

How B2B Sellers Win In The Age Of The Customer

Evolved Selling Creates Lucrative And
Loyal Relationships

Table Of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Overview Of Terminology	2
Evolved Selling Influences Business Purchase Decisions More Than Buyers Realize	3
Evolved Sellers Drive Business Results	5
To Reach Evolved Status, Sellers Need The Right Tools	7
Key Recommendations	10
Appendix A: Methodology	11
Appendix B: Supplemental Material	11
Appendix C: Endnotes	12

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Project Director: Karin Fenty, Senior Market Impact Consultant
Contributing Research: Forrester's B2B Marketing research group

Executive Summary

Business-to-business (B2B) buyers are fundamentally shifting how, when, and where they engage with prospective suppliers and partners. Sellers are no longer the sole conduits of information, making it even more critical for them to have high-quality interactions when engaging with customers and prospects. To win, serve, and retain customers in this environment, sales and marketing resources must be knowledgeable about their clients' specific business needs and deliver value and insights at every intersection point. With 74% of business buyers inclined to buy from sellers that provide a new insight about the customer's business and a clear path to capitalize on that vision, sellers need to be armed with a new type of selling solution that enables them to be nimble and engaging in their customer interactions.¹ Unfortunately, most of today's sales forces are ill equipped to sell in this dynamic, insights-driven, and nonlinear fashion.

In July 2016, Mediafly commissioned Forrester Consulting to analyze how B2B sellers' approaches to in-person sales interactions have an impact on their success. To further explore this topic, Forrester developed a hypothesis asserting that the most successful sales and marketing organizations will seek capabilities that connect sellers to the right information at the right time, enabling their frontline selling resources to add more value in their sales meetings.

Evolved sales organizations embrace scalable selling platforms to enable salespeople to deliver real-time, relevant, and custom insights when meeting with customers and prospects.

In conducting in-depth surveys with 152 business buyers and 150 quota-carrying sales professionals, Forrester found that sales forces that achieve "evolved selling" accelerate deal velocity, increase cross-sell conversions, drive repeat business, and foster customer advocacy. To embrace evolved selling, companies need easy-to-use technologies that will help them create compelling, interactive experiences in their sales meetings in order to turn prospects into lucrative and loyal customers.

KEY FINDINGS

Forrester's study yielded four key findings:

- › **Evolved selling accelerates deal velocity.** We compared three seller segments (Static, Transitional, and Evolved — see Figure 1 on the next page for definitions) and found that Evolved Sellers are highly successful in closing deals. Out of the last 10 initial in-person meetings that sales professionals held with customers/prospects, Evolved Sellers closed 1.3 to 1.8 more deals on average than Transitional and Static Sellers, respectively. Additionally, Evolved Sellers consider it significantly easier than other groups to accelerate the velocity of deal closure.
- › **Evolved selling increases cross-sell transactions.** Nothing says "successful sale" like a buyer increasing their budget to work with a trusted partner. In our survey, we saw that nearly half of business buyers (44%) that recently purchased from Evolved Sellers said their organization purchased additional products or services that were not originally in scope — a 70% lift over buyers that purchased from nonevolved sellers.
- › **Evolved selling drives repeat business and customer advocacy.** Interactive and engaging sales interactions resonate throughout the customer relationship and even beyond. Business buyers that recently purchased from Evolved Sellers are 82% more likely to consider that company for other business opportunities, compared with buyers that purchased from nonevolved sellers. Additionally, 50% of Evolved Sellers find it easy to get clients to deliver named testimonials and/or case studies, compared with just 34% of Transitional Sellers and only 18% of Static Sellers.
- › **Evolved selling is available to sellers of all skill levels.** In an increasingly challenging marketplace, B2B sellers can materially benefit from an easy-to-use platform for presenting dynamic, engaging content. Four out of five (81%) consider easy-to-use solutions critical to their success. They also want a platform that offers easy sharing and collaboration with customers, data and analytics functionality, and features that differentiate their selling stories in today's increasingly knowledgeable and self-directed B2B buyers.

