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Thought Leadership Paper
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The State Of Enterprise Sales Enablement, 2019

How Companies Are Empowering Sales
Professionals To Deliver Meaningful, Personal
Buyer Interactions That Win



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Executive Summary

Modern business buyers are beyond empowered — they are entitled. Based on their frictionless experiences with consumer brands, they now demand unfettered access to information and expect relevant and highly personalized content to find them. With so much information directly available to prospects and customers, B2B organizations must equip sellers with robust sales enablement strategies and programs. Although sales enablement is not new, few selling organizations have fully optimized the function with regard to executing on buyer-centric strategies. It is critical for organizations to get it right, as Forrester's recent research shows a direct correlation between sales enablement maturity and revenue growth.¹

Today's enterprises need to measure everything related to their enablement programs — from the effectiveness of buyer-facing content, to internal communications and training, to real-time buyer engagement — and do so through a lens of how each facet is working to transform the buying experience into one that is personalized, productive, and mutually beneficial for both buyer and seller. Organizations that can do this productively — and set up enablement programs and processes that efficiently take data and turn it into actionable insights — will succeed in transforming their sales and marketing teams into a unified commercial engine tuned to exceed expectations of increasingly sophisticated and discerning buyers.

In March 2019, Seismic commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate how companies can more deeply engage with prospects and customers across the buyer journey. Forrester conducted an online survey with 382 enterprise sales enablement decision makers at the director level and above in marketing, sales, and operations roles.

KEY FINDINGS

- › **Modern buyers are making decisions differently, and sellers must adapt.** Nearly 90% of decision makers agree that buyers expect personalized information to a greater extent than they did five years ago. After engaging in self-service research, buyers are more knowledgeable when they have their first interaction with a seller, and they expect sellers to meet them where they are in the buying journey.
- › **Enterprises struggle to deliver personalized sales interactions.** Despite ranking asset personalization as the top success factor for prospect engagement, only one in five organizations is very effective at personalizing sales assets. Inefficiencies and lack of data-driven insights abound; 70% agree that marketers spend too much time policing sellers' asset use to ensure brand and regulatory compliance, and most firms are not looking at high-impact metrics to better understand which assets help accelerate and close deals.
- › **The right software can accelerate sales enablement efforts.** Sales enablement automation (SEA) can streamline workflows and increase collaboration between sales and marketing, as 62% of respondents with SEA have seen improved collaboration. Additionally, centralized analytics can help organizations develop a comprehensive view of what content is working and what is not.



Nearly **90%** agree that buyers expect more relevant, personalized information than they did five years ago.



Asset personalization is the top success factor for customer and prospect engagement.

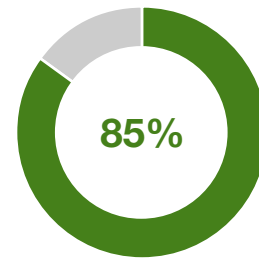


62% of SEA users have improved sales and marketing collaboration.

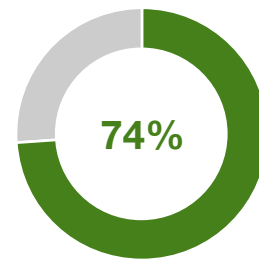
Modern Buyers Are Making Decisions Differently, And Sellers Must Adapt

Modern buyers are changing how they make decisions, and sellers must adapt to effectively cater to their needs. The same individuals who make purchasing decisions in a business-to-business (B2B) context are bringing expectations to work that have been shaped by brand experiences in their personal lives. The result is that buyers now demand the same exceptional experience when interacting with marketing and sales over the course of their purchase journeys in a business context.² In surveying 382 sales enablement decision makers, we found that:

- › **Modern buyers are knowledgeable, self-directed, and digitally oriented.** With numerous options for learning about a new company or solution, buyers increasingly engage in self-service research. In addition, they expect personalized information across a greater number of channels. Almost 90% of marketing, sales, and operations professionals agree that buyers have greater expectations of a personalized experience today than they did five years ago (see Figure 1).
- › **Buyers dismiss sellers who do not provide personalized information.** Eighty-five percent of respondents agree that buyers will dismiss a seller in the first interaction if they don't receive tailored information. Organizations that fail to arm their sellers with modern tools and methods run the risk of negatively impacting sales results.
- › **The role of sales is changing in response to evolving buyer behavior.** Sellers spend a greater proportion of their time researching customers' industries and business challenges (as compared to building relationships or other sales methods) than they did five years ago. It is more critical than ever that sellers are equipped to meet buyers where they are in the buying journey with relevant, personalized insights about the buyer's unique needs.



