

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of numerous gold-colored dollar signs scattered across a surface of crinkled, metallic-looking paper. The lighting creates highlights and shadows, giving the scene a textured, three-dimensional appearance. The dollar signs are of various sizes and orientations, some partially cut off by the edges of the frame.

INTENZ

Sales research:

The new winners of B2B sales



Introduction and key findings

Based on sales research in Denmark and the essence of the global research results, the report gives you insights into how digitalization has created lasting changes in the way we buy and sell in B2B sales. In addition, you get recommendations on how sales organizations best prepare themselves for a new future full of opportunities.

A future that especially calls for a change of:

Sales strategies, sales management, sales training, sales work organization and much more...

The analysis contains data from various sources:

1. Data collected in DK (own data) respectively questionnaire + interviews
2. Research results from several international studies
3. Results and data from AMA / GSSI Executive Panels
4. Preliminary results and data from SPLASH Project (International Erasmus Project) School

Compiled by:

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Key findings

- Customers experience that they get too much irrelevant information. Instead, they lack customized and personalized content.
- Customers today have a greater willingness to make their purchases online. The limits of the complexity of the purchase are changing, meaning that customers prefer to buy more complex solutions online in fully (or partially) automated processes.
- Approximately every 4th participant in the survey has seen great reason to change their sales strategy and as many as 86% expect increased digitization within the next 2 years.
- Omni-channel sales approaches win the battle for customers as they fit customers' buying journey better.
- Sales as a team sport between departments are no longer "nice-to" but "need-to".
- Salespeople need to be clearer and more value-creating to avoid becoming irrelevant.
- It's time to rethink the role of the sales manager from leading salespeople to leading sales.
- Most sales organizations have only just begun the journey towards a completely different B2B world. The journey involves handling change and this makes a great demand on a strong culture with a common purpose.

#1

Customers have changed behavior - the most important things you should know

One of the persistent trends in B2B sales is the changing preferences of customers in relation to how they want to attend meetings.

Before the pandemic, it was the norm to meet physically in B2B sales, especially in connection with complex sales. The common opinion is that the simpler a product or a service is, the more digitized the sales process should be. In other words, simple transactions should be made online.

In the more complex world of solution- and relationship-based sales, it is common to book physical meetings (sometimes by external agencies).

The trend now is that customers increasingly prefer meetings via digital platforms - also when purchasing complex solutions. Therefore, it will be necessary for companies to adapt to a more hybrid sales model in the future.

Other recent research indicates the following trends in customers' patterns:

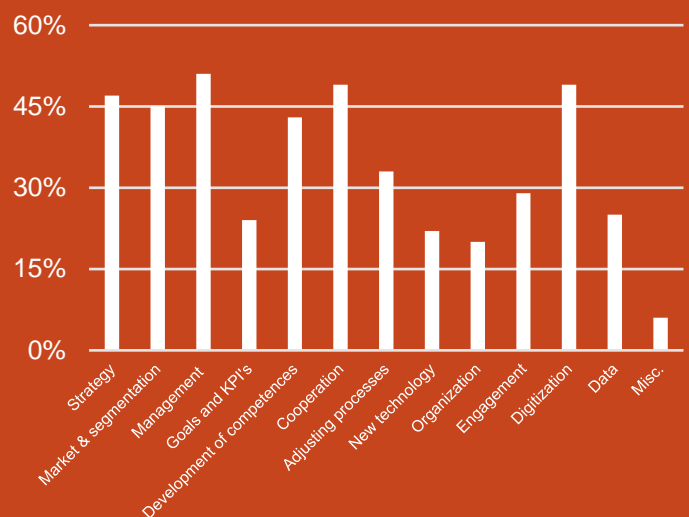
- Customers are more willing to complete transactions online than before. The limit of complexity in purchasing is shifting, so customers prefer to buy increasingly complex solutions online in fully automated processes.

- Customers experience "information overload", meaning they receive too much irrelevant information. Instead, they lack personalized content. Danish surveys confirm that customers generally experience receiving too much irrelevant information.

How companies adapt

The companies have a very diverse perception on what area is the most important to adapt to the accelerated digitization. This may be because they do not know exactly where to start the change.