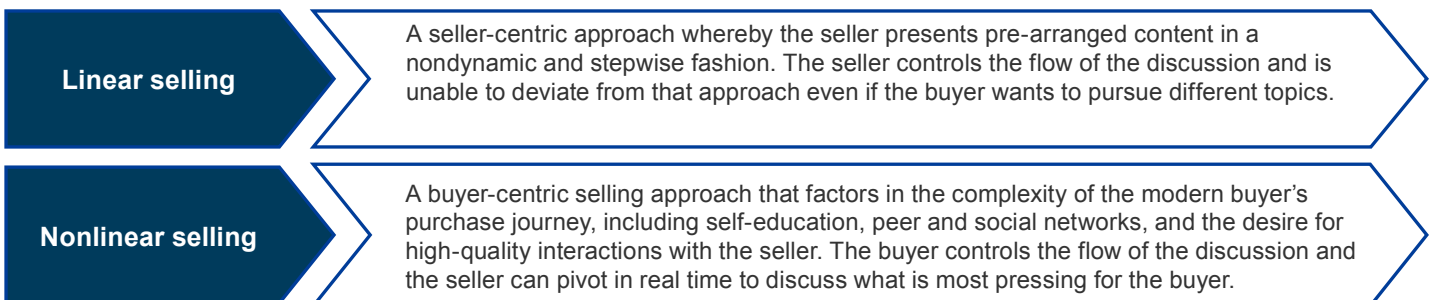
Overview Of Terminology

Throughout this paper, we will use a handful of terms to describe various sales approaches and strategies (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Overview Of The Terminology Used In This Paper

Selling Models			
	Static	Transitional	Evolved
Rely on email or content repositories such as cloud-based sharing tools, corporate folders, or intranet sites to prepare sales materials.	✓	✗	✗
Use modern technologies such as sales content apps to prepare and present sales materials on any device.	✗	✓	✓
Sellers typically employ these approaches and capabilities : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivot sales conversations in real time to focus on what is most relevant to the buyer by compiling potentially relevant content in their selling platform. • Use interactive sales tools (e.g., calculators, comparison tools) to get input from buyers during the sales interaction and deliver insights in real time. • Leverage third-party data to create custom insights about the customer's/prospect's specific business situation. • Integrate selling platform with CRM systems in order to analyze the impact that specific content, stories, or types of interactions have on sales results. 	✗	✗	✓

Other Terminology



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

Evolved Selling Influences Business Purchase Decisions More Than Buyers Realize

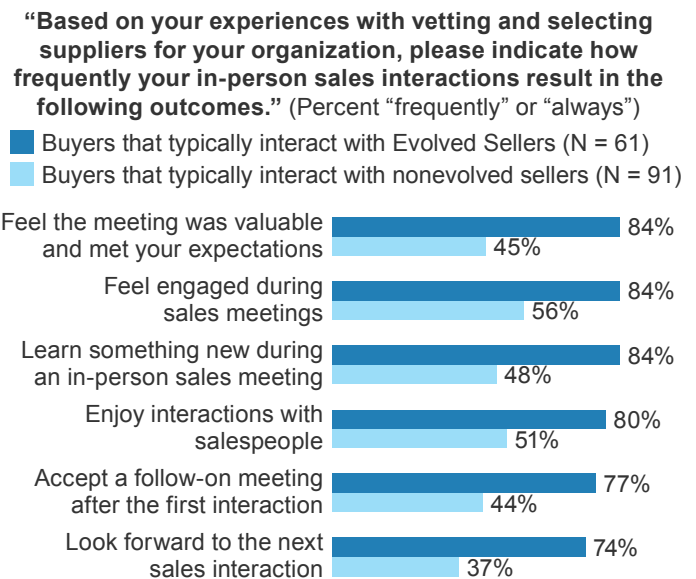
The proliferation of digital information has created new imperatives for B2B sales organizations. Most buyers do their own research on potential suppliers and partners before a salesperson can make a first connection. “Show up and throw up”—where the seller does most of the speaking and presents a standard pitch without much customization or insight into the customer’s or prospect’s specific business needs — no longer works in this environment of informed and empowered buyers. Sellers need to demonstrate their understanding of buyers’ specific needs and prove their value by engaging in interactive, fact-based discussions about how their products, services, and solutions can have an impact on the buyer’s business. To do this, many sellers will need to evolve.

To understand how more evolved selling approaches have an impact on buyers’ perceptions and behaviors, Forrester reviewed its existing research and conducted a survey of 152 buyers at medium-, large-, and enterprise-scale companies in the US. We found that:

- › **B2B buyers are fundamentally shifting how, when, and where they engage with prospective suppliers.** Today’s business buyers prefer to educate themselves about potential suppliers for business purchases before engaging directly with salespeople. More than half (59%) of buyers say they prefer not to interact with sales reps as their primary source of research, and 53% believe that gathering their own information online — via sellers’ and third-party websites, social media, ratings and reviews, etc. — is superior to talking to sellers.² When a seller finally gets their foot in the door, they should assume the buyer has already done their research and come prepared to have a more customized and interactive discussion. A linear pitch deck with minor modifications from one meeting to the next will not cut it in this environment.
- › **Buyers that interact with Evolved Sellers are more likely to be engaged during sales interactions.** Unfortunately, many buyers are forced to sit through unengaging sales meetings: 37% of our survey respondents said that most often, salespeople present their standard pitch without much customization. However, 40% of buyers frequently interact with “Evolved Sellers”: sellers that use advanced technology to support the in-person selling experience to easily pivot sales

discussions depending on their audience’s questions and interests, and can seamlessly share compelling and relevant data to tailor the interaction. In comparing buyers with different experiences, we found that buyers that interact more frequently with Evolved Sellers are much more engaged throughout the sales process. For example, they are 75% more likely to accept a follow-on meeting and twice as likely to look forward to the next sales interaction, compared with buyers that typically interact with nonevolved sellers (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Frequent Interactions With Evolved Sellers Make For More Engaged Buyers



