

Transforming the Business of Selling

Executive Summary

As a sales leader, what keeps you up at night? Lengthening sales cycles? Missed forecasts? Ineffective sales content? The inability to retain sales talent?

The good news: there are several proven strategies you can use to help your sales team meet these challenges head on and improve the performance of your sales organization.

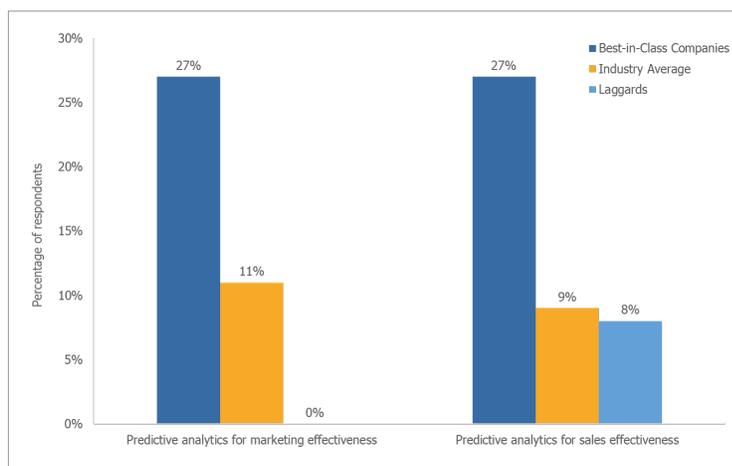
In a recent webinar, Peter Ostrow, Vice President and Research Group Director, Sales Effectiveness and Customer Management for Aberdeen Group, and Michael Schultz, Vice President of Marketing and Business Development at ClearSlide, outlined the practices best-in-class sales organizations¹ employ to ensure their teams perform optimally, and have access to the right content and tools to engage prospects and customers.

This paper highlights findings from Aberdeen Group's research on best-in-class sales organizations. You can view the full webinar at <http://pages.clearslide.com/resources-webinar-on-demand-transforming-the-business-of-selling.html>.

Why are Sales Cycles So Long?

In a recent survey of leading sales organizations, Aberdeen Group asked sales leaders what business pressures keep them awake at night. The number one pressure, by far, is concern about lengthening sales cycles that can impact revenue.

More than a third of respondents said they worry their forecasting is suffering from arbitrary input and inaccurate activity data. For many, this concern is rooted in the lack of data on buyer behavior and not knowing which content and campaigns are most effective in nurturing prospects to close.



Aberdeen Group found that leading sales organizations accelerate their sales cycle by using analytics to track the effectiveness of sales content. In fact, they are three times more likely to use analytics to improve the quality of their marketing content and overall sales effectiveness.

