



Gartner®

Maximize Sales Success With Adaptive Strategies

How CSOs thrive in changing markets






Introduction

In today's rapidly changing B2B sales environment, sales leaders must adapt their strategies throughout the year to meet shifting economic pressures, U.S. policy changes and high growth expectations. Behind the challenges of longer sales cycles and reduced seller productivity, evidence shows that many sales organizations struggle to incorporate AI into workflows, identify critical skills, and meet evolving market and buyer demands. These accelerating challenges require a new response from sales leaders.

Traditionally, hiring more sellers and providing more tools and training was how sales leaders hoped to boost productivity. But this approach often lacks strategic alignment in a world where changes are happening faster than ever and all at once.

The key realization is that these challenges offer a chance for chief sales officers (CSOs) to transform and innovate sales by aligning commercial strategies, adapting plans and building skills for success in this dynamic market.

Top CSO challenges:

-  **1. How can we align our commercial strategies with the evolving landscape of younger, more diverse B2B buying groups?**
-  **2. How can I develop strategic sales plans that remain effective amid rapidly changing market conditions?**
-  **3. How can I develop the skills to navigate commercial disruptions and ensure my sales organization is future-ready?**

Sales organizations face multiple and accelerating challenges

Longer sales cycles

Only 13% of CSOs were viewed by CEOs and senior business executives as AI-savvy.

87% of sellers report that their sales leadership does not accurately identify which skills are required for success in the seller role.

71% of sellers say their sales org is slow to adapt to sudden changes in their business context.

61% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free sales experience.

64% of sales organizations modify their sales strategy two or more times per year.

Reduced seller productivity

Source: Gartner



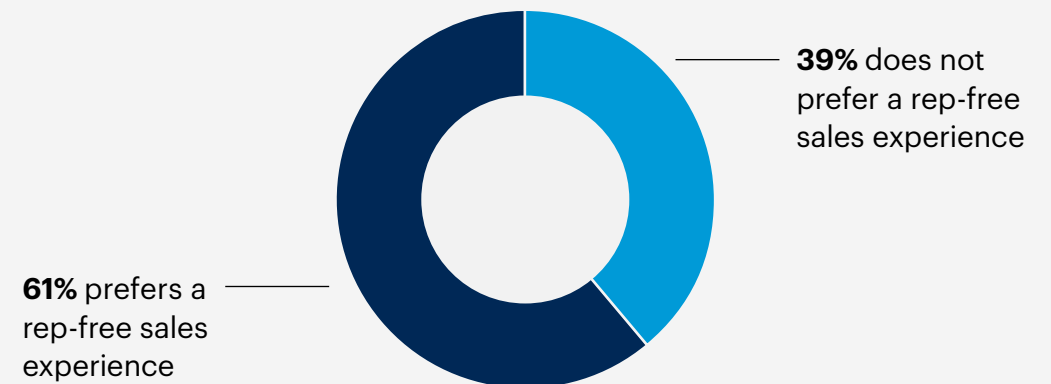
How can we align our commercial strategies with the evolving landscape of younger, more diverse B2B buying groups?

In the evolving B2B landscape, aligning with buyer needs is crucial. Traditional sales methods are losing impact. Cold outreach effectiveness has dropped 30%, with only 11% of purchases coming from unsolicited outreach. Meanwhile, 73% of buyers avoid irrelevant messages, and 61% prefer a rep-free sales experience.

While 22% of buyers report using generative AI (GenAI) for recent purchases, trustworthiness concerns highlight sales leaders' need for better tech integration. Seventy-seven percent of CSOs aim to enhance tech integration within existing sales stacks, as aligning tech with seller workflows boosts transformation success by 2.1 times and profit growth by 2.4 times.

Gartner research shows suppliers still play a key role in guiding buyers by helping them answer two critical questions: "What should I do?" (value framing) and "Did I do the right thing?" (value affirmation). Buyers who experience value framing are 20% more likely to engage in high-quality deals, while those who experience value affirmation are 30% more likely to do so.

Preference for a rep-free sales experience



n = 632 B2B buyers
Q26. Generally, as a business customer, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Source: 2024 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey
Footnotes: "Prefers a rep-free sales experience" represents "Somewhat agree," "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses to the question.