Base: variable business-buyers with decision-making responsibility for products/services that require in-person selling

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

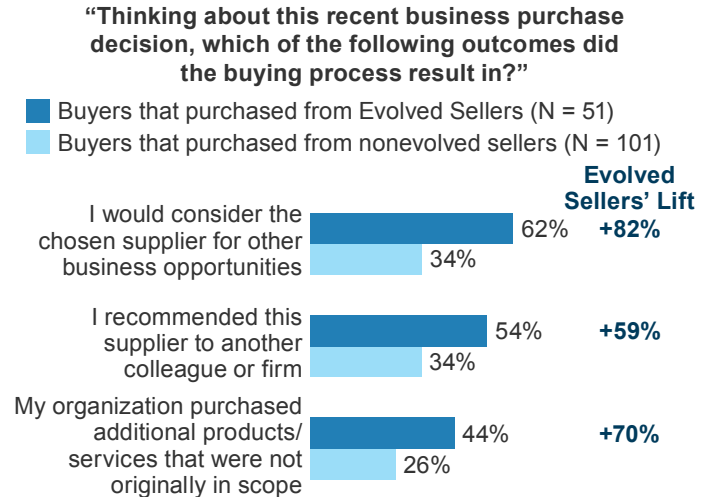
Buyers are two times more likely to look forward to the next sales interaction with an Evolved Seller than a nonevolved seller.

› **Evolved selling leads to cross-sell/upsell, repeat purchases, and increased buyer advocacy.** In our survey, about a third (34%) of recent business purchases resulted from interactions with Evolved Sellers.³ While evolved selling is not the predominant approach today, our analysis showed that it is highly influential in shaping strong customer relationships via repeat purchases and referrals and in capitalizing on cross-sell and upsell opportunities (see Figure 3). While buyers may not explicitly realize the full extent to which evolved selling influences their pre- and post-purchase behaviors, their actions around follow-on spend and advocacy amplify the commercial impact of this approach for the selling organization.

Evolved selling yields commercial gains, correlating with likelihood to buy, cross-sell transactions, and longer contracts.

› **All else being equal, three out of four business buyers are more likely to buy from Evolved Sellers.** Though buyers expectedly reported price, service and support, and solution capabilities as their top purchase drivers, evolved selling moves the needle for most buyers. Roughly three out of four buyers said they would be more likely to buy from a company that employed a range of evolved selling approaches (see Figure 4).

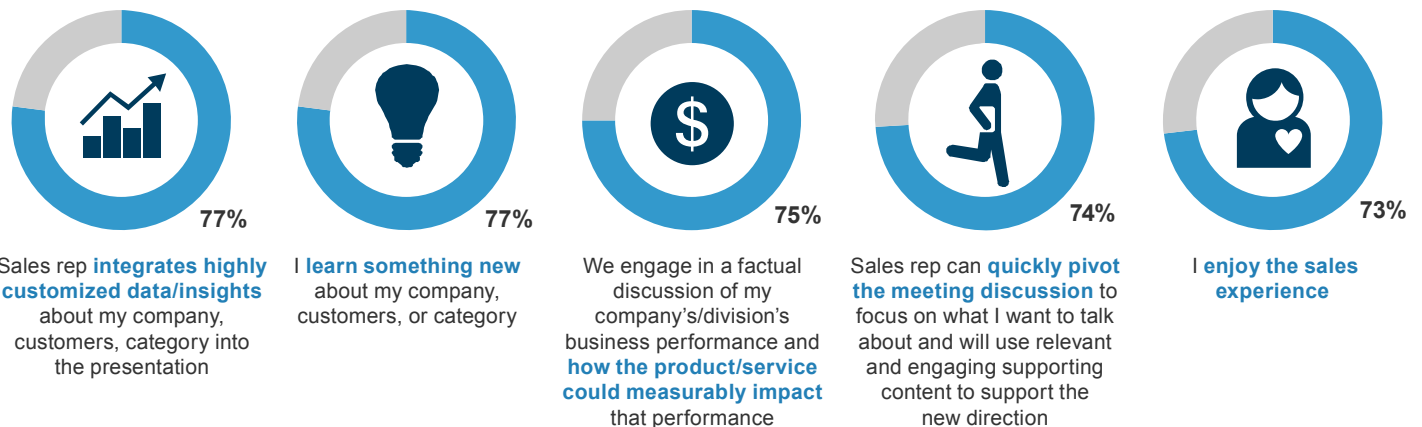
FIGURE 3
Buyers Indicated That Evolved Selling Approaches Led To Bigger Contracts And Future Opportunities