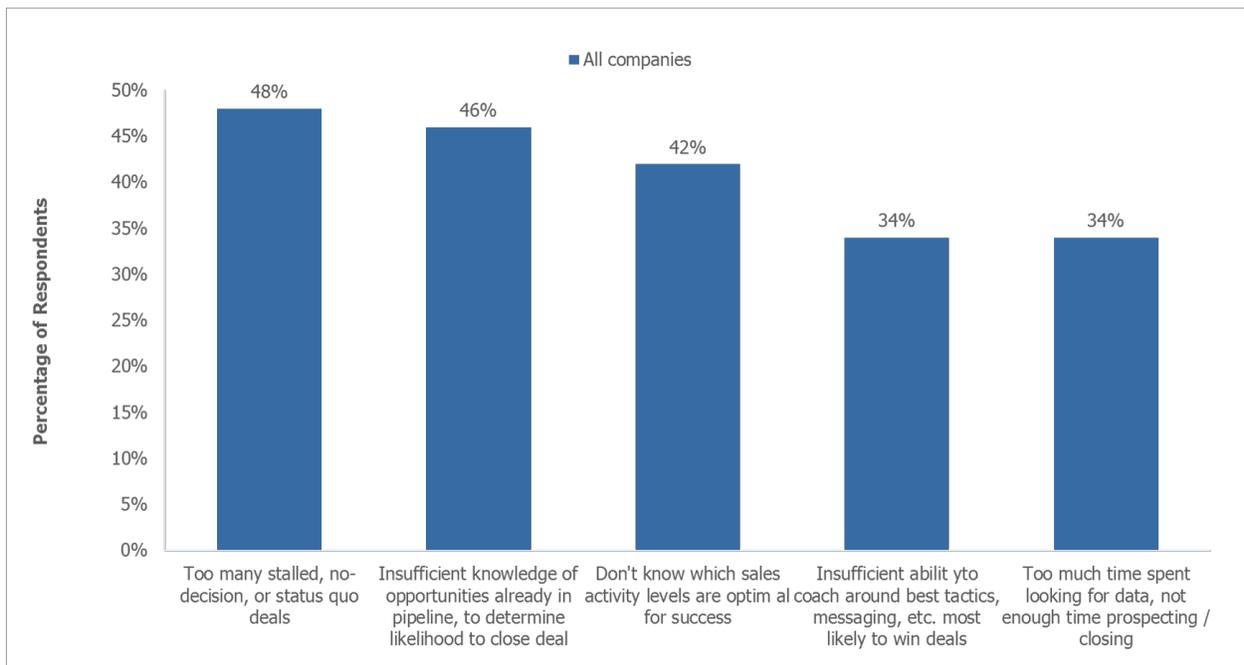
¹ Aberdeen Group surveyed more than 330 sales organizations and gathered detailed performance metrics. Aberdeen used the performance metrics to rank the organizations in terms of overall corporate performance. Best-in-Class Organizations were defined as the top 20% in aggregate corporate performance scores, Industry Average as the middle 50% of performance, and Laggards as the bottom 30% of performance. For example, Best in Class Organizations categorized in this maturity class have at least 72 percent of sales reps achieving quota, and have experienced 7.4 percent year-over-year growth in average deal size, and a 6.7 percent year-over-year improvement (reduction) in their average sales cycle, among other criteria.

With data-driven insights, sales reps can engage prospects with intelligence, instead of guesswork, and course correct with customers in real time. Ultimately, this can help to shorten sales cycles: Aberdeen Group reports that the average sales cycle for best-in-class organizations is 16 percent shorter than that of laggards.

“ *The average sales cycle for best-in-class organizations is 16 percent shorter than that of laggards.* ”

Identifying Sales Best Practices

Aberdeen Group asked respondents to identify the speed bumps that interfere with accurate sales forecasting. Forty-two percent cited not knowing which sales activity levels are optimal for success. And more than a third said insufficient ability to coach sales reps on what tactics to use when engaging with prospects was a factor undermining the quality of their sales forecasts.

