

4 considerations to maximize your sales productivity and profits.

Technology insights to solve the challenges facing sales teams in the distribution and manufacturing sectors.



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How distributors, wholesalers, and manufacturers can boost sales productivity in challenging times with sales technology.

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**Why is sales
productivity so
important?**

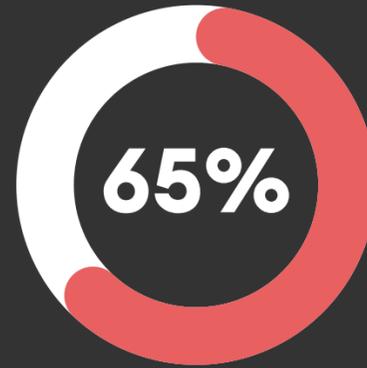
1 Why is sales productivity so important?

Sales productivity is the pinnacle of business success because it is the ‘success formula’ that maximizes time spent on critical (productive) activities and minimizes the resources required to accomplish them.

Current conditions in wholesale, distribution, and manufacturing are challenging productivity.

This e-book provides the strategies to maximize sales productivity, without incurring extra costs, time, or resources.

In fact, by improving this equation, it can shift from 65% time spent on non-selling activities, by eliminating these low-value activities to focus on value-maximizing activities. Demand is healthy for most but labor shortages, supply chain disruption, inflation, and more are adding to the pressure on many businesses.



of business economists reported an increase in sales for the fourth quarter of 2021, but 57% reported experiencing labor shortages

*According to National Association for Business Economics
January 2022 Business Conditions Survey.



Congestion at ports, labor issues, and more have meant containers spend more time in transit, and prices on route have increased upwards of 80% year on year.

*According to Fast Company.

Sales has seen some of the most substantial shifts, as B2B buyers shift toward digital preferences and teams must meet rising demand with fewer people.

Fortunately, just as the pressure on productivity intensifies, the technology that distributors and manufacturers need to greatly improve their circumstances and performance has become more accessible – and more powerful.

Sales technology has been advancing to solve these productivity issues. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and automation are removing the non-productive from our workday, enabling teams to become more productive despite the labor shortage, inflation, and supply-chain uncertainty.

Teams benefit from actionable insights to help them communicate in a more meaningful way with customers. This results in strengthening relationships faster and with less effort. Ultimately ensuring that your business can meet new and emerging B2B customer expectations.

Read on to understand the productivity challenges your industries face and discover how to apply valuable techniques to overcome them.



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The new B2B buyer.

2 The new B2B buyer.

For sales leaders to stay ahead, you need to align your selling approach to the new B2B sales reality – that gut instinct is giving way to an insights-driven sales system. To serve these B2B buyers, many distributors using the right sales tools are already unearthing hidden opportunities and drive better results than their competitors in this space.

Today's B2B buyers are a new breed. They:



Are digital-first.



Have more buying options than ever before.



Conduct much of their research independently of a sales rep.



Expect personalization (driven by data).



Want optimized sales interactions (i.e. brief and meaningful).

“Gartner expects 60% of B2B sales organizations will favor data-driven selling by 2025.”

Gartner

Modern sales tools meet the needs of this new breed of B2B buyer. Over the last couple of years, sales enablement technology has evolved immensely with AI and machine learning that bridges the gap between salespeople and their data, highlighting actionable insights with almost no user input, at a fraction of the cost and time.

This means that these sales tools advances can enable your sales teams to more efficiently meet these new B2B buyer expectations, identify opportunities and risks, and continually evolve to better serve the buyer amidst disruption and change.

Fundamentally, by knowing your customers' needs along with bigger picture insights will help to prevent erosion and create upselling and cross-selling opportunities - and therefore maximize your sales productivity.

Imagine if your sales tool provided even just a 5% increase in customer retention, insights show that this alone can lead to a significant profit increase with anything from 25% to 95% (Source: HubSpot).