Base: variable business-buyers with decision-making responsibility for products/services that require in-person selling
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

FIGURE 4
Interactive, Insightful, And Data-Driven Sales Experiences Will Move The Needle For Buyers Trying To Choose Between Similar Offerings

“All else being equal, to what extent would the following in-person sales experiences have an impact on your likelihood to buy from a company?” (Percent much more or somewhat more likely to buy)



Base: 152 business-buyers with decision-making responsibility for products/services that require in-person selling
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

Evolved Sellers Drive Business Results

Buyers favor sellers that demonstrate a deep understanding of their company's business needs and create dynamic, interactive experiences throughout the sales process. Our buyer survey showed that evolved selling positively correlates with buyer engagement, cross-sell and upsell, repeat purchases, and advocacy — but do sellers see the impact in their individual effectiveness or in broader business metrics?

Our survey of 150 quota-carrying sales professionals sought to explore the prevalence and effectiveness of three defined selling models.

At the highest level of maturity, Evolved Sellers rely on sales content apps — native desktop or mobile/tablet apps for finding, assembling, and presenting sales content — to create dynamic, engaging, and data-driven interactions with buyers. By assembling relevant modules of sales content into a sales story in the app in advance of their meetings, weaving data-driven insights into their sales stories and leveraging interactive elements — such as calculators and comparison tools — Evolved Sellers are able to engage in high-value conversations and adapt on the fly to buyers' nonlinear way of assimilating information.

At the next level, Transitional Sellers are beginning to embrace new technologies such as sales content apps but are still stuck in the linear, “show up and throw up” mode.

Finally, Static Sellers have not yet embraced new technologies and lack the capabilities to create dynamic, interactive in-person selling experiences. Our analysis revealed that:

- › **Only 28% of today's B2B sellers use an evolved approach to in-person selling.** About half (47%) met our definition of Transitional Sellers, and the remaining 25% are Static Sellers. However, nearly nine out of 10 companies we surveyed are not embracing all of the characteristics of a fully evolved selling model. Though 28% meet our minimum criteria for being Evolved Sellers — using at least one nonlinear selling approach — only 11% use all four of the evolved approaches we defined.⁴
- › **Evolved Sellers are more effective in fostering high-value, strategic customer relationships.** We compared the three seller segments across a wide range of metrics, and our data supported the business case for evolved selling nearly across the board. Evolved Sellers are more

effective at increasing deal velocity, reporting that they closed nearly two out of 10 *more* deals than Static Sellers as a result of recent in-person meetings. Not only did they close more deals, but the deals also proved more valuable to the company. Compared with Transitional Sellers, Evolved Sellers reported that more of their closed deals included multiple products/services and closed for more than originally forecasted. What's more, sales interactions that arose from evolved selling approaches helped build the foundation for long-term, loyal customer relationships, with Evolved Sellers reporting longer contract terms, more customers agreeing to act as references, and more customers providing testimonials or case studies compared with other seller segments (see Figure 5).

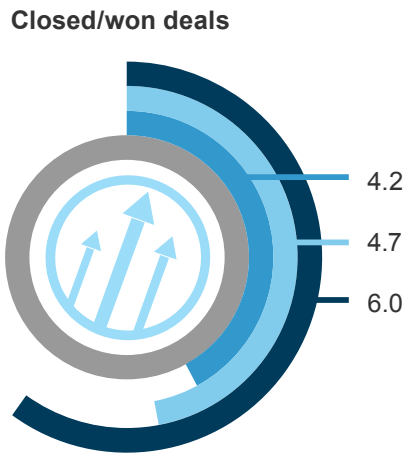
Evolved Sellers are more effective at increasing deal velocity, reporting that they closed 43% more deals than Static Sellers as a result of recent in-person meetings.

- › **The hard stuff comes easier to Evolved Sellers.** Advancing to the next stage in the sales process with senior-level buyers — quickly — is no easy feat. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents said they find it difficult to get senior-level stakeholders engaged in sales conversations, and 30% find it difficult to accelerate deal closures. However, Evolved Sellers find it much easier to achieve both of these objectives than Transitional and Static Sellers do. And when it comes time to woo the next client, Evolved Sellers may find it even easier, as they are more likely to get warm leads from existing customers willing to provide referrals and testimonials (see Figure 6).
- › **Companies that embrace evolved selling outperform others on key metrics.** The impact of evolved selling extends beyond the individual salesperson's metrics or quota performance. Nearly two out of three Evolved Sellers (63%) reported revenue growth of 10% or more year over year for their company — a statistically significant lift of 39% compared with Transitional Sellers. In addition, 40% reported that their companies lead in market share across categories, compared with only 28% of Static Sellers (see Figure 7).

