

IT Buyer Insights:

Why Your Sales Team's Outreach Might Be Missing the Mark

In many sales organizations, the ability to pinpoint, understand, and speak to a buyer's key corporate objectives is thought to be essential. After all, conventional wisdom suggests that those objectives drive buying decisions, making them critical when sales teams craft their pitches.

The reality is that accepting such wisdom often causes sales organizations to turn a blind eye to other transitional factors that help drive the sales process.¹ This can give sales professionals a false sense of clarity around how the IT sales process works, and a misguided notion of how to make that process more efficient and effective.

Making matters worse, when someone doesn't understand the front end of the sales process, it clouds that person's interpretation of what happens later on. That, in turn, can make it difficult to prioritize process improvements, wasting time and resources, and resulting in lost sales opportunities. Over time, this lack of clarity can also lead to significant inefficiencies in the overall sales process.

Supporting these assertions are the results of a recent OpenView survey of more than 130 B2B salespeople and IT buyers,² which illustrate how perceptions of the sales process are often misaligned and point to ways of addressing these issues. The survey sought to identify the discrepancies that exist between what salespeople believe drive IT buyer outreach, and what IT buyers say actually influences their purchasing decisions. Specifically, the survey found that:

- While B2B salespeople tend to believe that IT buyer outreach is primarily due to direct management orders to research or buy a new solution, according to most IT buyers that's not the case.
- Although many B2B salespeople believe their outreach is rejected because their pitches aren't specific enough to buyers' needs, IT buyers cite a lack of interest in the product or service as the primary reason for rejecting sales outreach.

¹ These factors include organizational and leadership transitions, organizational maturation, and grassroots innovation, among others.

² Only individuals who have been directly involved in an IT sales process as either the salesperson or manager responsible for closing the deal/decision-maker responsible for signing off on the purchase were included in this report. For more information on the profiles of the respondents, see the Appendix.

- B2B sellers widely agreed that they must aggressively pursue opportunities in order to stay top-of-mind, but the IT buyers in our survey favor less frequent interaction with salespeople, preferably no more than weekly or even monthly contact.

Those findings suggest that sales organizations often misunderstand how sales opportunities come to be, as well as which factors most efficiently move the sales process forward. Ultimately, that misalignment can often confuse what is or isn't working in the sales process, which tends to result in wasted time and effort by the sales team.

So, what should B2B salespeople be doing differently?

To improve your sales team's effectiveness, you must spend time understanding how your buyers view the sales process and then incorporate that insight into your end-to-end approach.

The following pages explore the data from our survey in greater detail, reveal changes your company can make to improve its sales process understanding, and explain why creating highly relevant content for each stage in a buyer's journey — rather than focusing on a buyer's corporate objectives — is the real key to a more effective and efficient sales process.

ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITION PLAYS A BIG ROLE IN IT BUYING DECISIONS

While it would be foolish to suggest that corporate objectives and management directives play no role in the sales process, the OpenView survey shows that sales teams tend to over-emphasize the importance of those factors.

As Figure 1 illustrates, 32 percent of sales respondents said IT buyers reached out to them in their sales process because they were asked to do so by their management team. By contrast, only 12 percent of IT buyers said this was actually the case. Instead, nearly half of the IT buyers in our survey suggested that the impetus for reaching out to a salesperson was to research a market or to initiate a major change in their organization.



Those numbers clearly point to sales organizations' misunderstanding of how sales opportunities originate — a discrepancy that can harmfully influence how salespeople interpret other issues in the sales process and prioritize their process improvement efforts.

SALES OUTREACH REJECTED DUE TO LACK OF INTEREST

One of the biggest reasons sales and marketing messaging falls flat is because the people creating it lack a true understanding of the factors that influence their buyers' decision-making process. Consequently, the value proposition that the sales team delivers does not resonate with buyers' needs or pain points, which can lead to disinterest in the company's product or service. This point is shown in the chart below.

