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# Why Sales Teams Need Advanced Digital Document Capabilities To Meet Modern Buyer Needs

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## Executive Summary

Sales has changed. The buyer community has become more diverse, digital-first, and values-driven. Anywhere-work has permanently changed how buyers and sellers interact, and the underlying technology has created buyers who expect seamless, instantaneous, and personalized sales experiences.[1] This has profoundly influenced how organizations and their sales teams will win, retain, and nurture buyers moving forward.

To meet buyer expectations and boost revenue, leading sales organizations will need to go beyond simply hiring more quota carriers. They will need to increase their investments in technologies and practices which reflect their brand, and empower their sales teams to be more precise, personalized, productive, and profitable.[2] However, the old habits of paper continue to linger over how many sales organizations use, manage, and distribute documents. This slows sales cycles and leads to weaker buyer experiences.

To stay competitive, sales teams must revisit how they are using digital document capabilities, assessing how effectively they meet buyer needs, and advancing capabilities to meet the demands of the modern buyer.

Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate how digital document processes and tools support sales teams.[3] To explore this topic, Forrester conducted an online survey with 156 senior business and technology decision-makers from sales or sales operations departments in North America and Western Europe with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organizations.

## Key Findings

**Sales teams struggle with processes that are interrupted by manual or paper-based steps.** Sales professionals reported a number of process and system issues that create poorer buyer experiences and time inefficiencies. As such, despite 77% of sales professionals reporting that their organization had already adopted digital document processes and tools, 54% plan to continue to implement, expand, or upgrade implementation over the next 12 months.

**Sales teams leading in digital document process adoption report advantages in deal flow, revenue, and operations.** Sales teams using mostly digital document processes are able to close more deals, reach more buyers, improve sales experiences, and streamline operations, in contrast to sales teams that are using minimal or a mix of digital document processes.[4]

**Advanced digital document capabilities are key to meeting the demands of the modern buyer.** Leading sales professionals are investing in advanced digital document capabilities to personalize actions, secure workflows, and build digital journeys to meet modern buyer demands for seamless, instantaneous, and personalized buyer experiences.

## Manual Or Paper-Based Processes Slow Sales Cycles And Put Pressure On Sales Teams

Today's sellers only spend 37% of their time selling.[5] This represents an unrealized opportunity for sales teams to invest in digital document capabilities so that organizations can start returning time to high-value sales activities. Our study found that:

> "Digitizing document processes has enabled our workforce to share, communicate, and read documents more effectively."
>
> **Vice president of sales, legal services company, United Kingdom**