B2B buyers now expect providers to have semi-psychic abilities.

Know your customers better than your competitors.

B2C customers expect salespeople to have a full understanding of their previous interactions, such as communications and purchase history, so they can pick up where they left off without having to backtrack.

Sales enablement technology can do this by delivering meaningful data, insights, and key talking points quickly to your fingertips.

Read customers' minds.

Customers want your business to anticipate their needs. They expect you to have insights they might not have due to your work and insights from working with hundreds of similar customers. If you can leverage sales tech to know what's trending - you are ahead of the game.

Look at the data of your most profitable accounts, where are they finding success and how are they gaining efficiencies with their orders over others? You can carry those lessons to other customers to greatly enhance each customer's experience.

Notice changes in your customer behaviors before they happen.

B2B buyers want you to notice and appreciate their business. If you don't recognize a change in their business with you, such as ordering less or skipping an order altogether, it will challenge their loyalty to you.

With the ability to identify trends, risks and opportunities sooner, sales reps can be more proactive on the customer retention front - with less work.

Your sales technology manages the responsibility of noticing changes across hundreds of customers, and it can use historic data and trends to forecast a shift before it happens.

Make things easy.

Manufacturing and distribution customers now expect the types of conveniences they get their

B2C experiences from their B2B providers, with 72% of B2B buyers expecting their commerce experience to be as intuitive as they get in the retail world.

Digitally enabled experiences that marry data, analytics, and cloud-based tools, provide a distinct competitive edge. In sales, by leveraging automation, Artificial intelligence (AI), and customer insights, you can provide more personalized experiences that are more convenient and valuable for customers.



Prior to sales-i, we were using our dealer operating system. Anything we did reporting-wise was mainly manual labor. The canned reports were not up to the standards we were looking for within the business system.

We were looking for a platform that will allow us to, not only react to the loss of business but be proactive in how we target our business.

Josh Ussery,
Operations Sales & Marketing Manager,
Nextran Truck Centres



3

The labor shortage.

3 The labor shortage.

Many wholesalers, distributors, and manufacturers have shared that they tend to have less trouble finding leads than the manpower to capture them.

The Washington Post found that while strong economic recovery drove up demand for workers in 2021, the labor force participation rate didn't rise to meet the demands of that recovery (Source: Washington Post). More people are retiring than anticipated and people are quitting at higher rates.

And individuals aren't entering the workforce, citing reasons such as COVID-related issues, or those taking early retirement sooner.

With conditions such as these, it's no wonder sales teams are seeing more opportunities than they have the capacity to capture them.

Power up existing sales teams.

Nothing is more counterproductive than manual, redundant processes that can be automated with the right tech.

Each salesperson gets a substantial power up when you introduce better sales technology into the equation so they can sell smarter.

Time

How much time does your team spend on administrative tasks, such as data collection and preparation, reporting and communication? Consider the potential if your finance and sales teams got that time back thanks to AI and automation.

Insight

The right technology can identify the most promising prospects from the data, identifying who a salesperson should call next and what to sell them based on behavior, segment and other factors.

Oversight

Salespeople can only nurture customer relationships one at a time. Technology can catch and flag key indicators of risk and opportunity in the customer data, alerting your team as needed.

You don't have to miss a beat in terms of productivity for you and your business.

A sales technology stack that supports automation powered by AI, means that existing salespeople can optimize their efforts, serving even more customers – better.

And you can usher in new hires to your business faster and more efficiently.

Give new hires a fast pass to productivity.

You can reduce onboarding time from up to a year to a matter of months or even weeks if your technology is easy to understand and use.

Sales reps can offer relevant products and services while still familiarizing themselves with your business.

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Advanced capabilities that attract talent.

In a tight labor market, you want to have tools that will make your roles more attractive and promising for candidates.

This is especially important in sales, where the tools have an outsized influence on employees' day-to-day lives and role success.