Figure 2: Why Sales Outreach is Rejected

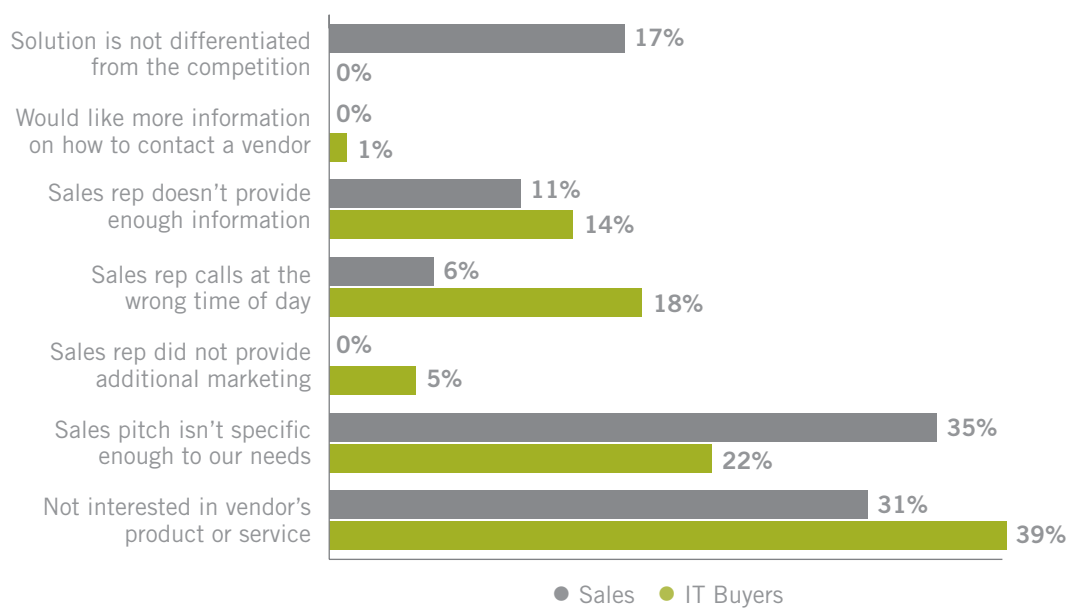


Figure 2 illustrates how misunderstanding the source of a buyer's needs or interest in a product or service can incorrectly influence a salesperson's interpretation of the factors that stall a sales process. Because sales and marketing teams often lack the insight necessary to understand what drives the sales process from the buyer's perspective, they struggle to create and deliver highly relevant content for each stage of that buyer's journey. That misalignment can lead to buyer disinterest caused by poor messaging — the factor that most IT buyers suggest causes them to reject sales outreach.



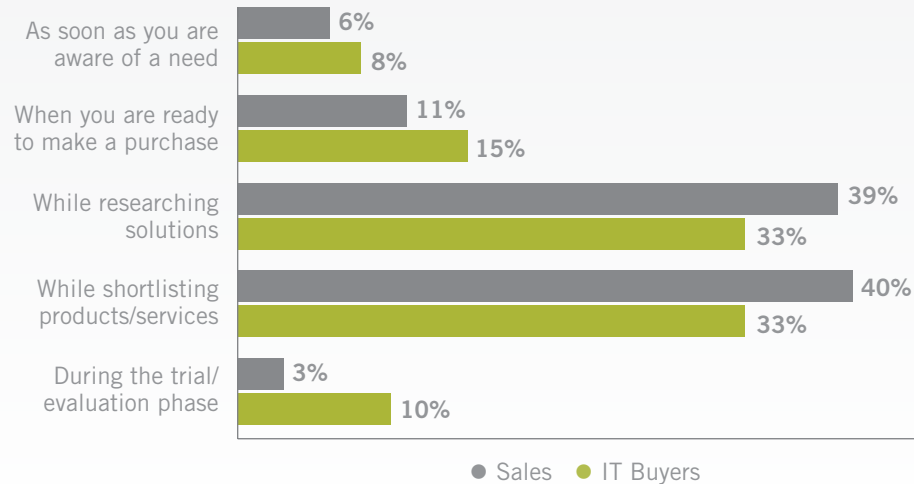
“Individuals capable of creating demand know that what you do in the first 30 percent of a sales cycle (targeting, qualifying, creating value) will largely determine how well, how predictable, and how consistent the back 70 percent will be.”