85% agree that buyers will dismiss a seller in the first interaction if they don't receive tailored information.



74% agree that sellers spend more time researching customers' industries and business challenges than they did five years ago.

Figure 1

"In thinking about your organization's B2B customers, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements." (Only "Strongly agree/Agree" responses are shown.)

88% Buyers expect relevant, personalized information to a greater extent today than they did five years ago.

83% Buyers expect to access relevant content across a greater number of channels than they did five years ago.

78% Buyers are more likely to engage in self-service research before buying our products/services than they did five years ago.

Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

Collaboration, Content Personalization, And Analytics Gaps Prevent Firms From Optimizing Buyer Experiences

While the buyer journey has evolved, organizations have not kept pace. Sales enablement as a function is relatively less mature. Only just over a quarter of all respondents in a recent study have had a sales enablement function in place for more than five years.³ As a result, sales and marketing still struggle with numerous collaboration and process-driven challenges:

- › **Organizations lack the capability to deliver personalization at scale.** Despite ranking personalization as the top success factor for customer engagement, only 1 in 5 organizations is very effective at personalizing content at scale. This problem is exacerbated by assets residing in multiple disparate locations, so firms have no centralized view of the latest assets.
- › **Organizations struggle to gain access to meaningful and actionable data.** With a decentralized approach to asset creation and maintenance, firms are unable to effectively track metrics that matter and generate actionable insights. More than half agree that their firms have not yet effectively figured out how to generate actionable insights from sales asset data. Marketing particularly struggles in this area: They are 1.4 times more likely to agree that their organization does not have visibility into top- or poor-performing sales assets, which suggests there is no feedback loop between sales and marketing to support content optimization (see Figure 2). Currently, firms are more likely to track lower-value metrics — like downloads — rather than higher-impact metrics — like viewing times or closed deals influenced by specific assets (see Figure 3).



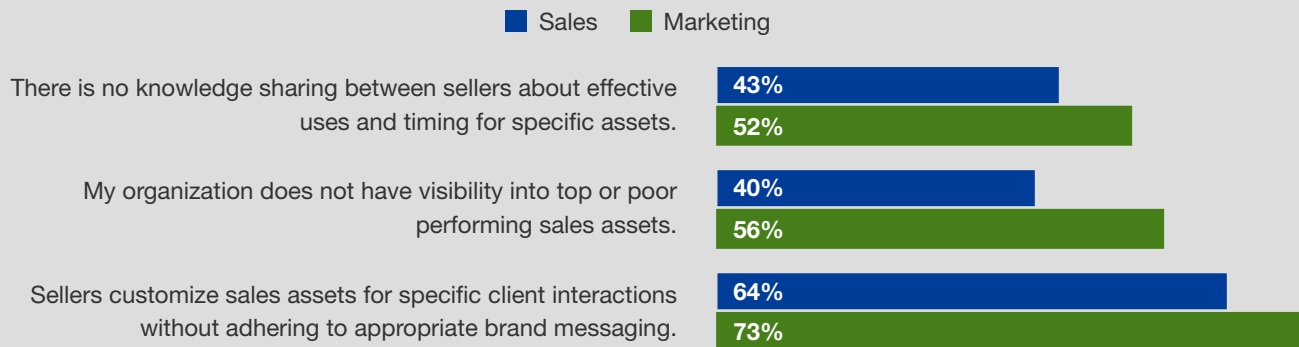
63% say asset personalization is critical to success for customer and prospect engagement.