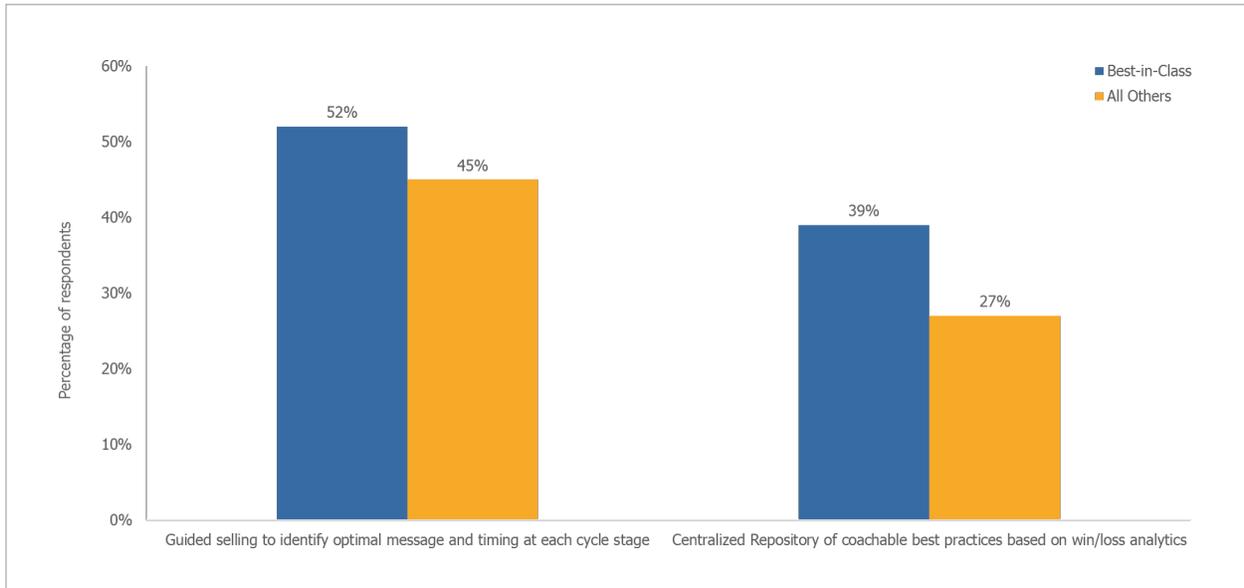


Delivering the right message to the right target at the right time can make all the difference in the ability to engage prospects — and ultimately, close deals. A formal guided selling methodology can help to ensure sales reps’ success. Best-in-class sales organizations understand this; in fact, Aberdeen Group found that these organizations are 15 percent more likely than underperformers to use guided selling to identify optimal messaging and timing at each stage of the sales cycle.

Best-in-class sales organizations are also 1.4x more likely to identify and scale their best practices. They make sure their sales reps can find and leverage content proven successful in closing deals, and also eliminate content that does not resonate with customers and prospects.

Best-in-class sales organizations are also more likely to maintain a centralized repository of best practices based on win-loss analytics. So, here again, leading sales organizations are using

data-driven insights to identify the highest yielding activities and tactics and replicate across sales teams.



“ *Best-in-class sales organizations are 1.4x more likely to identify and scale their best practices.* ”

Aligning Sales Content to the Buyers’ Journey

According to recent research by Forrester, 75 percent of executives feel they receive too much sales content from vendors — and 62 percent do not find the content useful.² And research by SiriusDecisions found that 65 percent of content created by marketing for sellers never gets used.³

Best-in-class sales organizations surveyed by Aberdeen Group clearly understand the importance of making sure that their marketing content will resonate with customers — and not go to waste.

For example, Aberdeen Group reports that top-performing sales organizations optimize ROI and sales effectiveness by ensuring their marketing content is aligned to buyer personas as well as to the buyer’s journey. In fact:

- 86 percent of top performers are more likely than underperformers to align marketing content with the specific buyer personas they sell to. They make a point not to use the same collateral for every buyer in every market, industry, vertical, and geographical location.
- 79 percent are more likely than underperformers to align their content specifically with the buyer’s journey.

“ *Top performers are 1.4x more likely to align marketing content with specific stages of the sales cycle.* ”

² Making Sales Conversations an Integral Part of Content Marketing, Forrester.

³ SiriusDecisions Summit.

Providing Mobile Access to Sales Content

Mobile access to sales content has evolved from a “nice to have” capability to a business imperative. Best-in-class sales organizations ensure sales teams have anytime-anywhere-any device access sales content, according to Aberdeen Group.

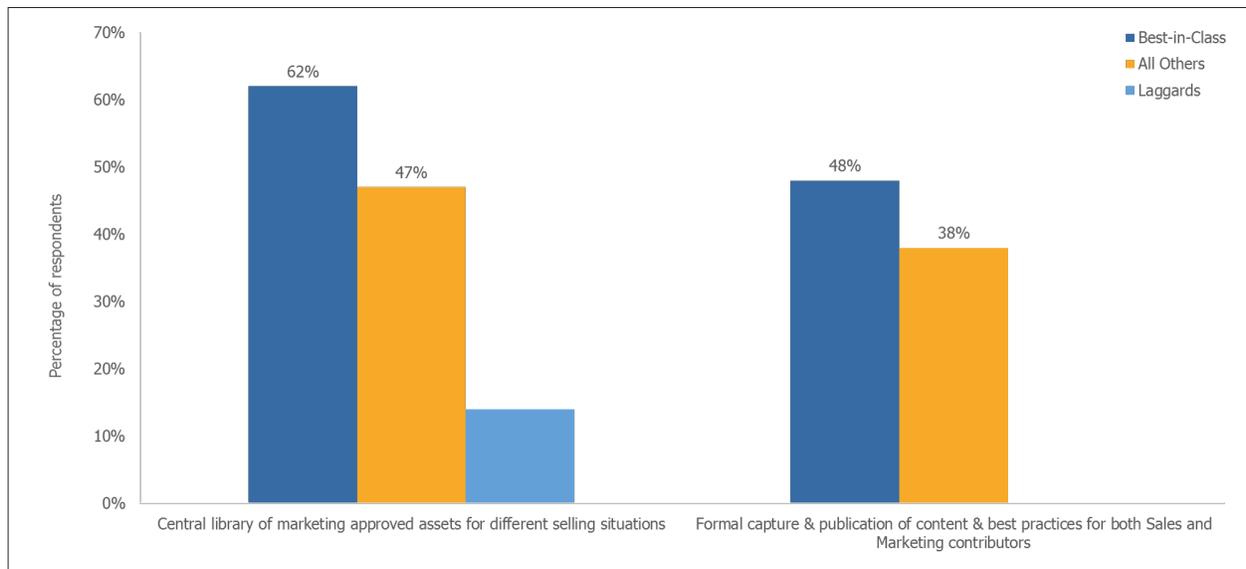
“*Mobile access to sales content reduces sales cycles significantly.*”

