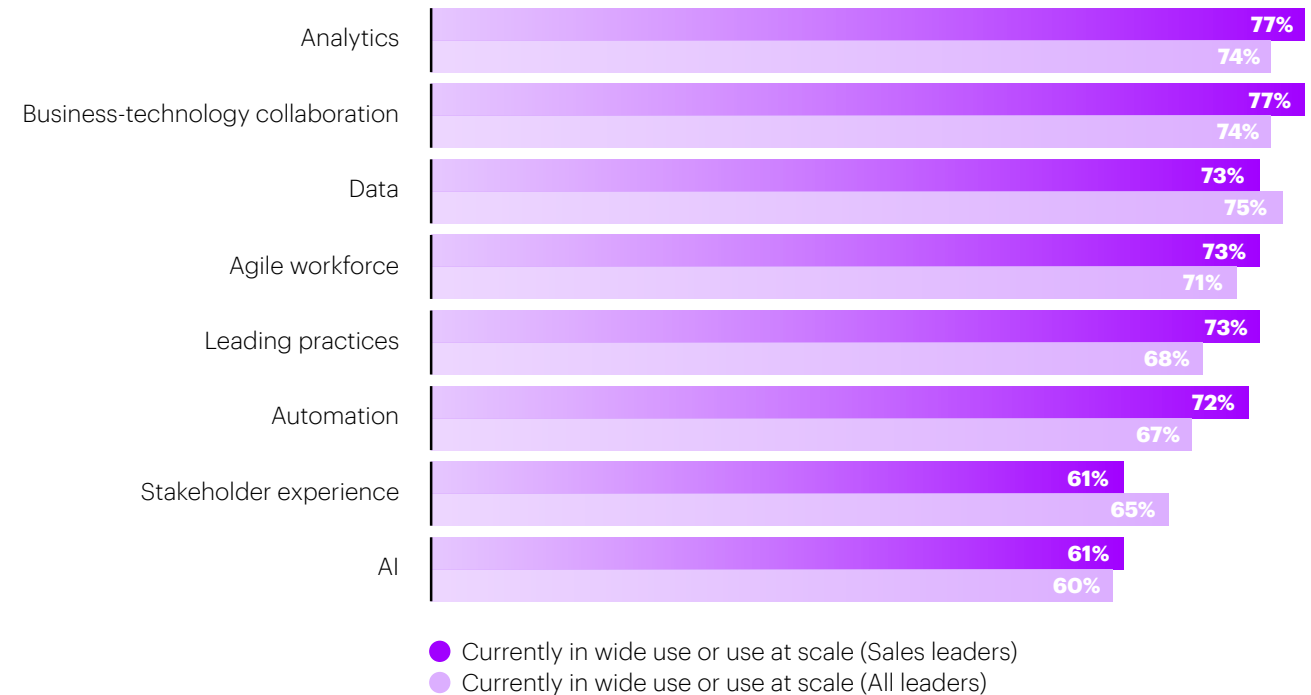
Teams at this level aren't just ahead of predictive teams; they run circles around them with their overall agility and scalability, and are the envy of their peers for their ability to drive superior revenue and business outcomes. Data orchestration across marketing, sales and service enables relevant, personalized customer experiences. Extensive, integrated applied intelligence drives superior sales and business outcomes, and real-time sales results inform product innovation that drives repeat business. Customers and sellers alike are supported at moments of truth in their channel of choice, and real-time sentiment analysis notifies salespeople for instant interventions.

The prospect of becoming future-ready might seem challenging. But it's important to remember that even sales organizations working their way from a traditional model into the stable tier already rely on some automation, data and cloud. Furthermore the sales function is ahead of other functions' uses of several technologies key to operational maturity. Where sales is behind, it's not by much. Many sales organizations have the teams, tools and data to get started on the journey.

With those building blocks in place, it's possible to make the leap straight to future-ready, bypassing the efficient and predictive tiers entirely.