Only **22%** are very effective at personalizing content for every buyer interaction.

Figure 2

“In thinking about your organization’s sales assets and sales enablement efforts, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.”

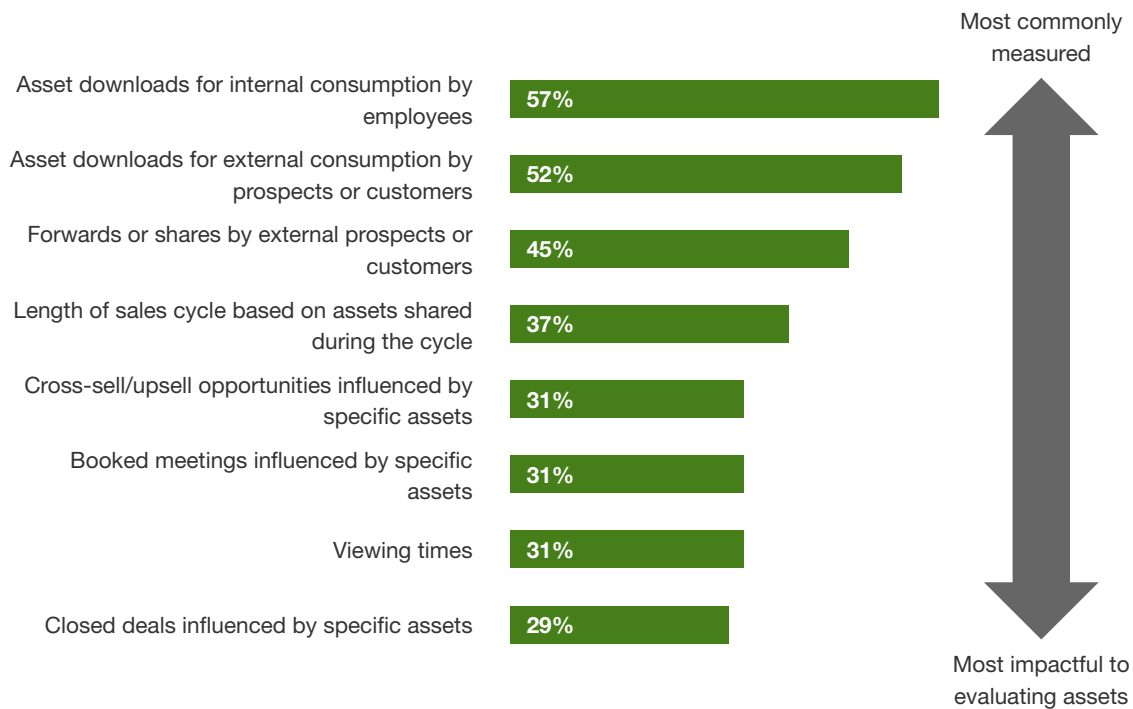


Base: 224 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

Figure 3

“Which of the following metrics does your organization track to evaluate usage and effectiveness of sales assets?”

Percent of respondents who track this metric



Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

- › **Sales and marketing silos are detrimental to seller productivity.** In most organizations, sales and marketing activities are largely siloed. Rather than focusing on selling or other high-value activities, sellers spend an inordinate amount of time searching for, customizing, or recreating assets for specific interactions. Our survey findings reveal that sellers spend up to a third of their time on low-value activities (see Figure 4).
- › **Sales and marketing silos are detrimental to marketer productivity.** When sellers independently create assets without consulting marketing and adhering to appropriate brand messaging, marketers waste time policing sellers’ asset use to ensure brand consistency and regulatory compliance (see Figure 5). The combined sales and marketing inefficiencies ultimately lead to poor customer experience; prospective buyers may receive delayed responses to inquiries or out-of-date or inaccurate information.



70% agree that marketers spend too much time policing sellers’ asset use to ensure brand and regulatory compliance.