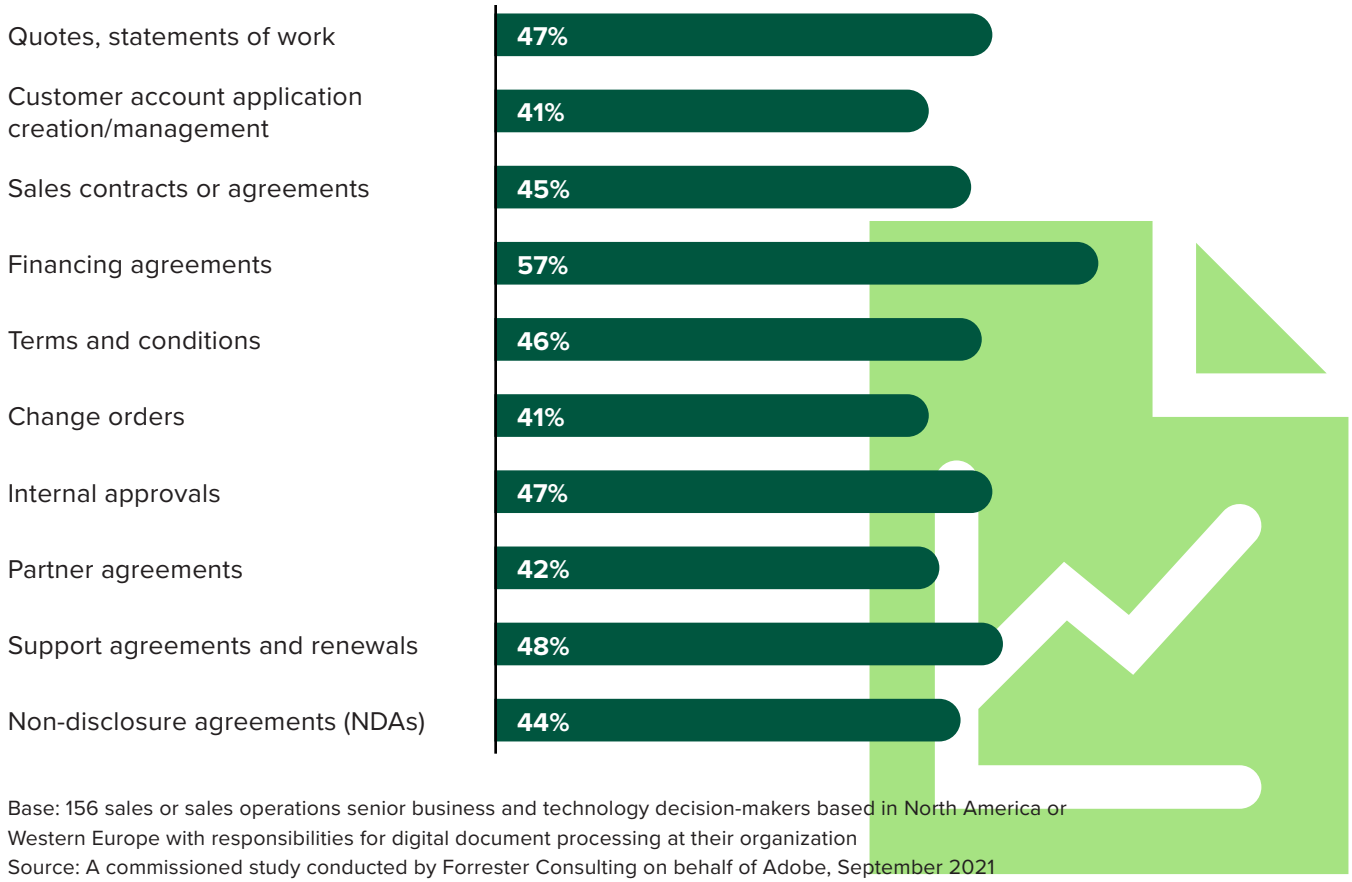
- **Sales teams continue to waste time on processes hindered by manual or paper-based steps.** While many sales teams have already digitized key sales processes, a significant proportion continue to use manual or paper-based steps (see Figure 1). This slows business by introducing processes and system issues that pull teams away from selling. It also creates poorer buyer experiences due to: delays in routing and obtaining signatures in the correct order (68%), delays due to paper-oriented tasks (63%), and reworks due to errors from manually transferring data (63%).
- **Barriers to deploying digital document processes and tools have dropped.** As noted by respondents' prepandemic experiences, perceived regulatory and compliance risks (57%) and a lack of regulatory support for electronic approvals (54%) were barriers against deploying digital document processes and tools. Since then, socioeconomic changes have accelerated the adoption of these processes and tools. The number of sales professionals who reported perceived regulatory and compliance risks decreased by 19%. And those that indicated the lack of regulatory support for electronic approvals as a barrier to deploying digital document processes and tools over the next 12 months also saw a 29% reduction.

- **Leading sales organizations continue to expand their implementation of digital document processes and tools.** While 77% of sales professionals indicated that their organization was already using digital document processes and tools, 54% reported that their organization was planning on implementing, expanding, or upgrading their implementation of those processes and tools over the next 12 months. The importance of these processes and tools have been recognized, with sales professionals anticipating that their deployment will: maintain or increase revenue (79%); improve collaboration in a hybrid working environment (74%); and accelerate document processing (65%).