This also means, however, that efficient and predictive sales organizations cannot be complacent. Elevation to the future-ready state doesn't happen naturally—it takes work. But it's ultimately a small investment of time and effort compared to the superior outcomes sure to be realized as a result of becoming—and remaining—future-ready.

Figure 2
Sales leaders are well positioned to achieve operations maturity





The will to change: don't sell yourself short

For most sales organizations, becoming future-ready is simply a matter of will. If you need to sell in a hypercompetitive environment, the stakes are that much higher. And the first step is appreciating that investing in the journey to a state of intelligent operations yields big, sustained results. Along with those investments come a few critical mindset shifts that drive and sustain momentum toward a state of future-readiness.

01 Know the ultimate goal

Think big, with sales strategy at the forefront

It's a misconception that any time spent not selling is time wasted. Instead, salespeople should focus on strategy—that is, matching the right solutions with the right buyers at the right times. Strategically minded sales organizations and those leveraging digital inside sales models are ahead of the game, in a few noteworthy ways.

Case study

A multinational software company needed to deepen its reach in Latin American and Caribbean countries, and develop a pipeline of consistent, qualified sales opportunities.

Using an expert sales team of native Spanish speakers with deep knowledge of the local market requirements and norms, Accenture developed an outbound sales program with standardized process and management structures to ensure consistency and efficiency in sales and qualification activities. The program not only expanded the pipeline, it also increased the company's conversion rates.

Ultimately, the demand generation program grew to include inbound opportunity qualification and real-time chat support. And the program expanded as a whole throughout Central and South America.



First, **they're quicker to market and they deeply understand the customer—so they close faster.**

In a complex business landscape, with customers seeking highly specialized solutions, successful salespeople don't waste time dialing or emailing firms and people who are not appropriate customers. Instead, they clock higher conversion rates because they're **modern** (they meet prospects on their terms); **predictable** (they understand customer or buyer needs); intelligent (they offer targeted solutions); and **continuous** (they capture data for smarter future interactions).

Second, **they have agile and disruptive solutions that support the enterprise's transformational journey to a state of intelligent operations.** The more nimble and adaptable a sales team is, especially in the face of changing market conditions and client objectives, the more sales can serve as a catalyst for enterprise-wide transformation. That requires the right toolset—technology that augments human talent to produce better outcomes.

Rising trends among smarter sales organizations

Sales leaders have reported speed of product and service innovation as one of their biggest investments over the past three years—24% said this area has significantly improved; 49% said it's somewhat improved.⁴

Customer experience has improved the most in the past three years—32% reported significant improvements; 39% said it has somewhat improved.⁵

They offer **increased speed of product and service innovation** (they're ready to pivot, alter or enhance offerings in the face of macro events or shifts in customers' strategies. They **create an exceptional customer experience** (customers stay engaged—and purchasing—when solutions, processes and people meet or exceed expectations); and they **stay focused on growth and profitability** (they leverage industry talent with technology to create a scalable, human + machine model that unlocks new customer segments, markets and partner channels).





Case study

A multinational technology company wanted to convert trial users of its cloud solution into recurring, paying customers and ensure long-term use of their platform. Accenture helped develop and launch a Global Demand Center, which provided the company with an integrated sales and marketing platform. It monitored customers' digital activity, triggered Inside Sales interactions and delivered timely, ongoing digital messaging relevant to each step of the buyer's journey.

The Demand Center integrated global digital marketing efforts with a multi-layered Inside Sales engine that could address deep technical questions, provide technical enablement and drive sales. The Global Demand Center allowed for local market customization while centralizing the pipeline and demand response. This ensured that all opportunities were captured and addressed. Identified and qualified opportunities moved quickly through the pipeline, and converted prospects moved smoothly through the evaluation state to purchase.

In just one quarter, sales of the cloud solution doubled, with the Global Demand Center driving a 128% increase in Inside Sales Qualified opportunities. And sales goals exceeded 110% for three consecutive years.