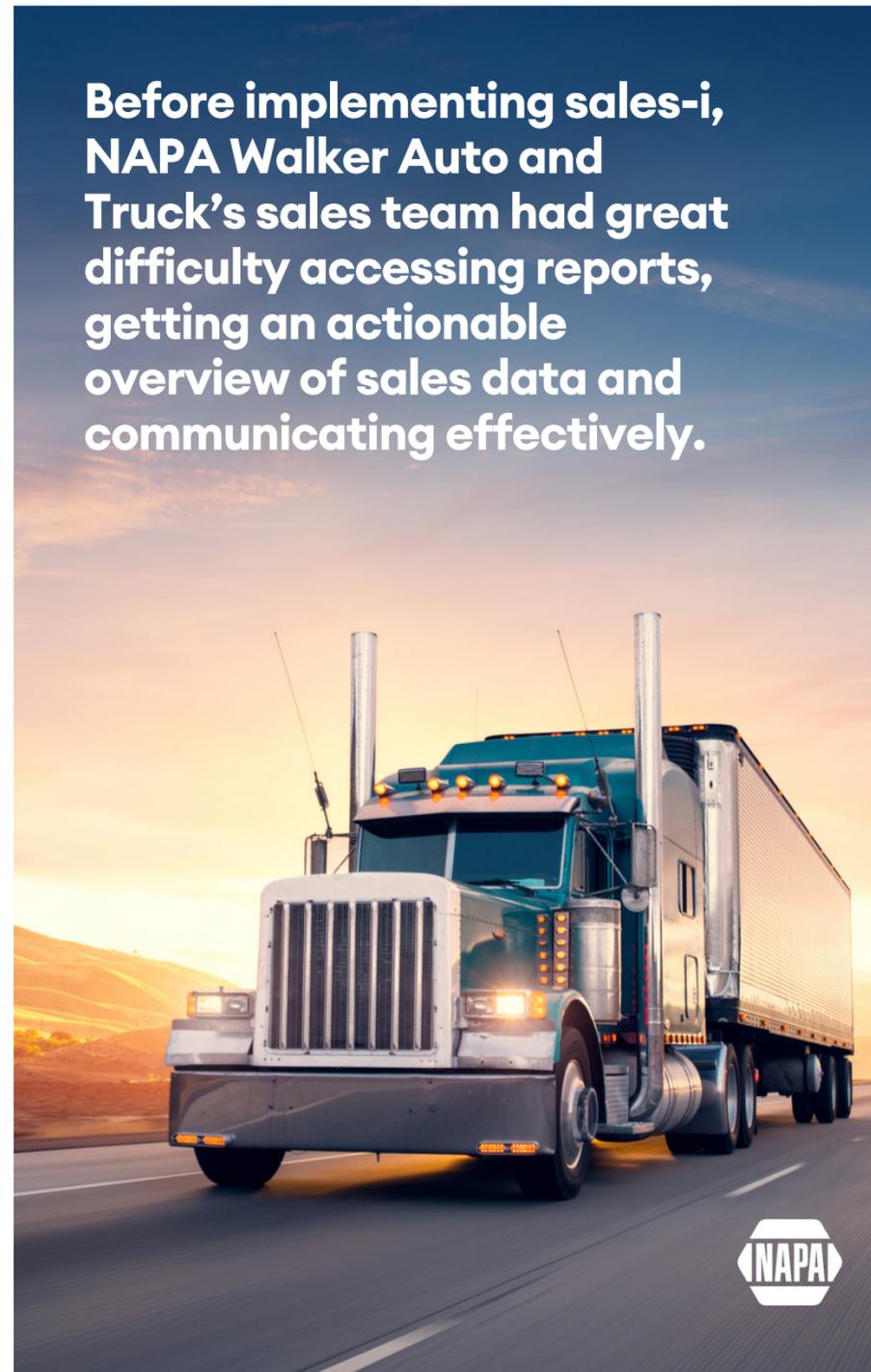
You also want to be able to broaden your hiring pool to include candidates with less experience in your industry.

