With this CSO Insights report, we dive into the challenges facing sales teams and how investing in quote-to-cash technology solutions, including e-signatures, are helping push Sales Ops into the future.

At Adobe, we believe that businesses today have to deliver great experiences across all touch points in our mobile-first, hyper-connected world. Sales teams are a crucial part of any company's interaction with its market and getting rid of outmoded paper-based processes says a lot about the kind of organization you are. And it's just better business.

We hope you enjoy this report and find insights that help you improve the impact of Sales Ops within your sales organizations.

Ashley Still
VP, Enterprise Offerings, Adobe

The Sales Performance Challenge

If you ask sales professionals how selling today compares to five years ago, they will probably say it is harder. But is that a perception or a reality? In reviewing the sales performance data that CSO Insights has been collecting over the past 25 years, the study findings clearly validate that assumption, as nearly every key performance indicator was lower for 2017 than 2012. One striking metric is that the percentage of salespeople who met or exceeded plan dropped from 63.0% in 2012 to 53% in 2017.

This trend has not been lost on sales management, as we continue to see companies pouring billions of dollars into new initiatives to increase sales effectiveness. One functional area management is leaning on to help plan, prioritize, and often oversee these projects is sales operations. To better understand how sales operations is responding to this challenge, CSO Insights conducted the 2018 Sales Operations Optimization (SOO) study.

In this white paper, we will review some of the research findings and discuss the role that technology and process innovations can play in helping to transform how sellers engage with buyers at key stages during the sales cycle. The objective is to help sales leaders make the best choices regarding new ways to optimally align with the customer's buying journey to improve sales performance.
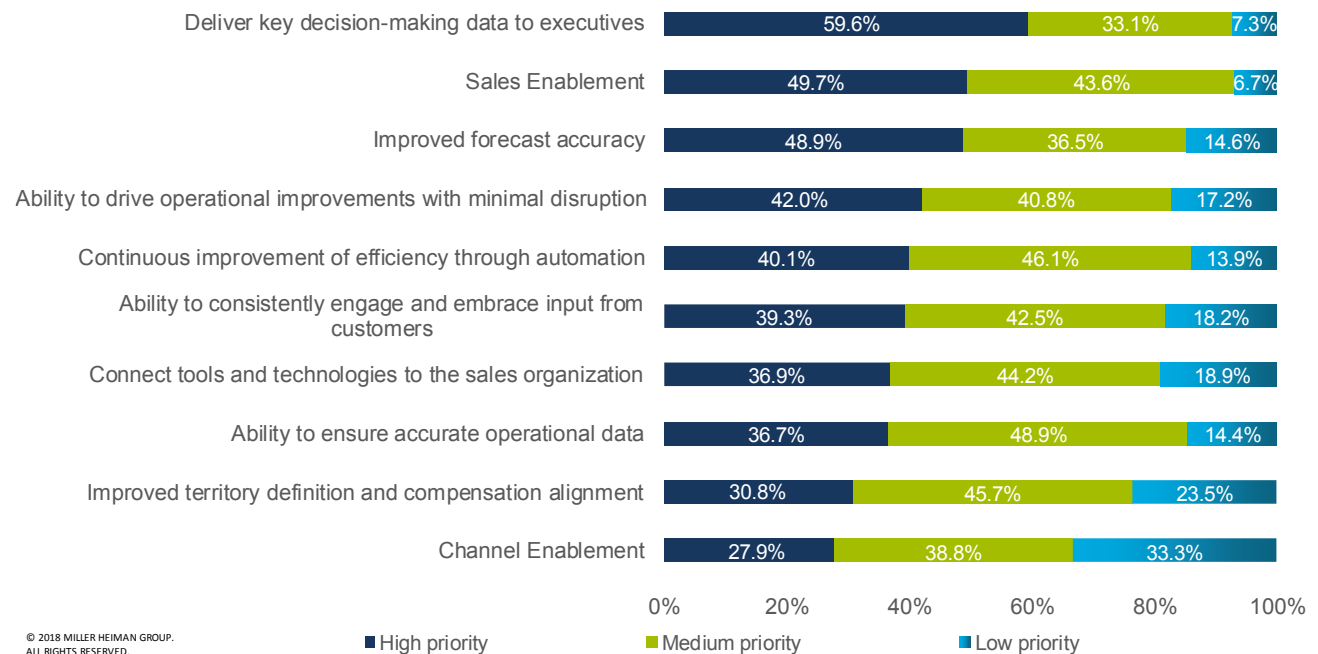
Sales Operations 2018