Make a strategic shift in how the organization approaches B2B customers.

Here's how to align efforts effectively:

- **Align sales and marketing:** Create experiences that help customers understand and affirm decisions, ensuring messages are relevant and impactful.
- **Reduce irrelevant outreach:** Shift from volume-based to value-focused interactions.
- **Leverage AI thoughtfully:** Use AI for personalized engagement, integrating it into workflows to boost sales productivity.
- **Monitor GenAI:** Track its influence on buyer decisions to stay aligned with evolving behaviors.

Action plan

Buyer to you

- ✓ Assess website design, content and usage.
- ✓ Synchronize digital tools and seller content.
- ✓ Evaluate social media footprint.
- ✓ Monitor GenAI impact.



You to buyer

- ✓ Inventory outreach channels and cadence.
- ✓ Place sellers at most opportune moments to engage.



Buyer value

- ✓ Highlight functional benefits.
- ✓ Shift to customer improvement that's value centric.
- ✓ Emphasize postpurchase experience.



Source: Gartner

Gartner resources to help you evolve your leadership



Learn how to deliver value-framing and value-affirming touchpoints across the buying journey with the **B2B Buying Report**.



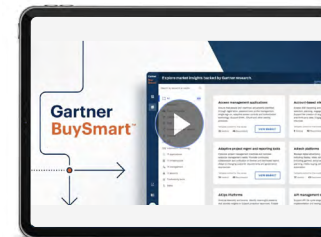
Understand buyer needs to facilitate informed purchasing decisions with **Winning Modern B2B Buyers**.



Use **The New High-Performing Seller** research to understand how to cultivate the skills sellers need to become high performers, including the use of GenAI.



Use the **Sales Technology Audit Guide** to expand the scope of revenue generation beyond your sales team through sales technology and tool adoption.



Use the **Comparative Seller Performance Diagnostic** to begin equipping sellers with what they need to achieve success with modern buyers.

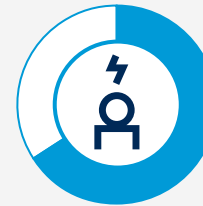




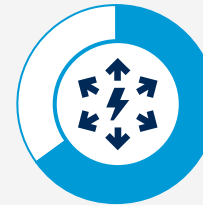
How can I develop strategic sales plans that remain effective amid rapidly changing market conditions?

Today, the dynamic nature of the market means that sticking to an annual plan without flexibility is no longer viable. The Gartner 2024 CSO Priorities Survey revealed that 65% of sales leaders struggle to shift budget and resources to address emerging priorities, while 66% find it difficult to adapt their strategic plans to sudden changes. This underscores the need for CSOs to lead from the top, setting a strategic vision that is both agile and responsive.

Rather than getting bogged down in the minutiae of daily operations, effective leaders must focus on empowering their teams to execute plans that can pivot quickly in response to market fluctuations. By fostering a culture of adaptability and foresight, CSOs can ensure their organizations are not only reactive to current challenges but also proactive in seizing new opportunities.



66% of CSOs struggle to adapt their strategic plans to sudden change.



65% of CSOs struggle to shift budget and resources to an emerging priority.

n = 240 heads of sales and senior sales leaders
Source: 2024 CSO Priorities Survey



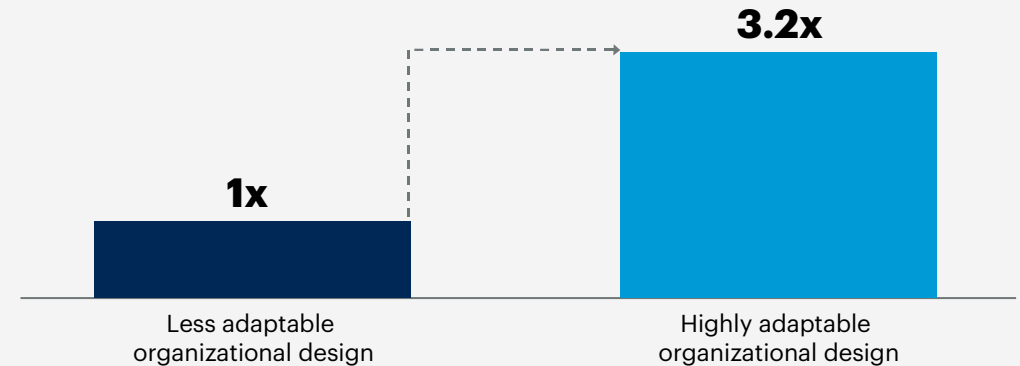
Prepare to pivot strategies swiftly and effectively.