**Figure 1**

**"To the best of your knowledge, how paper-based or digital are each of the following sales processes at your organization today?"**

(Showing "Fully paper-based or manual" and "Mix of paper and digital" responses)




Base: 156 sales or sales operations senior business and technology decision-makers based in North America or Western Europe with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, September 2021

## Digital Document Processes Improve Deal Flow, Revenue, And Sales Operations

Digitizing document processes helps sales organizations win, retain, and nurture buyers. Our study found that those ahead in their implementation of digital document processes and tools reaped significant improvements in deal flow, revenue, and operations, as:

> "Digitizing document processes optimizes our business operations, which allows us to improve the efficiency of our sales teams and the effectiveness of our buyer experiences."
>
> **Sales director, financial services and/or insurance company, France**

- **Sales teams are able to close more deals and reach more buyers.** Sales professionals estimated that their sales teams would be 37% more efficient in closing deals using digital document processes as opposed to paper-based or manual processes. In our study, we found that sales departments using mostly digital document processes reported an average contract signing period of 19 days, as compared to departments using minimal or a mix of digital document processes where the average signing period was 28 days — observing a 32% difference.

  As sales teams become more efficient in closing deals, they are able to spend more time on core selling and direct engagement activities — helping them win, retain, and nurture more buyers. As such, 71% of decision-makers also anticipate that digital document processes and tools will enable them to pursue opportunities and gain new buyers.

- **Digital document processes improve sales experiences and reduce deal churn.** Sixty-one percent of sales professionals agreed that digital document processes and tools would be very important in helping their organization deliver more effective sales experiences that help sales teams close more deals. Our study found that teams

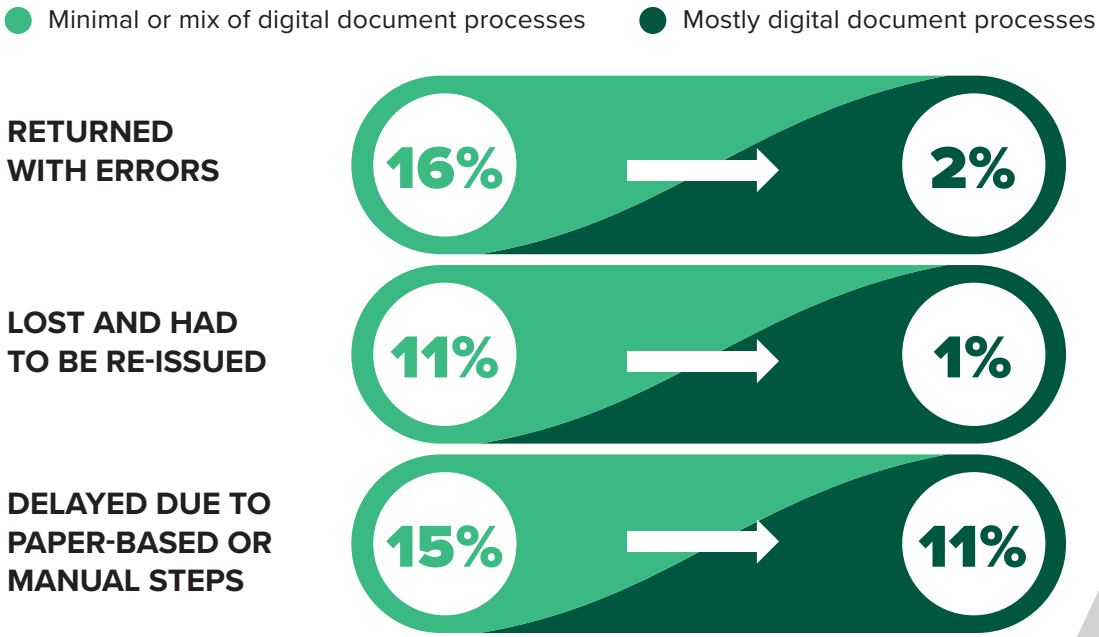
using mostly digital document processes reported a 47% reduction in deals lost (based on total deal size) due to paper-based or manual steps, as compared with teams using minimal or a mix of digital document processes.