One of the initial objectives of the SOO study was to get a detailed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of sales operations. We quickly found that these teams are involved in 16 different aspects of sales and sales management. But the top five areas where sales operations either had the lead role or were heavily involved were the following:

- Sales tool and technology management – 47.8%
- Forecast/pipeline process management – 46.8%
- CRM strategy planning – 46.8%
- Sales and sales support enablement – 45.6%
- Sales effectiveness performance analysis – 45.3%

In terms of areas of focus for sales operations, we asked the study participants to assess the priorities for the next 24 months. The following chart shows that sales management is expecting sales operations to take on a variety of responsibilities. As you consider all the items listed below in relationship to problems sales organizations are dealing with, you start to see that solutions will require the interplay between many of these items.

Sales Operations Priorities over Next 24 Months

Priority	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority
Deliver key decision-making data to executives	59.6%	33.1%	7.3%
Sales Enablement	49.7%	43.6%	6.7%
Improved forecast accuracy	48.9%	36.5%	14.6%
Ability to drive operational improvements with minimal disruption	42.0%	40.8%	17.2%
Continuous improvement of efficiency through automation	40.1%	46.1%	13.9%
Ability to consistently engage and embrace input from customers	39.3%	42.5%	18.2%
Connect tools and technologies to the sales organization	36.9%	44.2%	18.9%
Ability to ensure accurate operational data	36.7%	48.9%	14.4%
Improved territory definition and compensation alignment	30.8%	45.7%	23.5%
Channel Enablement	27.9%	38.8%	33.3%

■ High priority   ■ Medium priority   ■ Low priority

Take for example the issue of improving win rates. CSO Insights 2018 Sales Effectiveness study found that on average only 47.3% of forecast deals end up in the "win" column across all sales organizations. That number improved to 55.3% when we focused on firms with sales operations functions. This number stills leave much room for improvement and is symptomatic of challenges that sales teams are having in the Quote-to-Close (Q2C) process, defined as the steps required to prepare quotes and contracts, navigate those through the prospect review and approval procedures, and then once signed process successfully process the order.

To start to solve that problem, sales operations needs to deliver decision-making data to executives, find ways to improve sales enablement services to sales teams, improve forecast accuracy, drive improvements with minimal disruption, etc. Dealing with that single challenge of optimizing the Q2C phase of the sales process could easily involve every item in the above chart.

The Sales Operations/Technology Disconnect

Looking back to the roles and responsibilities seen on page one, we see technology is a key area that sales operations is involved in. Does that mean they are already actively leveraging technology? The study data found that this often not the case.

While our past studies have shown that the adoption of core CRM systems – Salesforce.com, Microsoft Dynamics, Oracle, SAP, SugarCRM, etc. – is ubiquitous, the implementation of other sales technologies is far less frequent. A contributing factor to this may well be the vast array of choices sale operations has to choose from.

The 2018 SOO study identified 25 different types of technologies that sales operations could use to optimize lead generation, support social selling, deliver training, manage content and sales tools, optimize pricing/minimize discounting, etc. Of course, no organization can successfully implement dozens of technologies all at once.

A Phased Approach to Optimizing Sales Operations

The method we have long advocated is taking a phased approach to sales transformation. Step one is to identify all the aspects of sales that need improvement. Step 2 is then calculating the size of the prize; determining what the expected ROI would be if you successfully dealt with each issue on the list. Step 3 is then honestly assessing your organization's ability to implement new processes and technologies to successfully make that transition to a new way of selling.

Here's an example: The second item on the list on page one showed that Forecast/Pipeline Process Management is a common area of focus for many sales operations teams. As part of the 2018 SOO, we asked the study participants to rate their current ability to effectively manage this process. The chart summarizes the responses received. Here we see that this is a core competency for very few sales organizations.