The ability to adapt to sudden market shifts is not just a competitive advantage — it's a necessity. By embedding agility into strategic planning, CSOs can ensure their organization is always ready to seize new opportunities. Here's how to build a resilient and adaptive sales strategy:

- **Craft an agile planning approach:** Start with a minimally viable strategy (MVS) that allows for immediate execution and refinement. This keeps plans flexible and responsive.
- **Elevate strategic proficiency:** Clearly define roles and responsibilities to ensure everyone is aligned and accountable.
- **Fortify plans for dynamic environments:** Use scenario planning to prepare for unforeseen challenges, ensuring the team is ready for anything.

Adaptive by design

Likelihood of strong commercial performance



n = 240 heads of sales and senior sales leaders

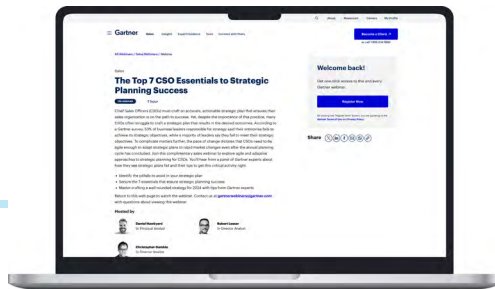
Note: Strong performance is defined as improving revenue growth, profit growth, customer acquisition and customer growth.

Source: 2024 Gartner CSO Priorities Survey

Gartner resources to help you adapt your organization



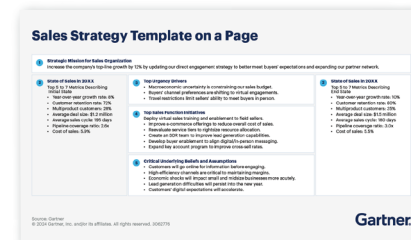
Learn more about adaptive strategic planning by viewing **The Top 7 CSO Essentials to Strategic Planning Success** webinar.



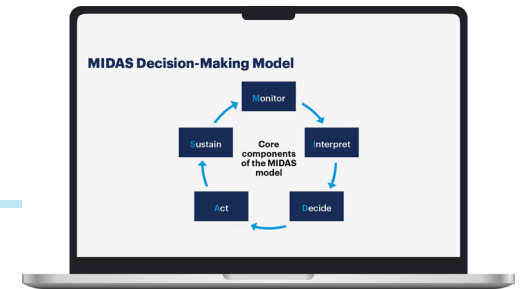
See how Workday used adaptivity by design to drive sales success with our **case study infographic**.



Use our **Strategic Template on a Page** to build out your adaptive strategic plan and review with a Gartner expert.



Optimize your sales planning efforts with the **MIDAS Decision-Making Model**.





How can I develop the skills to navigate commercial disruptions and ensure my sales organization is future-ready?