What areas are the most important in order to boost sales in the coming period? (Multiple choice)



Source: The new winners of B2B sales

#1

Omni-channel sales approaches win customers

As customers expect more and more from the digital purchasing experience, most sales organizations are facing a series of changes in the sales processes.

“There seem to be two different types of organizations: those who have chosen to digitalize temporarily until they can go back to the practice that existed before the pandemic. And those who have chosen to use the crisis as a starting point for working with digitalization throughout the sales process and the sales organization, choosing to make it a permanent solution. The successful companies have apparently chosen the latter strategy.”

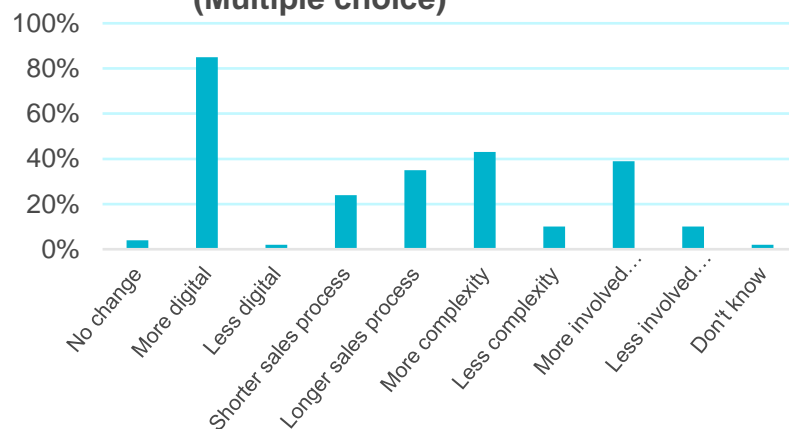
Karina Burgdorff Jensen - Sales Researcher,
Aalborg University Business School

This is also backed up by a new report by McKinsey. This report shows that customers are willing to make large purchases online or remotely. At the same time, it means a change in when buyers actually want physical visits and offline dialogue.

Thus, the future winners of B2B sales will to a much greater extent have to embrace a more hybrid approach to sales.

On the next page, we have outlined a proposal for a hybrid sales process for the complex B2B sales.

How do you expect the sales process to change over the next 2 years? (Multiple choice)



Source: The new winners of B2B sales

It is not surprising that the vast majority of organizations (86%) expect to add focus on digitalization and automation in the next two years.

Another interesting thing the survey shows is that 45% expect to adapt the sales strategy, which is a natural next step towards creating permanent change.

This may be a sign of several organizations having either already adapted their strategy and approach to sales during the crisis or have not yet embarked on this important task.

#1

Towards a more hybrid approach to sales - sales process

	SALES PROCESS	FOCUS AREA	ACTIVITIES	ONLINE / PHYSICAL / DIGITAL
NEW CUSTOMERS	IDENTIFY POSSIBLE CUSTOMERS	ONLINE / DATABASED INTERNAL	FAIRS SEO WEBINARS REFERENCES DATA COLLECTION ONLINE LEAD COLLECTION AI	PRIMARY DATABASED AND ONLINE TO A SMALLER EXENT, FAIRS AND EXHIBITIONS
	UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER'S BUSINESS	CUSTOMER SPECIFIC	VARIOUS REPORTS SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS INDUSTRY SURVEYS	ONLINE DATA-BASED
	POSITION OWN VALUE OFFER		BLOGS KNOWLEDGE SHARING SOCIAL MEDIA WEBINARS	ONLINE
	IDENTIFY AND DETERMINE COMMON OBJECTIVES	EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF IMPACT	DIALOGUE	PHYSICAL
	QUANTIFY IMPACT			PHYSICAL
NEGOTIATION AND DELIVERY			PHYSICAL	
EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF IMPACT		DATABASED	DIGITAL	
EXISTING CUSTOMERS	RE-CONTACT IN CONNECTION WITH REPURCHASE / ADDITIONAL SALE / UP SALE	BASED ON DATA, CUSTOMER SERVICE, RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	DIALOGUE	DIGITAL
	IDENTIFY AND DETERMINE COMMON OBJECTIVES	IN INTERACTION WITH THE CUSTOMER		PHYSICAL
	QUANTIFY IMPACT			DIGITAL
	NEGOTIATION AND DELIVERY			
	EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF IMPACT			

The above sales process is tailored to Value Based Selling, which is intended for complex B2B sales. In automated sales, the process looks different, just as Co-Creation sales is different from the process described.