Michael Tarbet, VP of Sales, UnboundID

When is the Best Time to Begin Sales Outreach?

Surprisingly, this is the one question IT buyers and B2B salespeople agreed on in our survey.

Figure 3: The Best Stage of the Buying Process for Sales Outreach



The chart above shows that outreach is most effective when buyers begin actively researching and comparing solutions. Importantly, because of IT buyers' clear assertion that they prefer less frequent interaction with salespeople, marketing teams must play a key role in these engagement stages to ensure their prospective buyers continue to progress along their journey.

By creating content that educates prospective customers about their needs and pain points, and how to address them, marketers can more effectively facilitate this stage in the sales process without having to initiate direct conversations with buyers.

WIN THEIR HEARTS BY MAPPING YOUR MESSAGES TO EACH STAGE OF THE BUYER JOURNEY

Clearly, the conventional wisdom that many B2B companies have accepted as fact does not paint a complete picture of the many factors that can influence sales process effectiveness and efficiency. As the charts above illustrate, organizational change is a powerful driver of IT purchases, and effective sales outreach is ultimately defined by your company's ability to deliver the right messaging to the right customer at the right time.

To better facilitate the buying process and avoid costly inefficiencies, salespeople need to present themselves as change agents or catalysts, and position their product as a solution that can help the organization better manage major transitions as well as address major corporate objectives. Doing so will improve salespeople's chances of capturing their buyers' attention and ensuring that conversations remain focused on factors that actually move buyers through their journey.

Ultimately, however, the insight from this report boils down to one core takeaway: In order for your B2B sales team to more effectively manage its sales process, you must invest time into truly understanding how and why a buying process starts, as well as the factors that influence your buyers' journeys. Only then

will you be able to map your marketing content and sales messaging to the various stages of that journey in ways that truly resonate with each buyer's needs.

One of the best ways of ensuring this happens is by creating a content matrix. Doing so will help you better organize and understand your buyer personas, map out the stages of each buyer's journey, and determine the content formats, channels, and approaches that will resonate most with those stages. Your goal is to create a resource that helps your sales team deliver the right content to the right prospect at the right time.

The more your sales team is able to do that, the better your company's chances are of developing highly tailored campaigns that speak directly to what buyers actually care about, rather than what your sales team thinks they care about. This ultimately will lead to higher sales conversion rates and help your company grow faster.



“When salespeople are able to put themselves in their customers’ shoes, and understand their motivation, they have the potential to become true value-adding partners who provide market and product knowledge. When this happens, the sales process becomes a frictionless, collaborative engagement, and ultimately a win-win situation for buyers and sellers alike.”

Tien Anh Nguyen, Director of Market Insights, OpenView Venture Partners

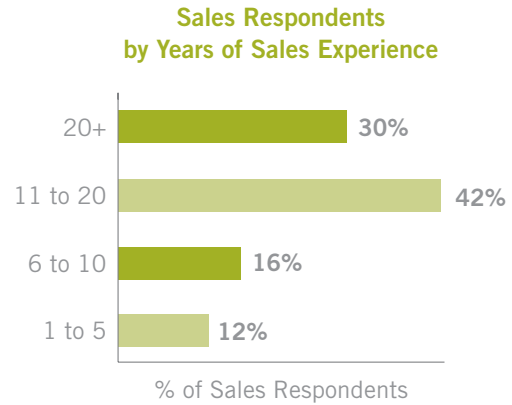
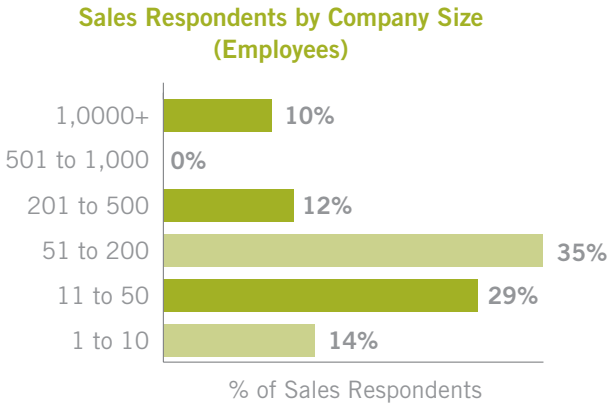
7 Resources to Help You Align Your Content to Your Buyer's Journey