Mobile access to sales content makes sales teams more productive, and thus more effective. Best-in-class organizations that provide mobile access to sales content achieved a 2.75x greater reduction in their sales cycle compared to all other organizations included in Aberdeen Group’s research. These teams also have reps who are twice as likely to achieve their quotas.

Centralizing Content, Then Customizing

Consider how much time your sales reps typically spend on administrative tasks, data entry, and searching for information when they could be selling. Aberdeen Group found that sales reps spend 22 percent of their time, on average, searching for content – that is roughly 440 hours per year of unproductive time. It’s no wonder that sales reps only spend 35 percent of their time interacting with customers.⁴

Best-in-class sales organizations make it easy for sales reps to quickly access and leverage marketing-approved content that is known to work. In fact, top performers are 4.4x more likely to have approved content that is centralized. According to the Aberdeen Group research, a majority (62 percent) maintain a central library of marketing-approved assets for different selling situations.

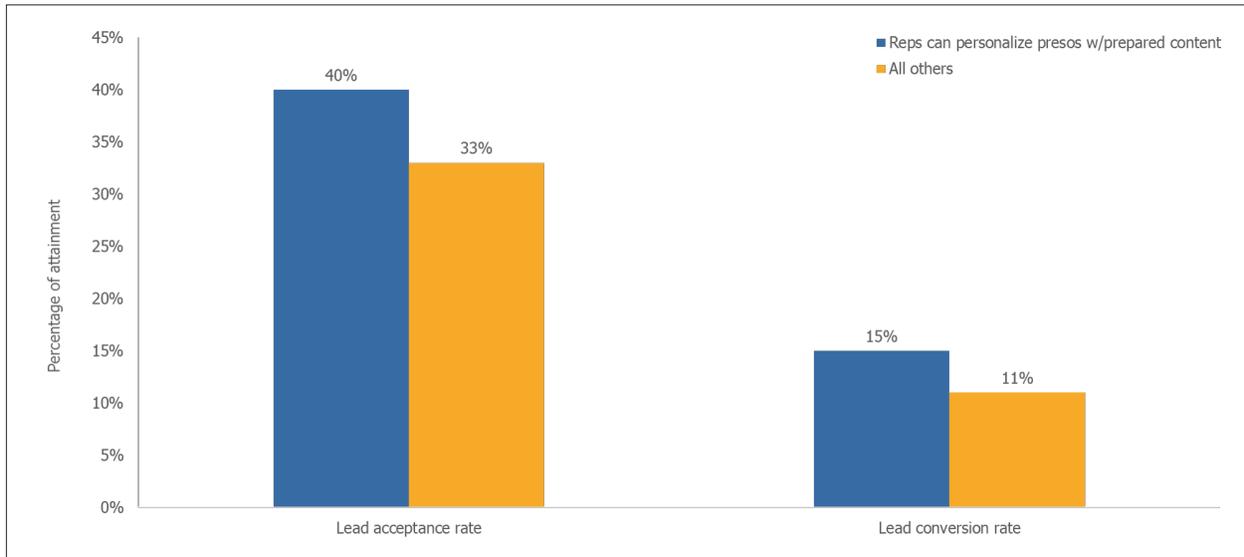


“*Top performers are 4.4x more likely to have a central library of marketing-approved assets.*”

Centralized approved content libraries ensure that companies equip their sales teams with current and consistent messaging about products, services, and brands, and that content that is truly aligned to buyers’ needs through the journey.