- **Operations are streamlined and enhanced.** Our study observed an 80% difference regarding the duration spent on manual or repetitive tasks each week. Sales professionals in teams using mostly digital document processes and tools reported an average employee spending 3 hours doing so, while those in teams using minimal or a mix of digital document processes spent an average of 14 hours. Respondents in teams using mostly digital document processes also reported more effective operations and buyer experiences. Out of the last 100 documents that needed to be signed, there was an 89% decrease for those that returned with errors, and a 90% reduction in documents that needed to be reissued after being lost, in comparison to sales professionals in teams using minimal or a mix of digital document processes (see Figure 2).

Buyers want end-to-end digital journeys. To enable this, sales teams must go beyond digitizing individual interactions (with traditional chokepoints) and develop end-to-end journeys that are designed with digital in mind. This includes integrated experiences with digital document capabilities that are integrated into tools sales teams are already using daily. Gone are the days of document storage cabinets, mass printing, and mailing contracts — advancing digital document capabilities will be crucial for leading sales organizations to develop truly digital document processes.

## Figure 2

**"Thinking of the last 100 documents you issued that needed to be signed (sales, and/or employment contracts for instance), how many were:"**




Base: 156 sales or sales operations senior business and technology decision-makers based in North America or Western Europe with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, September 2021

## Now Is The Time: Invest In Advanced Digital Document Capabilities To Meet Modern Buyer Needs

Traditional document capabilities like document sharing, live document collaboration, and e-signatures are table stakes in the sales environment today. As leading sales professionals increase their investments in digital document processes and tools, they will also invest in advanced capabilities to:

> "Continuing to advance digital document capabilities will enable us to find hidden bottlenecks within sales processes, and generate more income from this."
>
> **Director of sales, telecommunications services company, United States**

- **Personalize actions and engage with existing buyers.** Modern buyers want personalized experiences. However, without the right tools, personalization at scale becomes an impossible and unprofitable task. As such, more than half (52%) of sales professionals are planning to implement, expand, or upgrade their implementation of document data analytics and insights capabilities over the next 12 months, with 62% agreeing that this capability will improve their ability to engage buyers and increase deal flow and average deal size.

  However, data analytics and insights capabilities will only be as effective as the data sales teams have available. Thus, document data integration with critical business systems (e.g. CRM, ERP, HCM, etc.) will also be critical, with 64% of sales professionals agreeing that this capability will allow them to have a more holistic view of their buyers and better personalize actions.

- **Secure workflows to reach new buyers.** In 2021, over one in five (22%) security breaches were due to an attack on, or an incident involving an organization's supplier or business partner.[6] As documents are accessed, shared, and collaborated on between buyers and sellers, oftentimes going beyond traditional organizational

security perimeters, buyers and sellers are exposing themselves to significant security risks. To support the demands of the modern buyer, documents must evolve beyond the traditional perimeter-based model of security to embrace security by design. Leading sales teams, however, also recognize that systems and processes that are secure by design empower sales staff and reflect positively on an organization's brand, with 69% of sales professionals agreeing that document security capabilities would empower their organization to reach new buyers.

- **Build digital journeys to retain buyers in the long term.** Leading sales teams recognize that building end-to-end digital journeys require more than simply digitizing individual interactions. Interactions must also become more connected. Hence, 60% of sales professionals are planning to implement, expand, or upgrade their implementation of document process integrations with customer-facing systems (e.g., digital self-service, digital experience platforms, etc.), and 73% of them agree that this will enable them to improve buyer experiences.

  Leading sales professionals will also continue to integrate document processes with everyday productivity applications (e.g., word processing applications, file sharing and collaboration software, etc.) and automate key document interactions. Sixty-seven percent agree that integrating document processes with everyday productivity applications — and 62% agree that document automation capabilities — will reduce the number of errors or redundant actions sent out to customers, hence improving buyer experiences and increasing the productivity of sales teams.