1. “The Buyer Persona Manifesto” by Adele Revella
http://www.buyerpersona.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/The_Buyer_Persona_Manifesto.pdf
2. “5 Steps to a Buyer-Centric Content Audit” by Carmen Hill
<http://www.bnj.com/blog/5-steps-buyercentric-content-audit/>
3. “Hey Marketers: Sales Doesn't get Your Content Strategy” by Ardath Albee
http://marketinginteractions.typepad.com/marketing_interactions/2013/07/hey-marketers-sales-doesnt-get-your-content-strategy.html
4. “Are Your B2B Buyers More Evolved than Your Content” by Ardath Albee
http://marketinginteractions.typepad.com/marketing_interactions/2014/02/are-your-b2b-buyers-more-evolved-than-your-content.html
5. “6 Ways to Speed Up a B2B Sales Process” by April Dunford
<http://www.rocketwatcher.com/blog/2013/08/speed-up-b2b-sales-process.html>
6. “The 4 C's of effective Go to Market Design” by Scott Maxwell
<http://labs.openviewpartners.com/go-to-market-strategy-elements-4-cs/>
7. “8-Step Guide to B2B Content Mapping: Aligning Your Content to the Buying Cycle” by Brandon Hickie <http://labs.openviewpartners.com/b2b-content-mapping-guide/>

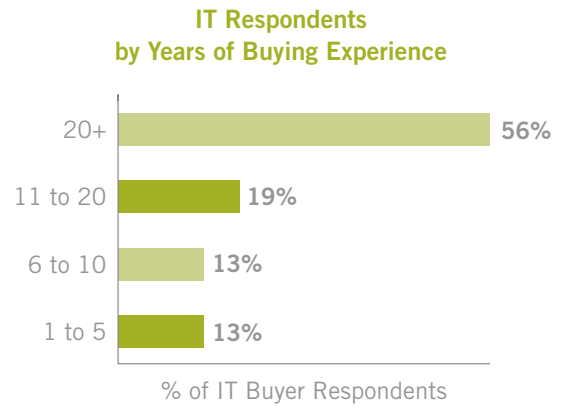
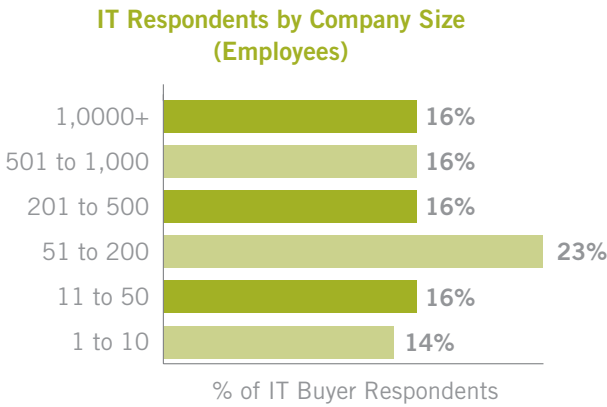
APPENDIX

OpenView's December 2013 survey of more than 130 B2B salespeople and IT buyers was broken down as follows:

B2B Sales People (69 respondents)



IT Buyers (64 respondents)



To learn more about how OpenView Venture Partners can help accelerate your success, contact us at (617) 478-7500 or e-mail info@openviewpartners.com.