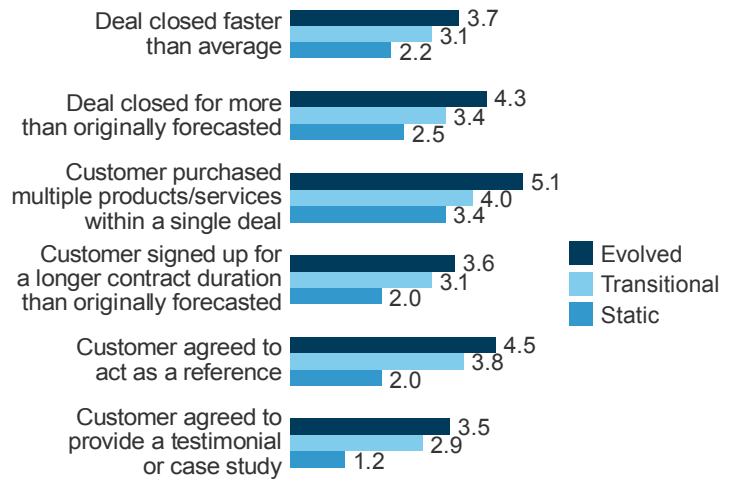
FIGURE 5

Evolved Sellers Are More Effective Than Static And Transitional Sellers Across Metrics — Particularly Deal Velocity, Upsell, And Customer Advocacy

“Of your last 10 initial, in-person meetings with customers/prospects (e.g., to initially pitch a product or service), how many resulted in . . . ?”



“Thinking about the last 10 deals you closed, how many of those deals included the following attributes?”



Base: variable quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies (n = 50 per segment)
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

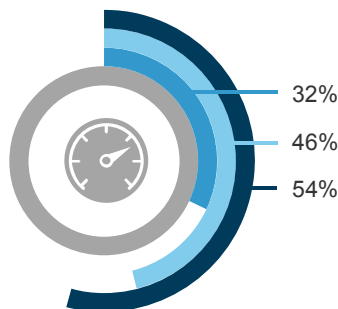
FIGURE 6

Evolved Sellers Find It Easier To Progress Quickly Through The Sales Cycle

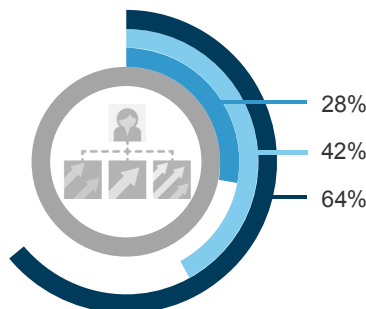
“Based on your current capabilities and processes, how easy would you say it is for you to achieve the following?”
 (Percent “very easy” or “somewhat easy”)

■ Static ■ Transitional ■ Evolved

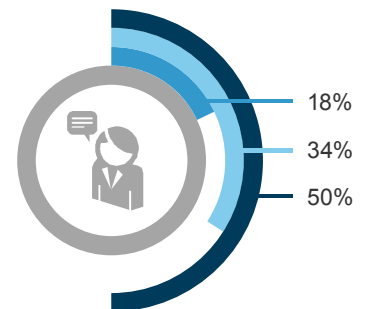
Accelerate the velocity of deal closure:



Get higher-level stakeholders involved in the sales conversation:



Get clients to deliver named testimonials or case studies:



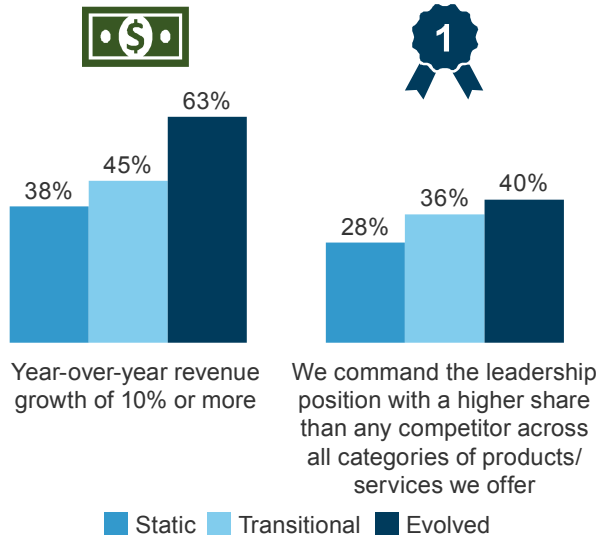
Base: variable quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies (n = 50 per segment)
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

FIGURE 7

Companies That Embrace Evolved Selling Drive Higher Growth And Sustain Market Leadership

“Please estimate your company’s year-over-year revenue growth rate for 2015.”

“Which statement most closely describes your company’s market share relative to your closest competitors?”