#1

Omni-channel gains ground - from one sales process to several

After being a standard in B2C sales for many years, Omni-channel sales approaches are gaining more and more ground in B2B sales.

Professional buyers expect to be able to make their purchases at the lowest possible cost and in an efficient way.

Web-shops, quick answers to precise questions (eg. chat) and online orders are chosen when the buyers assess that the risk associated with the purchase is low.

The actual meeting with salespeople is chosen when customers experience no other options - which is why complex B2B sales have traditionally been associated with physical encounters. It has shifted as trust and transparency increase.

As a salesperson, this means that you have to make it clear how you want to create value for customers in a new reality. Traditionally, the buying experience (the seller) in the physical meetings has been the key to creating momentum.

The future winners succeed in creating value both in the buying situation (the seller), but also in the buying process itself.

Value can be created through:

- Saving time and money in the purchase itself (intelligent web-shops)
- Online training and knowledge about the products / solutions
- Easy access to knowledge and answers to fundamental things like prices, availability and delivery times
- Cases and ROI calculations

In order to be effective and "maintain control" over the most important segments, a sales manager must at the same time decide which customers should have which service level, via which channel, with which products / solutions / services and by whom in the sales team?

The prerequisite for success is when sales process and sales behavior match with the customers' buying journey.

The winners know how to adapt sales methods and approaches in sales to the customers' preferences.

Examples of different approaches:

Customers primarily want to buy through online channels

Then we have a tailored sales approach for this type of sale, which minimizes "transaction costs for both us and the customer". E.g., automated communication via mail flows.

Customers want a hybrid approach when they order based on advice

Then we have a sales approach which involves a customer meeting with a product expert who can guide the customer in solutions.

Customers want to be challenged on their choices and get inspiration on what they should do

Then we have a sales process that includes several steps along the way, driven by a salesperson who focuses on understanding the customer's needs in the short and long term as well as on designing solutions that match the need.

The advantages of working with a more tailored approach are that we find the right tool for the job, and we ensure using sales muscles where customers experience the most value and the highest benefit.

#2

Sales as a team sport

A study by Gartner shows that only 17% of the buying journey is spent on interaction with a seller. The switch to more omni-channel sales approaches also means that the seller is not as directly in interaction with the buyer as before.

Today, there are far more switches between digital channels and interaction with the seller in an efficient shopping journey than before. A change which means that sale is not done alone but has to a greater extent become a team sport.

The best sales organizations have long ago recognized that large parts of the organization are involved in developing and enabling sales, rather than sales depending on individuals.

Traditionally, a sales organization that needs to sell more would go directly to discussing efforts, goals, campaigns, and sales competencies. Sales research shows that it's worthwhile analyzing and understanding a handful of crucial areas to ensure that you make the right choices and enable the changes needed to strengthen sales.

When you look into which activities sales organizations plan to spend the most resources on for the next two years (see graph to the right), being able to drive sales as a team sport is crucial to succeed in winning the future B2B sales. This because all areas require collaboration across functions and departments.

On the next page, we have collected the most important areas that sales organizations should work on in a structured way in the future.

On which activities do you plan to spend most resources (time and money) over the next two years?



#2

Build a smooth selling machine as one team

Sales research shows that successful sales organizations work together as one team across departments such as; IT, marketing, R&D, sales, internal sales, technicians / specialists etc. Customers are affected by the collaboration of many departments during a buying journey - especially when the journey is more digitally driven.

In order to create a strong team across departments, sales organizations should consciously work in the following 5 areas, to create smooth buying experiences and sales opportunities:

Sales access and customer journey:

Do the sales approach and experience match the customers' new buying behavior and wishes?

