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# Sales Science-led Growth: Session 1

**History lesson and current issues:  
Salespeople versus Technology, or  
Salesmen and Technology?**

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# Salespeople versus Technology, or Salesmen and Technology?

An article published in 1997 (Samli et al., 1997) states that the so-called 'information superhighway' has much potential for industrial sales transactions. The authors describe a set of advantages and disadvantages when selling companies would jump on the internet train. One key take-away from this article is that 23 years ago, we were already in an era of continuous technology innovations. Back then, the authors were using the success of PCs and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) as a backbone to their claim that the internet would be revolutionary.

However, they also warned of the negative implications of extensive use of the internet by sales organizations. Surprisingly, some of these drawbacks are still an issue today, not to call them an even bigger issue. One pinpointed problem is user unfriendliness. We cite the following sentence: "you have to learn how to sort through the garbage to get to the gems (p. 56)." This issue has been on most IT-providers' agenda, but we are still trying to sort the good from the bad information. More worrying is their call for face-to-face interaction. The authors stress the need for human interaction. As a third point -here to stay- a drawback of the internet is the fraudulent use or criminal access.

## On the positive angle of this technological revolution

Now, on the positive angle of this technological revolution, the scholars shined a light on how sales managers should "put more emphasis on the development of their information workers in their new role as first-line direct communications specialists with customers. Information workers will be forced to become even more versatile and upgrade their communication skills (verbal and written communications, greater diplomacy, and greater awareness to use nontechnical words) (p. 58)." The authors continue with the need for change at the salesperson level.

Salespeople still need to qualify leads and close deals, but the sharing of basic information might disappear. For the international B2B salespeople, the prediction was that they need to focus on developing their prospecting and interpersonal communications skills to persuade the prospect into two-way communication. The sales transaction process changes also require changes in sales training, recruitment, remuneration, and motivation techniques.



# Business-wide perspective of sales transformations and leadership

Exploring a subsequent article five years later (Ahearne & Schillewaert, 2001), sales automation was trending. The outcome of the research on 'selling smart' is that salespeople first need to accept the use of technology - what later in research became known as the technology acceptance model- to see the positive effects of that technology on sales performance.

In 2008, Ahearne et al. examined how the use of technology might improve the salesperson performance but looks at how IT is improving customer service and adaptability, which then positively impacts the performance of the salesperson. The authors found no significant effect on IT and performance, which means that just using technology does not automatically lead to better sales performance.

Moving on to more recent research, a couple of articles from 2020 conceptualizes Sales Enablement to develop a framework for technology adaption and dynamic capabilities in sales, to meet evolving customer demands and increasing technological advantages (Peterson et al., 2020; Rangarajan et al., 2020). Firms must combine knowledge from various sources to align internal and external processes and use insights and channels to enable and support the sales force. The sales enablement process has become even more relevant as digitalization, and technological developments have developed. The interesting and novel approach presented in these articles is the holistic and business-wide perspective of sales transformations and

leadership. In this, technology is the catalyst for firm-wide change towards true customer-centricity.

Last, an article from 2020 (Pullins et al., 2020) about techno-stress in sales addresses the sometimes overlooked but very relevant dark side of sales technology. This study shows that the implementation of sales technologies potentially negatively affects job satisfaction and increases job stress levels for salespeople. Firms must, therefore, consider this when working with sales tech to ensure an acceptable job-environments.

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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 man's expression is focused and attentive. The hands in the foreground are clasped together, suggesting a meeting or a collaborative effort.

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