Base: variable quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies (n = 50 per segment)

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

› **As sellers adopt a more comprehensive evolved selling model, their competitive advantage continues to improve.** Among the 50 Evolved Sellers we surveyed, 29 of them use between one and three nonlinear selling approaches, while 21 use all four approaches. In comparing these two groups, we found some interesting differences in business results. For example, roughly half of the “fully evolved” group that uses all four approaches (11 of 21 respondents) reported that their company commands the market leadership position across all of their product and service categories, compared with about a third of the “partially evolved” group (nine of 29 respondents).

To Reach Evolved Status, Sellers Need The Right Tools

Sellers that are still clinging to linear “show up and throw up” tactics need to evolve or perish. Our data supports this imperative. For example, 30% of the Static Sellers we surveyed said that their sales organization delivers inconsistent performance or misses its goals, compared with 12% of Evolved Sellers.

In order to pave the path toward evolved selling and ensure their frontline sales teams remain relevant in today’s challenging marketplace, sales and marketing leaders need to re-evaluate their enablement strategies and supporting tools. Our research identified the following pain points and potential solutions for sellers:

› **Preparing sales content is overly repetitious and wastes sellers’ time.** A third of our seller survey respondents said they feel they have to create their own content too often — a challenge that nearly half of Static Sellers (46%) reported. Sellers also believe they have to spend too much time preparing sales materials (see Figure 8). With the constant time management challenges sellers experience, time spent on lower-value activities is not time well spent. For example, survey respondents reported that they spend an equal amount of time searching through existing sales materials as they do researching the customer’s specific business needs. Sellers need the right information about their clients at the right time, and they need the tools that enable them to access that information quickly when preparing for a meeting or dynamically when they are in front of the customer or prospect. As one respondent said, their biggest pain point is “customizing the interaction to a customer’s specific needs, since many variables are at a constant change.”

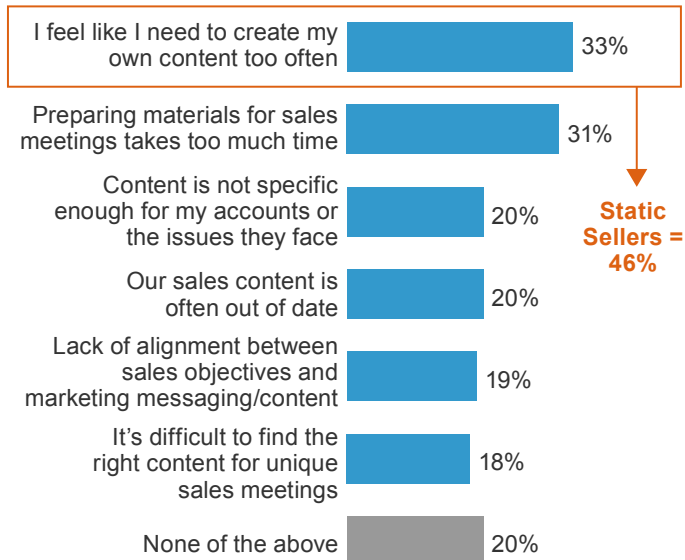
“Getting an engaged room and keeping content fresh and up to date [is our biggest pain point].”

— Sales manager at a US-based media and leisure company

FIGURE 8

The Time And Effort Required To Prepare Sales Content Hinder Sellers' Effectiveness

“What challenges do you currently face that prevent you from being more effective in your in-person sales meetings?”



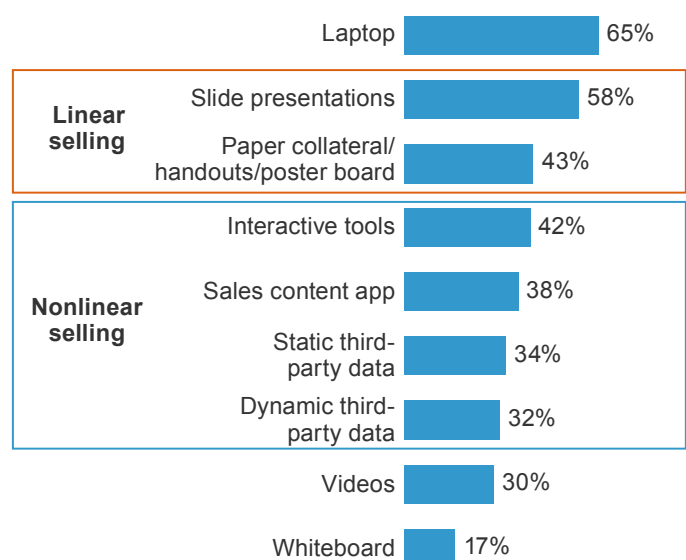
Base: 150 quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

FIGURE 9

Tools That Enable Evolved Selling Are Not Yet The Norm

“How frequently do you use the following technologies/tools for in-person sales meetings?”
(Percent “frequently” or “almost always”)



Base: 150 quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

- › **Less effective and antiquated “show up and throw up” tactics persist in today’s in-person sales meetings.** The majority of the sellers we surveyed (58%) use slide presentations at least frequently for in-person meetings, and many still bring paper handouts (43%) to give to clients/prospects. Meanwhile, tools that enable evolved selling are less prevalent (see Figure 9). However, sales presentation apps offer huge promise — 98% of Evolved Sellers said that these apps make them more efficient. Ultimately, sellers seek tools that help them create fresh, dynamic, insightful content that fosters interactive discussions with buyers.