## Key Recommendations

Forrester's in-depth survey of 156 senior business and technology decision-makers from sales or sales operations departments in North America and Western Europe yielded several important recommendations:

**Go beyond quota carriers, invest in technology to deliver seamless and instantaneous buyer experiences.**

While a larger sales team can fill the gaps in your buyer experiences and help your organization deliver on this in the short term, this strategy quickly becomes unprofitable as your organization continues to scale and sell to more buyers. Start by identifying and digitizing key steps in your sales process that create buyer pain points i.e., having to print, sign, and scan a document.

**Personalize interactions to better engage buyers.**

In addition to a seamless and instantaneous buying experience, the modern buyer also expects interactions to be personalized. Unlock document data to help your sales team deliver on this promise, but also invest in document security capabilities that will help your team protect its buyers and your organization from malicious actors.

**Connect and accelerate interactions to begin developing buyer journeys.**

To truly fulfill the promise of a seamless and instantaneous buyer experience, your sales team must go beyond simply digitizing individual interactions to connecting and accelerating them. Beyond foundational capabilities i.e., document-sharing and e-signatures, your sales team must begin to automate menial document tasks and integrate document processes with customer-facing systems and everyday productivity applications. This will not only improve buyer experiences, but it will also increase the productivity of your sales team.

**Find a partner with relevant expertise.**

Your organization needs a digital document partner that can challenge how your organization prioritizes its investment in digital capabilities. Your buyers expect you to have specific digital capabilities in your sales process — a digital document partner, not just a provider, can help you identify and implement those capabilities. Beyond that, they can challenge and empower your team to innovate by helping to identify potential opportunities. This can provide a competitive edge in winning, retaining, and nurturing buyers.

## Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 156 senior business and technology decision-makers from sales or sales operations departments in North America and Western Europe with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization. The study began in August 2021 and was completed in September 2021.

Project Director: Leon Zhang, Market Impact Consultant

Contributing Research: Forrester's CIO research group

## Appendix B: Demographics

| INDUSTRIES | |
|---|---|
| Financial services and/or insurance | **31%** |
| Government | **9%** |
| Healthcare and/or life sciences | **24%** |
| Other | **36%** |

| COMPANY SIZE | |
|---|---|
| 1,000 to 4,999 employees | **27%** |
| 5,000 to 19,999 employees | **45%** |
| 20,000 or more employees | **28%** |

| GEOGRAPHIES | |
|---|---|
| France | **14%** |
| Germany | **14%** |
| United Kingdom | **12%** |
| United States | **60%** |

| RESPONDENT FUNCTION | |
|---|---|
| Sales leadership | **15%** |
| Sales/revenue operations | **33%** |
| Sales enablement | **19%** |
| Sales technology | **8%** |
| Channel sales | **14%** |
| Customer success | **12%** |

## Appendix C: Endnotes

[1] Source: "The Future Of Sales," Forrester Research, Inc., May 3, 2021.

[2] Ibid.

[3] For this study, we define digital document processes and tools as including any processes, workflows, or platforms to manage the creation, collaboration, distribution, and storage of digital documents and records within the guardrails of corporate policies. This includes solutions that allow for reading, editing, signing, and sharing of PDF and other documents.

[4] For this study, we define sales professionals whose departments or organizations are using mostly digital document processes as those that selected either: "We exclusively use digital document processes" or "We mostly use digital document processes, but a number of our processes still require paper-based or manual steps." This response was to a question that asked about their department's or organization's level of adoption of digital document processes. Additionally, for this study, we define sales professionals whose departments or organizations are using minimal or a mix of digital document processes as those that selected: "We have not adopted digital document processes and use paper-based or manual processes and tools for document management;" "We mainly use manual or paper-based processes and have implemented minimal digital document processes;" or "We use a mix of paper-based and digital processes and tools for document management," This response was to the same question that asked about their department's or organization's level of adoption of digital document processes.

[5] Source: "Why Sales Reps Spend Less Than 36% Of Time Selling (And Less Than 18% In CRM)," Forbes, January 10, 2018 (https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenkrogue/2018/01/10/why-sales-reps-spend-less-than-36-of-time-selling-and-less-than-18-in-crm/).

[6] Source: Forrester Analytics Business Technographics® Security Survey, 2021.

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