Figure 4

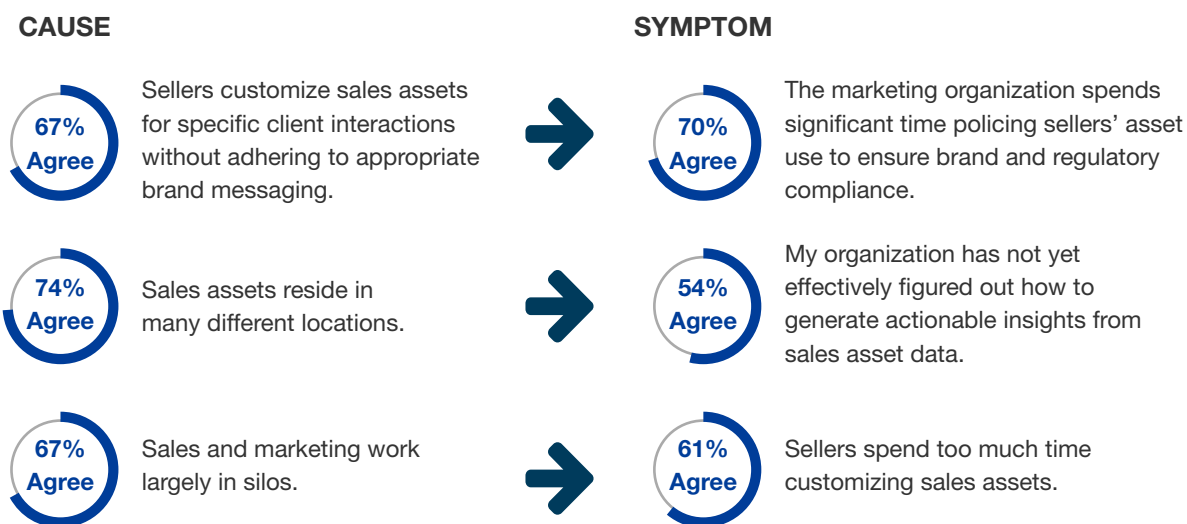
“Using your best estimate, about what percent of working hours would sellers at your organization currently spend on the following activities each week?”

Activity	Average time spent each week	
Researching prospects and customers	8.8%	3.5 hours
Customizing assets and presentations in advance of prospect meetings	9.4%	3.8 hours
Prepping for meetings with prospects/customers (excluding content development)	9.2%	3.7 hours
Ongoing training/learning about the company’s products and new releases	8.8%	3.5 hours
	36.2%	14.5 hours

Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

Figure 5

“In thinking about your organization’s sales assets and sales enablement efforts, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.”



Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019



The Right Software Can Accelerate Sales Enablement Efforts

Sales enablement automation delivers benefits that are critical to engaging customers and prospects. Enabling sellers now requires providing access to insights and tools that improve their efficiency and effectiveness in engaging with prospects and customers. Our research shows that firms with SEA solutions in place have stronger operational practices across several dimensions than firms that do not have a solution in place:

- › **Better marketing and sales collaboration, as well as productivity gains.** B2B firms with SEA solutions in place are more likely to have regular leadership cadences to ensure marketing and sales are tightly aligned. Respondents at these firms report that marketing and sales personnel meet regularly to discuss the type of content sellers need to be successful. They also are more likely to have a common set of metrics and a shared understanding of asset use: Marketers understand why sellers use assets provided to them, and sellers understand why marketers recommend certain assets. When considering the impact of functional information sharing, it is not surprising that nearly 70% of companies with SEA solutions have experienced higher sales productivity and performance (see Figure 6).
- › **More data at their fingertips to inform asset development.** With advanced analytics, marketers continuously improve assets from advanced insights, and sellers receive recommendations on assets to use in specific scenarios based on previous sales experience. Additionally, systems can highlight outdated content for content reduction (see Figure 7).
- › **Greater ability to attract and retain employees.** Organizations with SEA solutions are better able to recruit and retain sellers. This correlation may be because sales professionals now seek out environments where they will be well-equipped with the tools they need to succeed (see Figure 6).
- › **Stronger personalization capabilities.** Sixty percent of marketing, sales, and operations decision makers agree that SEA solutions provide sellers with the ability to deliver personalized engagement experiences, which is a critical differentiator in today's business climate (see Figure 6).