Having user-friendly tools that improve onboarding time will make a difference.

The right technology stack is intuitive and elevates new hires' capabilities and customer knowledge out of the gate. It reduces your time to success, by eliminating redundant administrative tasks.

This can lead to improving productivity, increasing the speed of onboarding, and making more effective salespeople right away.

Before implementing sales-i, NAPA Walker Auto and Truck's sales team had great difficulty accessing reports, getting an actionable overview of sales data and communicating effectively.



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We have gained business because we are able to see specific lines and have conversations around them. Also, anyone in our company can view call notes about customers.

This really helps if our management team visits customers. They can pull up history so they are not blindsided with issues or can discuss previous call notes.

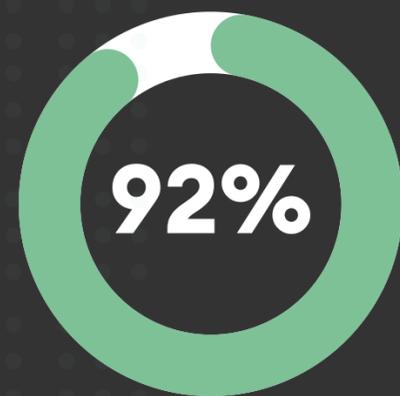
Phillip Liles,
Sales Support Manager,
NAPA Walker and Auto Truck

4

**The rise in merger
& acquisition
activity.**

4 The rise in merger & acquisition activity.

Both distribution and manufacturing are experiencing increased merger and acquisition (M&A) activity. As any company who has been involved in an acquisition knows, disruption is par for the course.



In 2021 M&A activity broke records with over 62,000 deals globally (PwC). And 92% of executives surveyed anticipate an increase in deal volume or that it will sustain itself over the coming year.

*According to Deloitte.

While each company is busy managing the ins and outs of the deal and making the transition, the sales team is challenged to maintain and grow sales and retain customer relationships.



A report from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that over the course of 20 years, U.S. takeovers led to losses of \$226 billion in shareholder value.

*According to National Bureau of Economic Research

Establishing stability takes time. Technology can play a major role in mitigating disruption throughout an integration and beyond – and acquirers know it. The more seamless they can make this process, the easier it will be to protect productivity, stabilize and grow – right out of the gate.

Technology adds value for acquirers.

Acquirers are putting more emphasis than ever on the available technology stack when evaluating acquisitions.

They're looking for advanced technology, digital capabilities, and analytics to gain a clearer view of their potential ROI, such as sales technology that unifies sales, product, and customer data and leverages Artificial intelligence (AI). Buyers also want technology that can readily scale.

Further, acquirers are looking for companies with effective data programs. Analytics gives potential buyers a clear picture of the existing business, its customers, as well as the revenue potential.

They will pay more for these capabilities because these assets – technology and data – mean a buyer can be more successful and productive from the start. If a seller wants to maximize their valuation – commanding a premium – getting their data and technology in shape could be the ticket.

Foster confidence to flourish with new sales tech

According to Distribution Strategy Group, over half of distributors are unsatisfied with their sales team's performance. In many cases, teams have had to adapt to a digital way without the right training, along with more time pressures to carry out activities that are not value generating for them.

Go above and beyond to seek buy-in, ensure open two-way communication and feedback, provide thorough training and conduct change management. And ensure that the tech itself is backed by great customer support.

5

The state of
inflation.

5 The state of inflation.

Inflation is reaching historic heights. In early 2022, the annual consumer price index increased 7.9% in the U.S alone. (Source: The Financial Times).

Core contributors include jumps in energy prices, as well as political activity, supply and labor shortages, and social factors.

To thrive in such conditions, you must shore up areas of your business you have greater control over. Becoming more data-driven is crucial to this strategy, not only in sales but also in supply chain management, logistics, finance, operations, and more.

Get to an agile state that keeps you in control.