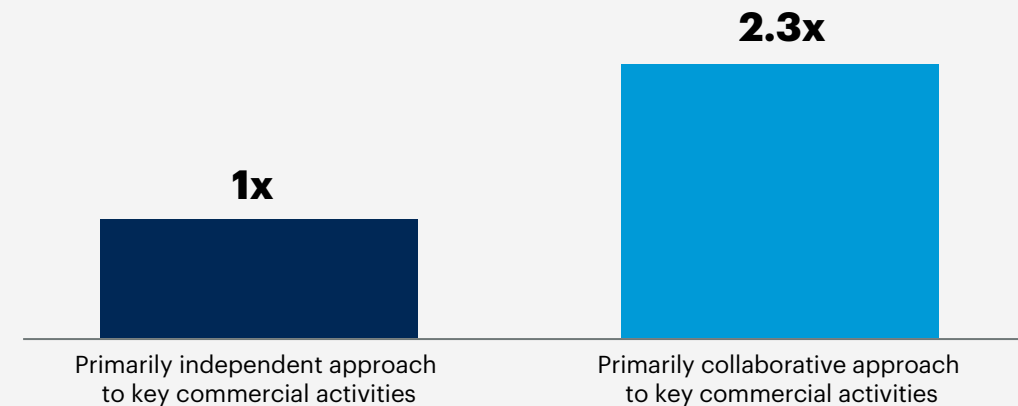
CSOs are facing major challenges, with nearly half citing the misalignment between sales and marketing as a top concern in 2024. This disconnect results in isolated operations and missed opportunities. As the buyer landscape evolves, seamless collaboration between sales and marketing is crucial, with most buyers interacting with both channels. Notably, 72% of B2B buyers have completed transactions through traditional rep-led sales channels, while 28% have used digital marketing channels.

Effective collaboration on key activities makes teams 2.3 times more likely to achieve strong growth, yet 80% of these activities proceed without input from either sales or marketing.

Unifying sales and marketing activities by developing collaboration and technology skills across the sales organization is key to achieving results and future growth.

Sales and marketing collaboration achieves results

Likelihood of strong commercial growth



Key commercial activities

- Buyer journey mapping
- Sales enablement
- Digital commerce management

n = 285 executive/senior marketing and sales leaders
Source: 2023 Gartner B2B Commercial Strategy Survey



Adapt strategies and evolve skill sets to meet buyer expectations.

Enhancing sales and marketing alignment requires fostering collaboration and using technology effectively. Address these challenges by evolving skills to transform the sales organization into a future-ready powerhouse. Here's how:

- **Foster alignment:** Encourage collaboration for unified goals, as buyers engage across both traditional and digital channels.
- **Adapt to buyer preferences:** Understand evolving B2B buyer preferences and work together to offer a cohesive experience.
- **Leverage technology:** Use AI to complement strategies and focus on reskilling sellers to meet new buyer expectations.
- **Break down silos:** Involve both sales and marketing in key meetings and decisions to promote collaboration and shared priorities.

CSO's 10-step checklist for enabling seller success

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Map the customer buying journey
With: Marketing</p> | <p>6 Align digital and sales content to customer buying jobs
With: Sales Enablement, Marketing</p> |
| <p>2 Break down data silos to consolidate buyer engagement data
With: Sales Operations, Marketing, IT</p> | <p>7 Create a content repository for sellers to easily share information
With: Sales Enablement, Marketing, IT</p> |
| <p>3 Convert engagement data into buyer insights and visualizations
With: Sales Operations, Sales Enablement</p> | <p>8 Train sellers on digital content, tools and capabilities
With: Sales Enablement, Marketing</p> |
| <p>4 Align sellers with digital messaging
With: Sales Enablement, Marketing</p> | <p>9 Develop "emotional intelligence" capabilities of sellers
With: Sales Enablement</p> |
| <p>5 Expand seller knowledge of third-party information sources
With: Sales Enablement, Marketing</p> | <p>10 Establish a data-driven, customer-learning-focused culture
With: Sales Enablement</p> |

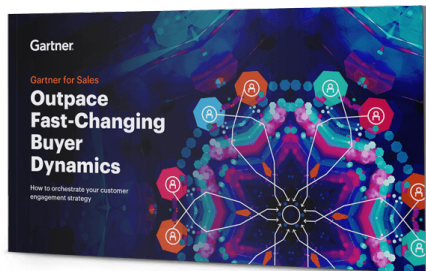


Source: Gartner

Gartner resources to help you adapt your organization



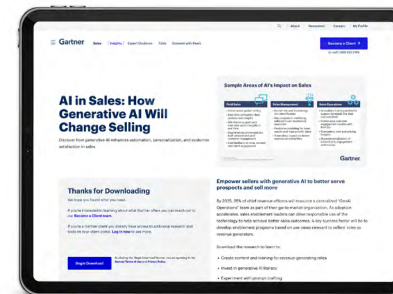
Adapt your commercial strategy to an orchestrated model that aligns with evolving buyer dynamics with our **Unified Commercial Strategy Guide**.