Leadership:

Success requires structured development of the sales organization as well as KPIs and incentives that enable cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Collaboration and processes:

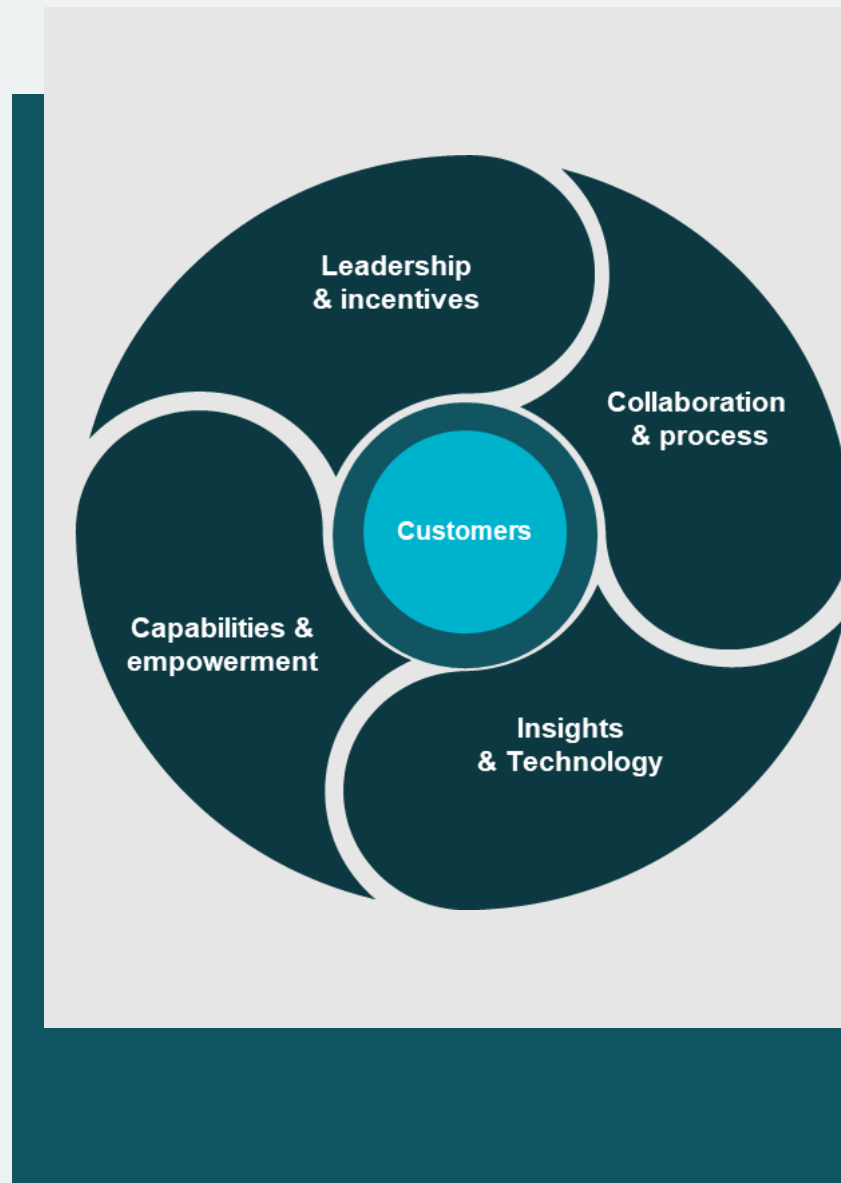
Inefficient processes are the root of all evil. The goal is to create fluent and effective communication and collaboration across the organization.

Tools and technologies:

Do we use the right technologies, and do we have the sales analysis tools needed in order to sell effectively?

Competences and decision-making power:

Do we have the right skills and the decision-making power close to the customer, which creates a smooth customer journey?



#3

Salespeople need to be precise and value-creating

43% of the respondents in our survey believe that the development of sales competences is one of the most important areas for boosting sales in the coming period.

The 2 primary reasons are that the salesperson's role is transforming, and many sales organizations have not had the desired effect of developing the competencies they believe will be needed in future sales.

When asked about the benefits of sales training, only 26% say they get the desired effect to either a high degree or a very high degree. 47% say to some degree, while 12% say to a lesser degree or not at all. This may be because they are training the wrong things, or the organization is standing in the way of an actual change.

Few have the right foundation in place when developing salespeople's competences.