Figure 6

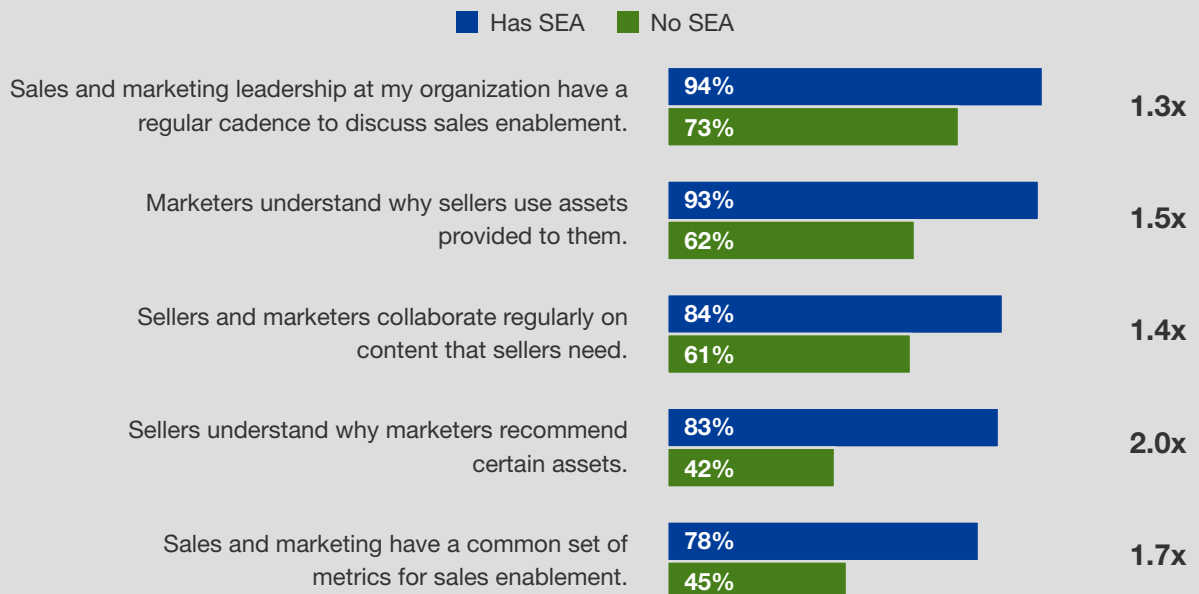
“Which benefits has your organization seen after implementing sales enablement software?”



Base: 161 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees that currently use SEA software
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

Figure 7

“To what extent do the following statements describe the relationship between your organization's sales and marketing teams when it comes to sales enablement programs?” (Statement describes the relationship “completely” or “very well”)