And third, strategic sales operations **already know what the customer wants; they don't sell the solution to the customer, they match the customer to the solution.** Effective sales talent expresses both intuition and timing—and augments their intuition with technology. People still buy from people, which means knowing what to offer, to whom and when. Furthermore, these sales teams are always ready to inject unique, targeted expertise at any moment because they're equipped with technology that offers a holistic source of truth on customer interactions, real-time insights and provocative, actionable information at the moment that prospects are most receptive. From first contact to close, the customer experience is seamless no matter how many complexities or variables the client introduces along the way.

Collaborate across business and technology

Only 8% of sales organizations say business-technology collaboration is being used at scale, and only 44% of sales executives say the collaboration will be used at scale in three years' time.⁶ But eliminating barriers between IT and other departments is essential to fueling innovation generally, and specifically for sales.

In order to overcome strategic and technical challenges that sales organizations face, IT must be a symbiotic partner, not just a facilitator.

02 Know the key steps

There are many steps between one level of operational maturity and the next—a few, in particular, make the biggest impact. Even if future-readiness isn't achievable in the near term, it should be on the horizon for every sales organization—regardless of whether it's a few months or a few years away. And this requires improving data and the stakeholder experience, as well as scaling leading practices. Any and all ways of doing business that are recognized as enabling best-in-class performance should be embraced without hesitation.

Automate at scale to augment human talent

Automation is a critical way to reduce costs, and ranks as the most important factor to digitization of business processes so salespeople can focus on better interactions and optimal outcomes. Fortunately, the sales function is on the right track; the percentage of sales executives reporting widespread or full-scale automation has increased 3x over the past three years. That's a great start—but sales organizations need to pick up the pace if they're to work towards future-readiness.

And by fostering a human + machine workforce, where technology helps people, organizations can allocate work to realize efficiencies. They include **seller assist solutions** that help people close more opportunities, faster; **seller performance management** technologies that help people identify the skills they need to increase their conversion rates; **order automation software** that eliminates mundane, time-consuming tasks; and **management dashboards** which provide instant visibility into operational performance, with insights driving improvements. All of these can free up salespeople to spend more time selling, and allow others the freedom to pursue other value-driving endeavors.

But AI is the critical element and, ultimately, leads to higher-value transactions. AI-driven technologies from ecosystem partners must be integrated so that sellers have the advanced capabilities that allow them to produce better interactions at the right times with the right people. These typically include **advanced lead-generation technologies** that allow companies to identify, enrich and qualify better leads with a higher propensity to convert. There's also **feedback technology** that records sales calls and provides real-time performance feedback, so salespeople improve and hone their interactions with every call. Aggregated data creates profiles of a high-performing seller and provides longer-term coaching to move sellers into the high-performing category. **Customization technology** enables sales agents to adapt to client needs in real time, and also surfaces competitive and product insights to product teams. And while preparing for a call, the system can provide salespeople with consolidated recommendations on key messages and products or service offerings.

Based on Accenture experience, we've seen automated sales support increase lead qualification productivity by up to 75%, and improve lead generation and lead conversion rate by 35% or more.

38% of future-ready leaders are scaling AI, compared to just 1% of efficient companies.⁷

There are even **comprehensive solutions** that do a mix of everything above. They can create better customer interactions by using data, advanced AI and machine learning to help companies identify, enrich and qualify better leads; optimize targeting; and predict customer desires. Also, new operating engines that combine talent, data, AI and advanced analytics are able to reimagine business processes and identify high-impact opportunities that yield faster results.