98% of Evolved Sellers that regularly use sales content apps said that these apps make them more effective.

“Sales apps and interactive product examples resonate with prospects and existing clients, giving them a more tangible concept to consider.”

— Sales professional at a US-based telecom company

› **Sellers seek easy-to-use solutions that will help them create compelling, interactive sales experiences.**

Sales organizations have back-office solutions, such as CRM systems and collaboration tools, to help them manage their teams and processes. They also have front-office solutions for configure, price, quote (CPQ) and marketing automation. But frontline sellers need their own dedicated selling platforms that simplify content preparation so sellers can focus on the activities that drive results: creating compelling, personalized selling experiences that foster interactive and engaging discussions. Ease of use is paramount, as 81% consider it essential or very important. Beyond this requirement, the majority of sellers seek interactive features, such as calculators and comparison tools; the ability to collaborate and share these dynamic selling stories with their customers; and access to data insights and analytics (see Figure 10). An evolved selling platform that weaves these features together will help sellers evolve and thrive with today's B2B buyers and will help organizations that invest in modern enablement strategies and tools deliver sustainable growth for their companies.

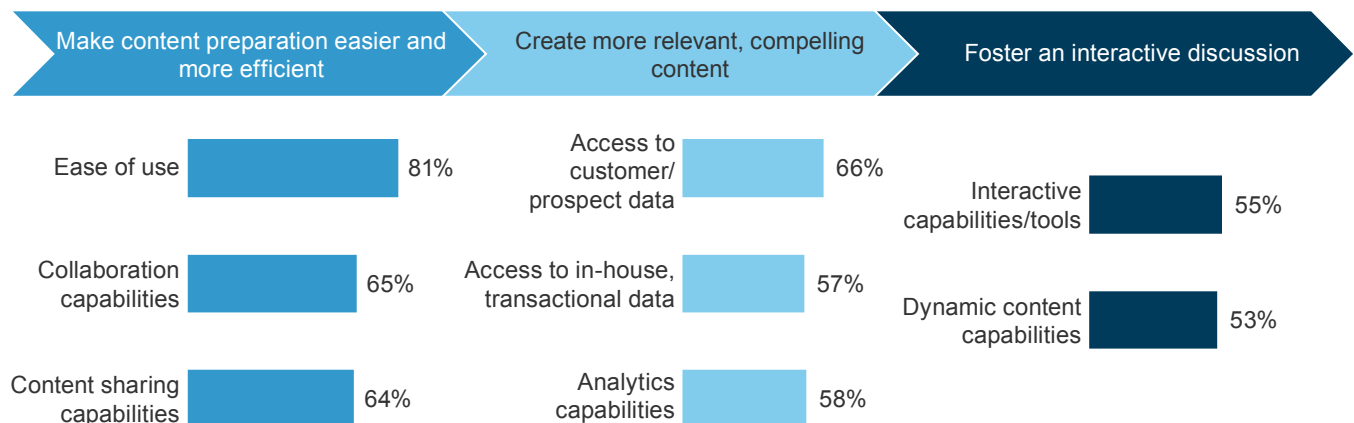
“The ability to visually show customers what benefits they will realize in the future if they work with us [has the most impact].”

— Sales professional at a US-based financial services/insurance company

FIGURE 10

Sellers Seek An Easy-To-Use, Evolved Selling Platform To Help Them Engage Customers In Insightful, Interactive Discussions

“In thinking about the ideal technologies/solutions to support in-person selling, how important to your success are the following features, functions, and capabilities?”
(Percent “essential” or “very important”)



Base: 150 quota-carrying sales professionals at US companies

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Mediafly, August 2016

Key Recommendations

Today's B2B buyers are more informed, self-directed, and demanding than ever before. When evaluating new products and services, they want to embark on a journey of customized interactions with digital and human assets. As the marketplace becomes increasingly challenging for B2B sellers — with more than half of the research process completed before buyers want to interact with a salesperson, more stakeholders involved in decision-making cycles, and buyers less tolerant of “off the shelf” sales pitches — sales and marketing leaders must accept that a status quo approach to enabling the sales force will not lead to success. Go-to-market leaders across all industries should revisit their sales enablement strategies and ensure they have the most innovative tools in place to enable sellers at all levels to: 1) operate more efficiently, 2) engage in high-quality interactions, and 3) remain relevant and differentiated with buyers both today and in the future.