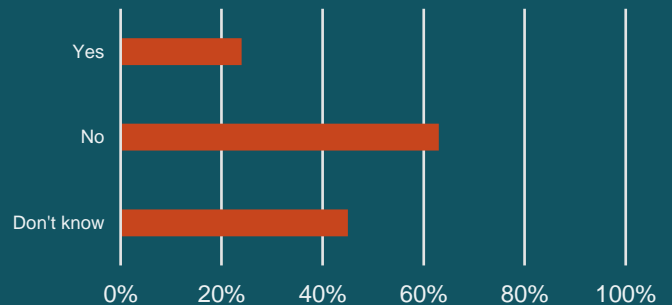
There is a vast number of well-known sales methods - in fact over 200 different kinds. A sales method covers fully described concepts for sales. The methods have different characteristics and are targeted for different sales situations.

You can compare them to playing styles in football: Some teams play very ball-possessing, while others bet on counters. Others play with high pressure all over the field, etc. Football coaches are very aware of the choice of playing style based on a philosophy of how they want to play.

Other coaches adapt the style of play to the opponent they face, and finally there are those who choose the style of play based on what matches the available player material on the team.

The challenge is that many sales organizations have not chosen which way they want to play - the sales method.

Are salespeople trained in selling in a particular sales method?



Source: The new winners of B2B sales

It is important to note that 63% do not use a particular sales method, even though it has been proven that it increases sales significantly.

Secondly, the 24% who has a dedicated method uses methods that are outdated (for the most part), and which are primarily suitable for simple sales, which due to digitalization should be sold online. This means that many will potentially face a huge competence gap in the future.

#4

It's time to rethink the role of the sales manager

When it turns out that a vast majority of organizations (75%) expect to have additional focus on digitalization and automation in the following two years, it is relevant to look at what is crucial to succeed in changing the way we do sales in the future.

And that is sales management and how we manage sales!

Because in most sales organizations, the sales manager role is centered around the salespeople. But going forward, the role is just as much about leading sales as a function, as sales in a more digital world is not only handled by salespeople.

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Sales research shows that successful sales managers not only lead the salespeople, but sales as a function. This means that they take ownership of the entire buying journey rather than just managing the seller's activities. It's a big transition for many sales managers”

Karina Burgdorf Jensen, Sales Researcher,
Aalborg University Business School

In complex B2B sales, up to 80% of the customer journey is completed before the seller becomes involved. Wonder why?

If the salesperson had created value for the customer along the way and assisted in navigating through the "information overload" instead of pleasing a dashboard with KPIs counting "number of closed x", the salesperson would probably have been invited onboard the customer journey earlier.

The difference lies not only in being strong in the traditional sales manager role with follow-up, goal setting and being a valuable sparring partner for the salespeople, etc. But to a greater extent to be able to understand and drive the digital sales channels going forward.

Because even though many sales managers measure their sales on "number of meetings", "number of order lines", "number of contracts" or "number of millions", sales are increasingly about being able to help the customer move forward in the buying journey.

It takes a completely new set of competences and change of mindset, where it is important to understand that the future of selling is about leading sales on the entire customer's buying journey rather than just leading the salesperson.

The very part of "managing sales" through pipelines, dashboards and KPIs can also get "a notch up" in complexity, as more tailored and different sales processes can not be managed in the same pipelines.

Likewise, the greater integration of other departments means that more transverse goals / KPIs are an advantage for creating a common direction and focus.

#5

Focus on mental health and a strong culture



Across national borders, studies show that the mental health and job satisfaction of salespeople and sales managers are challenged by more virtual sales.

The combination of a transformation of sales and the sales role in terms of accelerated digitalization, and that many salespeople's everyday lives have changed and will change significantly in the coming years, forms the breeding ground for growing uncertainty.

Many salespeople long to get back on the road and visit customers. Unfortunately for salespeople, customers are no longer as ready to meet face to face.

It challenges the mental aspects of many external salespeople, and here leadership is crucial to help them thrive in a new everyday life without a desire to return to the old normal.

At the same time, leaders are the primary culture carriers. Therefore, it is important to ensure that they have the skills to develop and maintain a new sales culture in the organization, where sales are no longer about individuals, but much more about a community that aims to help the customer buy.

Some leaders have the needed skills, while others need help.

Understanding the importance of culture as well as skills in communicating and driving change is crucial here in order to ensure a common understanding that changes do not have to be dangerous or bad, but rather exciting and evolving.

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is looking intently at someone whose hands are visible in the foreground. The scene is dimly lit with a blue tint. The word "INTENZ" is overlaid in white, italicized, sans-serif font.

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