Case study

An industry leader in IT, network and cybersecurity wanted to develop a unified view of the customer, so that every interaction would help sellers understand where customers were in their journey, as well as where they should go next. Accenture integrated proprietary AI and machine learning platforms with the company's existing tech stack to create a consolidated view of the customer. Soon thereafter, sellers had real-time information delivered to them during customer conversations to help accelerate the sales conversation. Sellers gained:

- Automatically generated use cases and next best actions
- Real-time customer research and industry insights
- Automatically generated product and bundle recommendations

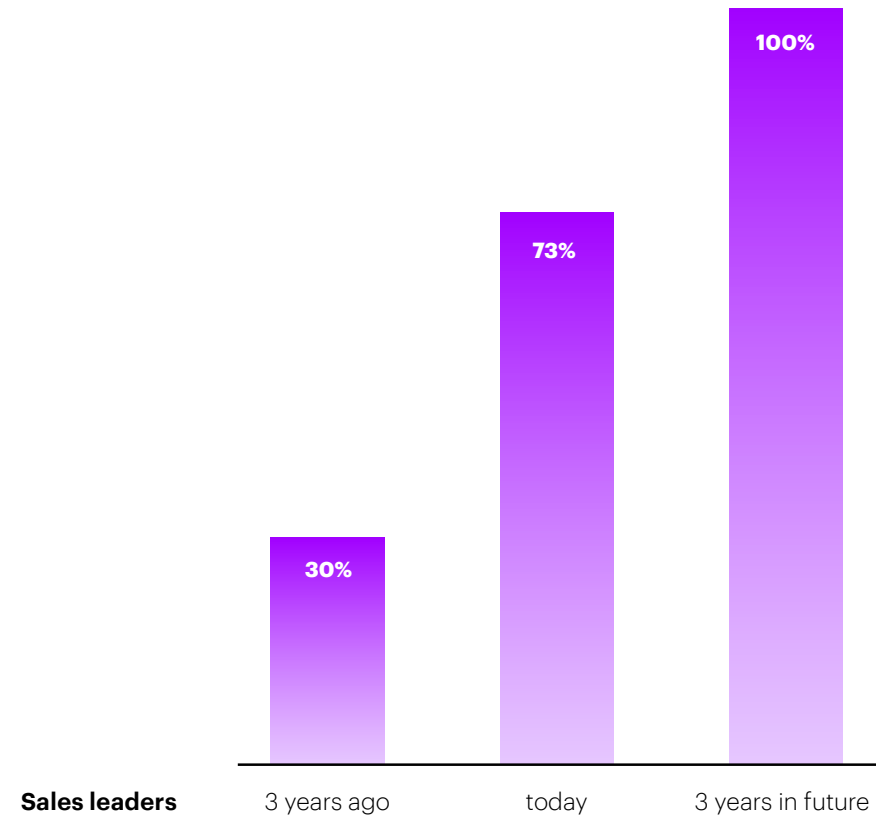
The integrated platform aggregated customer information and conversations to provide continuous, robust Voice-of-the-Customer business intelligence and a unified campaign performance view. It also ensures that each sales interaction was meaningful and valuable for customers. By creating an excellent customer and seller experience, the company is seeing extraordinary growth in interactions and revenue, particularly with key accounts.

Commit to making data-driven decisions with better data

Sales organizations must be able to determine with ease who the best targets really are. That means using complex data, not one or more lead lists.

Data use is a clear strength for sales teams over experience and intuition; only 68% of sales executives say they design their operating model based on data. Sales executives must develop a data strategy that includes diverse data from multiple sources. Extracting and analyzing data from multiple sources enables sellers to better understand their targets. Data, not just lead lists, provides a more comprehensive view of prospects—small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) and global enterprises alike.

This is particularly impactful because digitization follows data. 73% of sales executives say they currently have data in use at scale (100% expect to have data in wide use at scale in three years' time); 77% say that digitization provides insights and decision-making for better business outcomes.⁸ **Digitization, particularly digitized leads, is an essential enabler of high-quality customer experiences.** It's what allows for the creation of an end-to-end process across internal functions, and it facilitates the broader transformation that separates roles and responsibilities while still keeping everyone connected and informed.