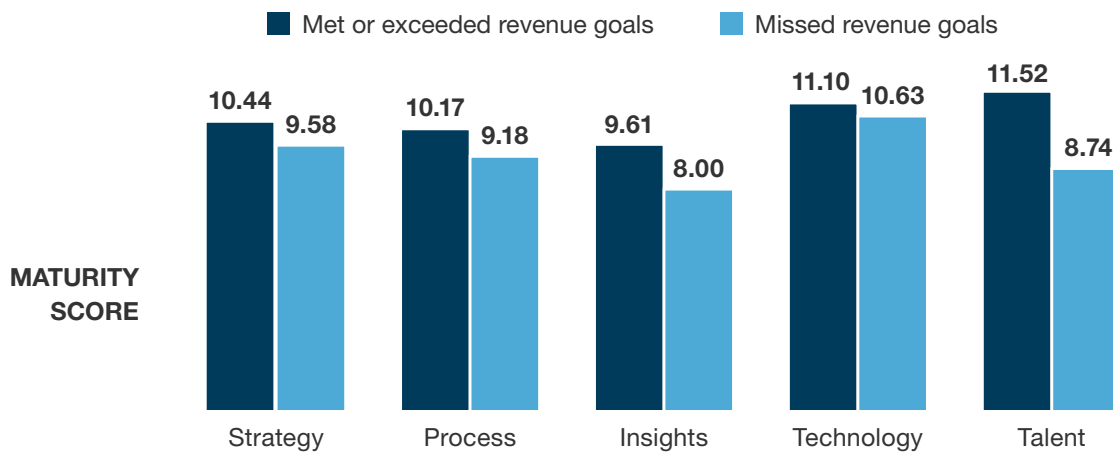


Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

› **Outstanding business performance.** There is a direct correlation between sales enablement maturity and a company’s ability to meet and exceed revenue goals (see Figure 8). On a 20-point maturity scale, the largest difference between those who achieve their revenue targets and those who do not, outside of talent, is insights (1.6-point difference in SE maturity). This finding illustrates that providing better insights to sellers and marketers is critical for revenue goal attainment. These companies also experience larger order values and more cross-sell and upsell opportunities. It’s not surprising: Collaborative teams that are more effective at creating, accessing, and delivering personalized content will deliver better experiences to their buyers — and ultimately win more business.

Figure 8

“Based on the B2B products and services for which your marketing and sales organizations are responsible, to what extent did you meet your revenue goals for the previous fiscal year?”



		CORE COMPETENCY				
		Strategy	Process	Insights	Tech	Talent
MATURITY LEVEL	Beginner	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10	1 to 10
	Intermediate	11 to 15	11 to 15	11 to 15	11 to 15	11 to 15
	Advanced	16 to 20	16 to 20	16 to 20	16 to 20	16 to 20

Base: 69 respondents

Source: Forrester’s Q3 2018 Global B2B Sales Enablement Online Survey



Key Recommendations

Today's buyers are digitally savvy, self-directed, and sophisticated. They demand better experiences when interacting with both salespeople and the assets provided to them. As such, it's now more critical than ever before that organizations get sales enablement right. Unfortunately, many companies are still struggling to keep pace with evolving buyer requirements. They lack the right systems and processes to support marketing and sales collaboration, lack asset personalization at scale, and have no way to access data and insights. B2B organizations must quickly take steps to address these gaps and better enable sellers to meet the needs of modern buyers.

Forrester's in-depth survey of marketing, sales, and operations decision makers yielded several important recommendations:



Implement a robust sales enablement automation solution. For sellers to engage in personalized and meaningful ways, they need access to the right tools. SEA solutions enable sellers to quickly deliver custom and relevant content at scale, provide them with buyer consumption data and analytics to inform their next action, and dramatically enhance their collaboration with marketing colleagues.



Measure more impactful metrics. It is time to shift from measuring low-value and commonly measured metrics to higher-impact metrics — such as closed deals influenced by specific assets — which will enable sellers to better identify which assets are right for a particular buyer at a particular phase in their journey. These metrics will also help marketers better understand what content to sunset and what content to keep up to date.



Foster collaboration between marketing and sales. In a world with sophisticated and independent buyers, the days of the “lone wolf” seller are over. Marketing and sales personnel now require tools that enhance collaboration through digital workflows and support data-driven decisions versus emotional conversations. The time has come that one can no longer succeed without the other.