Having real-time data and leveraging technologies that utilize machine learning and Artificial intelligence (AI) means you can make strategic shifts as inflation occurs.

Increase the efficiency of your delivery routes.

With gas prices sky-high, you need to make the most of every mile traveled by your trucks. The right technology can optimize routes, identify waste, and provide opportunities to gain greater control over this process.

For example, reduce multiple short trips with small loads to close proximity destinations, by collaborating with customers to consolidate into one delivery a week, instead of five.

Focus on sales visits with a purpose.

Help your salespeople get the most from their in-person visits by using technology to put the right sales insights at their fingertips, so they have revenue-driving conversations. Customers benefit from this, as well.

They are also short on time and manpower, so they want a supplier to get them what they need when they need it – with little extra fanfare.

Reduce the cost of sales.

The cost of sales has gone up dramatically. And there are more accounts to manage with fewer people due to the labor shortage.

In a sample scenario, Distribution Strategy Group calculated:

\$100-\$133

Average cost per contact as for a field sales rep who makes three to four contacts per day.



\$10-\$12

Per contact for proactive inside sales reps who make 20-25 contacts per day.



Consider how you can use your in-house sales team more to connect with and sell more to existing customers. Ensure that every touch with a customer is driving value.

The Artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities embedded in technology help your entire customer-facing team sell smarter, helping them have more productive conversations and make smart in-the-moment decisions and suggestions. These pointers will all improve your overall profits and productivity.

Stop reacting to supply shortages.

Supply shortages have a major impact on wholesale and distribution.

So it is imperative that salespeople can rely on the stocking information they're seeing and which alternatives are suitable should supply shift.

Advanced technology can provide purchasing data and trends from customers to pivot.

Salespeople can also strengthen customer relationships by alerting customers to issues and having conversations about the current realities.

Vigorously defend existing customer relationships.

Your existing customers are one of the strongest pillars of your business. Technology fueled by AI and machine learning will help you get more from customer data and make it easier to navigate customer relationships.

You'll have a clearer view of the value you provide and the data to demonstrate the impact you make, as well as insights to drive relevant conversations.



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It allows us to easily identify where opportunities lie and when problems are beginning to arise, so we can be there for the right customer, at the right time, with the right products.

sales-i has saved time across all departments and allowed for accountability for every team member.

Georgina Morley,
National Account Manager,
Bancroft Wines



6

Conclusion.

6 Conclusion.

No one predicted every challenge wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers are currently facing. And no one predicted those challenges would all hit at once.

The learning opportunities these challenges provide albeit frustrating are priceless for all of us.

The greatest lesson was that technology investments are not a luxury; they have become a necessity.

Technology is the key catalyst to drive sales productivity like never before despite these challenges.

The businesses that use the right tech stack are overcoming the loss of knowledge that comes with retiring professionals, the steep learning curves of entry-level hires, changing customer expectations and demand, disruption in the economy and more.

The industry is seeing that small changes in approach can make a big difference. Be proactive when it comes to using data and technology to optimize where you can.

Shift your team's focus to being productive, bringing new life into your sales team and their efforts. Mitigate the impact of the uncontrollable in your organization. These changes are impactful and empowering throughout your entire organization.

A great CRM and sales enablement technology gives your sales reps superhuman capabilities, delivering insights you can use to customize your approach, without a large investment or additional staff.

Each touchpoint can be more meaningful. Your customers, existing and future ones, are sure to notice.

Who are sales-i?

sales-i is the leading [sales enablement technology](#) for the manufacturing, distribution, and wholesale sectors.

The company was founded in 2008 to help sales teams sell smart, every day no matter what, and still makes that their mission today.

Led by Paul Black and Kevin McGirl, who have over 40 year's experience delivering software solutions sales-i has grown to be a global leader within the sales technology industry.

The sales-i team is passionate about helping salespeople leverage customer data to maximize performance in challenging markets.



Work smart. Sell smart.

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