Figure 3.**Percent of organizations at widespread or full-scale Data usage from 3 years ago to 3 years in the future**



Elevate every decision with digital inside sales

Scale cloud investments

73% of sales executives say they're using cloud at scale.⁹ That's on par with other functions, but there is still room for improvement. Cloud infrastructures are critical because they enhance data and analytics, which can be used to enable great customer experiences. Additionally, cloud solutions often provide advanced capabilities at an affordable cost that scales with consumption. So companies are able to access leading-edge capabilities and best practices at a fraction of the cost of legacy, on-premise solutions.

Much like scaling automation, the more a sales team can make cloud an integral part of the process, the quicker top-line revenue growth will be realized.

03 Position sales to leapfrog maturity levels

Embrace a fully digital operating model

Every step toward full digitization of the sales function results in better interactions and better results. Our Fast-Track to Future-Ready Operations survey, combined with financial performance data, found that organizations that have moved to a fully digital operating model are 1.7x more efficient and 2.8x more profitable than other organizations.¹⁰ The sales function is no exception—increased digitization means greater efficiency and more top-line growth. Becoming future-ready is a worthwhile objective, because moving just one position up in the four levels in operational maturity will have a significant impact on global profits.

Build ecosystem partnerships

Partnerships send the right message. They bring differentiating capabilities, such as extending into managed services, and signal to customers that the sales organization knows its own strengths. Partnerships not only boost performance, they enable access to leading capabilities, top talent and innovation. Ecosystem partners can include technology providers, managed services providers, startups and niche services—all of which can augment the performance of a sales team.

31%

of sales executives rank ecosystem partnerships as a top business goal.

44%

of sales executives have seen their ecosystem partnerships improve over the past three years.

47%

have increased their focus on ecosystem partnerships as a result of COVID-19.¹¹

A street scene at dusk or dawn, featuring a tram track in the foreground. The street is lined with trees and buildings. A traffic light is visible on the right side, showing a red light. The overall atmosphere is calm and urban.

Make your move

Sales organizations that succeed in the key areas outlined earlier will be more likely to achieve future-ready intelligent operations—and will see pronounced benefits almost immediately. And with the correct technology, data, process and people in place, the results will be sustained. Future-ready operations are also future-proof.

Future-ready sales organizations understand, for example, that sales from new and existing customers are equally important. In fact, they are able to extract more value from recurring business that’s ultimately more profitable in the long term—hence the importance of constantly anticipating customer needs.

But it isn’t solely about immediate, top-line value. Being future-ready means realizing transformational value, too. In other words, better ways of working that make people and customers happier ultimately drive increases in revenue as well.

Of course, the path to becoming future-ready is not only unique for every organization, it’s also rarely linear. But it is a journey well worth taking, bearing in mind that even sales organizations in the stable stage can make the jump directly to the future-ready tier if the determination exists. However, it also might not be appropriate to make that leap just yet—the operational model has to fit the sales organization as well as it

fits the customers. That’s why each sales organization must take a unique approach toward attaining future-readiness.

Still, every step toward the future-ready state matters. Just one move between maturity levels yields impactful results. **On average, organizations that moved one maturity level higher between 2017 and 2020 were 7.6% more efficient (lower operating expenses per dollar of revenue) and 2.3pp more profitable (EBITDA as percentage of revenues).**¹²

7.6%

more efficient (lower operating expenses per dollar of revenue)

2.3pp

more profitable (EBITDA¹ as percentage of revenues)²

The sales function can only be as successful as its operational maturity, and the same goes for the enterprise as a whole. Since sales owns the customer relationships and drives revenue, this function should set an operational maturity paradigm that the rest of the organization can follow so the future is defined by accelerated growth.

1: Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.

2: Based on Standard and Poor’s Capital IQ 2019 financial data.

*Accenture Research and Oxford Economics Intelligent Operations Survey, 2020

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