Appendix A: Terminology

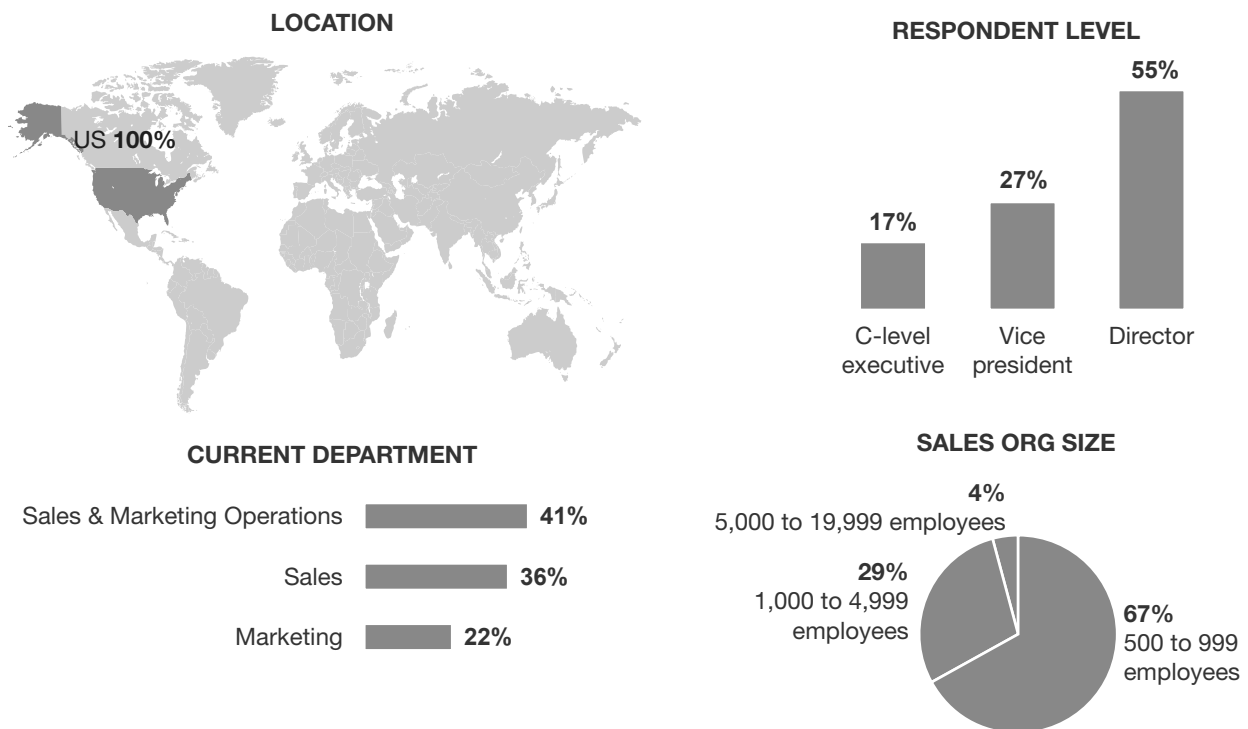
Forrester defines modern sales enablement as a business function that helps all selling systems work in an effective, efficient, and coordinated manner to increase revenue lift, minimize costs associated with sales, and deliver more meaningful experiences to buyers.

Sales enablement automation (SEA) is a solution that allows sellers to efficiently access and share content. With analytics, data visualizations, and collaborative workflow, SEA increases marketing and sales collaboration and provides marketers with insights to create content that impacts commercial outcomes.

Appendix B: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey with 382 respondents in marketing, sales, and sales enablement roles in the US to evaluate the crucial need to fuel sales enablement through data and metrics. Survey participants included director-level and above decision makers with responsibility for sales enablement assets and technology decisions at companies with sales organizations of at least 500 employees across industries. Questions provided to the participants asked about their current sales enablement capabilities, challenges with current capabilities, and what benefits companies are seeing from sales enablement assets. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study began in March 2019 and was completed in June 2019.

Appendix C: Demographics



Base: 382 decision makers of sales enablement assets in the US at companies of 500+ employees
Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Seismic, May 2019

Appendix D: Supplemental Material

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

“The Future Of Sales Enablement Is The C-Suite,” Forrester Research, Inc., April 30, 2019.

“Milestones On The Journey To Modern Sales Enablement,” Forrester Research, Inc., June 7, 2019.

“Evaluate Your Sales Enablement Maturity,” Forrester Research, Inc., November 6, 2018.

Appendix E: Endnotes

¹ Source: Forrester’s Q3 2018 Global B2B Sales Enablement Online Survey.

² Source: “The Birth Of The B2B Consumer,” Forrester Research, Inc., October 5, 2017.

³ Source: “The Future Of Sales Enablement Is The C-Suite,” Forrester Research, Inc., April 30, 2019.