Forrester's surveys with business buyers and B2B sellers yielded several important observations that sales and marketing leaders can act on today:

- › **Remove barriers to success for your salespeople.** Salespeople never have enough time in their days to complete all of their critical tasks. Don't allow searching for content and preparing presentations to burn precious cycles. New platforms eliminate the need for salespeople to dig through emails, search portals and corporate drives, or create marketing assets from scratch to find what they need when they need it. Comprehensive technology solutions can solve these problems so that sellers can spend the right amount of time on higher-value activities such as deeply understanding their prospects' specific needs and easily assembling a dynamic sales story for each buyer.
- › **Accept that the linear-based sales presentation is antiquated.** Buyers continue to acquire and consume information they seek whenever and however they want. And they will not respond to sales presentations that are long, boring, and linear. If your sales reps build “decks,” then you know you are linear selling. Arm your sales force to be ready to expect the unexpected and to be capable of pivoting the discussion based on prospect or customer interest — real-time — in the moment of truth.
- › **Show buyers something relevant and new.** Our research shows that 74% of the time, B2B buyers purchase from the first sellers to create a clear path to value.⁵ Make sure your sellers gain that competitive advantage. Put in place an evolved selling platform that can provide access to the right content, interactive tools, and data insights to ensure your sellers add value at every intersection point. Make sure that they can deliver insights by leveraging compelling industry and company data (e.g., from a third party or from your CRM system) or provide ROI calculations and interactive comparisons demonstrating the impact of your solution on prospect or customer business objectives.
- › **Keep it interactive.** Today's B2B buyers are overwhelmed with product information they can find on mobile, online, and through social and other channels. As wearables and their apps mature, buyer distraction will only increase as they receive fitness, news, and travel alerts throughout the day. The problem is not access; it's clarity. To cut through this plethora of noise, sellers must amp up and personalize their approach. Savvy B2B sellers will employ comparison tools, calculators, discovery assessments, and videos to keep buyers in the room engaged and provide them with insights they would not have derived on their own.
- › **Adopt an evolved selling platform for your sales force.** You have likely invested in back- and front-office solutions to improve the management, processes, and workflows for your team. Consider investing in a frontline enablement tool — an evolved selling platform — to allow your sales force to differentiate themselves from the competition, engage in more meaningful and insightful ways with buyers, collaborate more effectively with marketing colleagues, and gain valuable time back in their day.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted two online surveys — one with business buyers and another with B2B sellers — to evaluate buyer needs and preferences, seller strategies and tactics, and the impact of different selling models on business results and buyer behaviors. The buyer survey included 152 respondents based in the US at organizations with 500 or more employees. Survey participants included business purchase decision-makers and influencers across a range of organizational departments. Questions provided to the participants asked about recent business purchases, overall experiences with in-person sales interactions, and the impact of various selling tactics on likelihood to buy. The seller survey included 150 respondents at B2B-focused companies in the US with 500 or more total employees and a sales force of at least 100 employees. Survey participants included quota-carrying sales professionals at the individual contributor, manager, director, and VP level. Questions provided to the participants asked about current approaches and tools used in in-person sales interactions, results of recent sales efforts, pain points with current processes, and desired characteristics of technologies to support in-person selling. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study began in July 2016 and was completed in August 2016.

Appendix B: Supplemental Material

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

“Why Buyers Don’t Want To Meet Your Salespeople And What To Do About It,” Forrester Research, Inc., September 9, 2015

“Turn B2B Buyer And Seller Data Into Insights,” Forrester Research, Inc., August 23, 2016

“Tune Your Sales Force To Enable Perfect Pitch,” Forrester Research, Inc., May 13, 2016

Appendix C: Endnotes

¹ Source: “What Does It Take To Win With Executive Buyers?” Forrester Research, Inc., December 12, 2013.

² Source: “How Self-Service Research Changes B2B Marketing,” Forrester Research, Inc., May 13, 2016.

³ The 34% of buyers we identified as having purchased from Evolved Sellers said that the sales representative engaged with their teams in at least two of the following ways: They were able to quickly access relevant content based on the direction of the discussion; they presented compelling and relevant data/insights about the buyer’s company, industry, or customers; they used interactive tools to facilitate the discussion.

⁴ Our survey sample consists of 150 respondents split evenly across the three selling models (n = 50 each for Static, Transitional, and Evolved). However, in the process of collecting responses, we tracked all 249 respondents who met our other screening requirements (company size, job responsibilities, etc.). This is how we determined that 28% of companies are Evolved Sellers, 47% are Transitional, and 25% are Static. We also looked at the number of evolved selling approaches that these respondents apply today and found that only 11% of the overall sample follows all four approaches —i.e., they are “fully evolved.”

⁵ Source: “What Does It Take To Win With Executive Buyers?” Forrester Research, Inc., December 12, 2013.