Ability to Effectively Manage Forecast/Pipeline Management Process
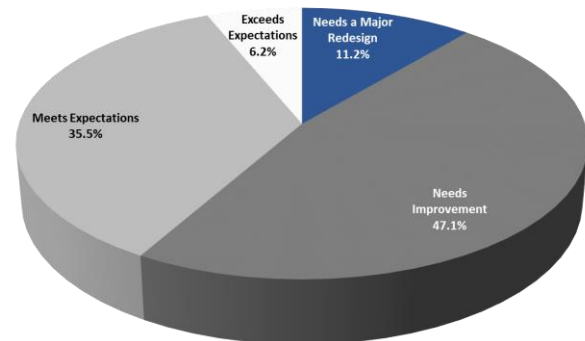
We then need to look at what the contributing factors to poor performance might be. In past work with research clients, we have often seen that the Q2C process has a lot of room for improvement. For example, the process of creating contracts is often left to the salesperson, who relies on cutting and pasting information from old contacts into new ones. Those agreements are then mailed or emailed out to the client, where all visibility into where the contract is in the buyer's approval process gets lost. When deals do come back, salespeople spend a significant amount of time manually processing the paper work to get the order entered, etc. In an age of readily available technology innovation, only 37.3% of the firms surveyed reported using Q2C/contract management/e-signature systems.

Making Intelligent Sales Technology Choices

On the surface, there is a lot of room for improvement. But that raises the question, "Is the payoff there to justify the investment?" Answering that question is a two-step process. The first is calculating the cost-of-doing-nothing. To help clarify that, we segmented the 2018 SOO study data into two groups; those firms that were technology-enabling the Q2C process versus those that were not. The following table summarizes the results.

Sales Performance Comparison Based on Method for Managing the Quote-to-Close Process	Firms not Using Q2C/ Contract Management Systems	Firms Using Q2C/ Contract Management Systems
Percentage of Overall Revenue Plan Attainment	85%	90%

Percentage of Salespeople Meeting or Exceeding Plan	60%	64%
Percentage of Forecast Deals that End Up as Wins	54%	58%

Here we see noticeable differences in performance that would generate a hard-dollar ROI for investing in new technologies that would optimize the Q2C process. In previous benchmarking we have done in reviewing Q2C technology implementations, we have also seen reductions in contract and order processing error rates, shorter closing cycle times, proactive tracking of which deals are "stuck" in the approval process, and automated updating of all relevant systems after the deal is signed without salesperson involvement, all of which contribute to a high payback for successfully tackling this sales transformation task.

The second question concerns your organization's ability to successfully implement these new systems and processes. Regarding Q2C/contract management, the solutions available today are robust and well proven. We see very little pushback from sales teams to adopting a new way of selling based on the personal benefits they see from doing so, and the costs associated with implementing these solutions are often an order of magnitude less than the cost-of-doing-nothing.

Summary

The challenges facing sales teams today are significant. Based on the amount of change that continues to bombard sales teams, existing problems will continue and new ones will arise. Based on that reality, sales organizations must constantly seek ways to optimize how they market to, sell to, and service customers. Sales operations, in conjunction with their counterparts in the emerging discipline of sales enablement, need to become more effective at implementing new processes and supporting new technology innovations to proactively deal with these issues.

Staying competitive in the sales marketplace requires a culture of continuous, incremental change. If sales operations is willing, and is given the authority to identify specific aspects of selling that need to be transformed, redesign processes, and implement the right solutions to technology-enable new ways of selling, then we can reverse the downward sales performance trends we have witnessed over the past several years.

Thank you for taking the time to read this CSO Insights report.

As pointed out in the report, firms investing in quote-to-cash tools for digital transformation at the end of the sales cycle outperformed across the board: in percentage of overall revenue plan attainment; percentage of salespeople meeting or exceeding plan; and percentage of forecast deals that end up as a win.

Yet, less than 40% of companies reported using e-signature solutions in conjunction with their quote-to-cash and contract management systems. At Adobe, we believe the digital transformation of contracting processes with e-signatures is a "must-have" for modern sales organizations.

Adobe is investing heavily in e-signature technology with Adobe Sign. Today, Adobe Sign enables sales teams to accelerate time-to-revenue by reducing time-to-signature by up to 95%, which helps improve win rates. Adobe Sign also "plays well with others," so it's available in the tools and platforms sales teams use every day—CRM, quote-to-cash and general productivity.
Learn more about Adobe Sign ›

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