Tap **Gartner experts** to build skills to drive commercial collaboration, change management, digital transformation and adaptive planning.



Learn how **sales AI** helps sellers improve automation, personalization and customer satisfaction.



Implement a **Revenue Operations Model** for a fully buyer-centric, go-to-market operation.



Conclusion

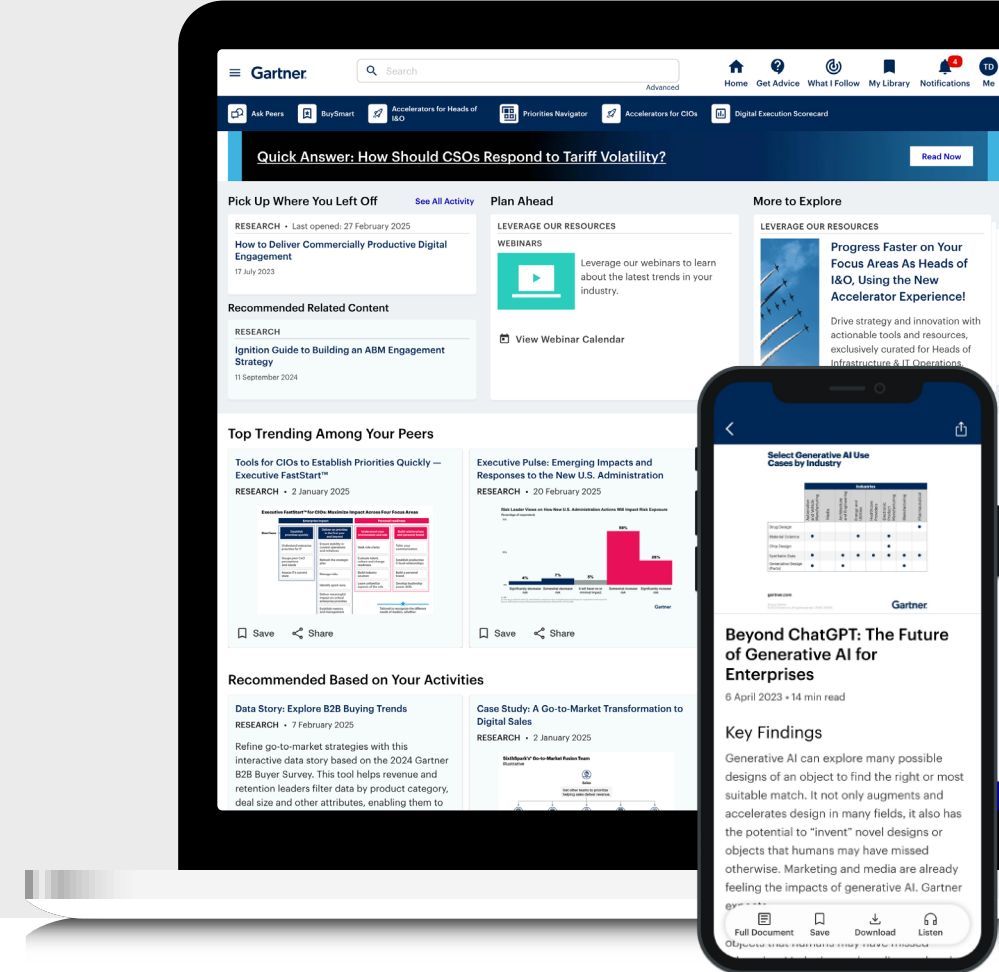
As CSOs adapt their plans to current challenges and emerging opportunities, unifying sales and marketing efforts, building agility and evolving skill sets will enable better navigation of constant change. The future of sales is being shaped today, and visionary leaders have the opportunity to lead cross-functional collaboration, embrace new technology and foster commercial alignment to meet evolving buyer needs.

Gartner for Chief Sales Officers

Gartner delivers actionable, objective insight to CSOs and their teams in a single, always-on solution.

Gartner for Chief Sales Officers helps you to thrive as an executive leader, transform sales strategies and improve seller productivity all within a single insight platform.

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