⁴ Sales Performance Optimization Study, Accenture and CSO Insights.

The ability to customize sales content for specific prospects and clients is also critical to success. Aberdeen Group's research found that personalizing sales presentations with prepared content results in a 1.3x improvement in lead conversion rates.



Top-performing organizations are also more likely than laggards to have extensive visibility into how prospects and customers are engaging with sales content and other assets. Best-in-class sales organizations are 1.2x more likely to have and use customer engagement data, compared to other organizations.

These leading sales teams, armed with insights on how customers are engaging with content, also have the ability to adjust and customize their messaging in real time in response to that customer behavior.

“ *Enabling reps to personalize sales presentations with prepared content increases lead conversion rates by 1.3x.* ”

“ *Best-in-class sales organizations are 1.2x more likely to have and use customer engagement data.* ”

Making Faster Decisions and Scaling Sales Teams

Best-in-class organizations are better at prioritizing leads, and have a better pulse on when deals are likely to close. They are 1.4x more likely to walk away from deals unlikely to close. By making faster decisions to disqualify dead-end deals, sales reps can devote more time and energy to pursuing the most promising opportunities.

Another differentiator for leading sales organizations: they can gauge which reps are likely to have the highest growth potential. Aberdeen Group found that best-in-class sales organizations are 2.6x better at identifying best practices from top-performing reps and quickly scale best practices across teams.

Transforming into a Best-in-Class Sales Organization

Sales and marketing teams are facing unprecedented pressure to grow revenue and operate more efficiently. The biggest inhibitors to their sales effectiveness are improving forecast accuracy, increasing rep productivity, and managing sales team turnover. Best-in-class organizations have tackled these challenges and provided their teams with:

- Recommended content based on best practices and win/loss analysis
- A centralized repository of content that is accessible from anywhere, including mobile
- Insights into customers' response to content across communication channels
- The ability to customize content based on customer interaction and engagement analytics

Identifying and recommending content for sales not only saves time but also allows reps to focus on understanding and responding more effectively to customer needs. Real-time insight into customer engagement allows reps to make more informed, real-time decisions about what is working — and what is not. They can concentrate on the most engaged prospects and walk away from opportunities least likely to close. And sales leaders can quickly identify the activities and strategies of top performers, and then scale these learnings across their organizations.

Investing in a Sales Engagement Platform can help accelerate the transformation into a best-in-class sales organization. Learn how Lamar Advertising transformed their Sales Organization [in this video](#).

About ClearSlide

ClearSlide is the leading Sales Engagement Platform that powers valuable, genuine business conversations and enables sales, marketing, and customer success teams to achieve better business outcomes. ClearSlide improves customer communications (phone, email, face-to-face) by providing real-time visibility and analytics for sales and marketing leaders. As a result, customers achieve higher seller productivity, increased sales management effectiveness, and stronger customer-facing messaging. Founded in 2009 and headquartered in San Francisco, ClearSlide serves thousands of customers, including Comcast, LinkedIn, Medtronic, Rackspace, SurveyMonkey, The Economist, Thomson Reuters, and more.

The ClearSlide platform gives sales and marketing leaders ability to interact with insight by seeing the real-time activity of their teams and deep analytics about the types of content that ultimately is most impactful with customers. For sales professionals, ClearSlide allows for easy communication with customers and prospects, whether online or in-person, using ClearSlide's web-based and mobile applications. Please visit www.ClearSlide.com for more information or follow the company on Twitter [@ClearSlide](#).

About Aberdeen

Aberdeen Group is a technology and marketing services company that helps tech sales and marketing executives distill smart data and analytics into actionable moments. They help companies win through unique targeting capabilities (using the CI Technology Data Set), advanced analytics using innovative proprietary and public data sources, and their original and research based content engine. Learn more about Aberdeen Group at www.aberdeenservices.com.