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Gartner for Sales

State of Sales Operations Report: Key Findings



Introduction

Sales leaders are regularly expected to increase revenue while managing expenses. This means they are constantly trying to find new ways to improve sales productivity and scrutinize costs. More than ever, sales leaders are turning to sales operations to help with these tasks. Sales operations can leverage the mountain of available data to help sales leaders make data-based decisions that improve the effectiveness of everything from sales force design and development to sales compensation, sales process and systems, and sales analytics and intelligence.

Sales operations' role in driving commercial excellence doesn't stop at providing analysis. The most effective sales operations departments also serve as "chiefs of staff," coordinating everything from sales strategy to execution — both within the sales function and among stakeholders outside of sales. The organizations that succeed will be those that can successfully leverage sales operations as a focal point for the key decisions sales leaders need to make to succeed.

While some sales operations departments have successfully become such a focal point, many others have struggled to evolve beyond a support function that provides ad hoc reports. Gartner recently surveyed more than 250 sales leaders to look at the current state of sales operations to help heads of sales and sales operations identify emerging trends and opportunities in the sales operations function.

Here are the top 5 key findings from the survey:

01

Forty-two percent of respondents rate sales analytics ROI as significantly higher than expected. This rating is consistent whether sales analytics is housed in sales operations or outside of sales and shared between multiple functions.



02

Sales operations' support is increasingly scoped beyond sales. **Today, 57% of sales operations functions support marketing departments, 38% support product and 35% support finance.**



03

Forty-five percent of respondents say sales leaders in their organizations have high confidence in forecasting accuracy. This skepticism results in sales leaders acting on intuition instead of evidence, often leading to reduced commercial outcomes.



04

Talent needs for sales operations are changing. **Respondents expect data and analytics skills to be much more important for sales operations staff in the coming years than they are today.**



05

Financial concerns are the top factors sales leaders consider when determining sales force size. This focus on financial concerns is consistent with sales organizations that are uncertain about the future and looking to preemptively control costs.



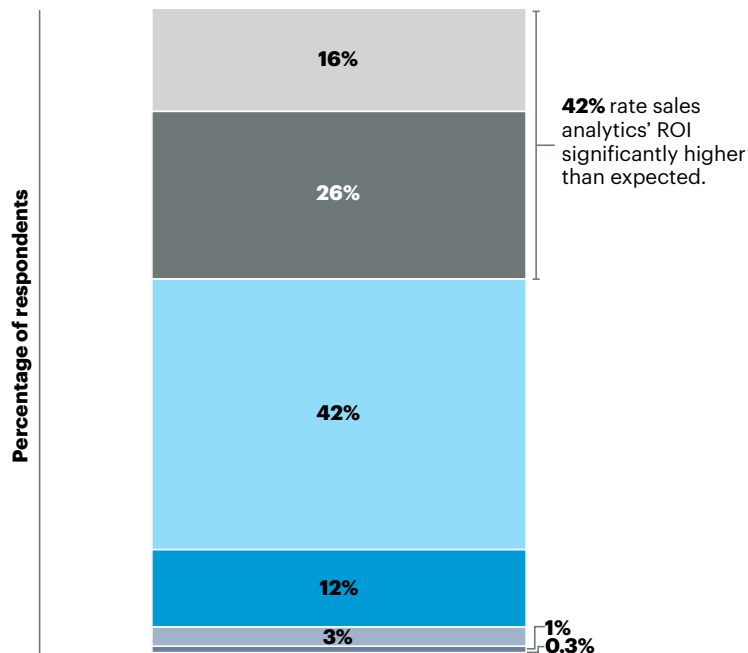
Key Finding No. 1

Forty-two percent of respondents rate sales analytics ROI as significantly higher than expected. This rating is consistent whether sales analytics is housed in sales operations or outside of sales and shared among multiple functions.

01

Overall return on investment for sales analytics

Q: "How would you rate the return on your organization's sales analytics investments?"



n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Recommendations

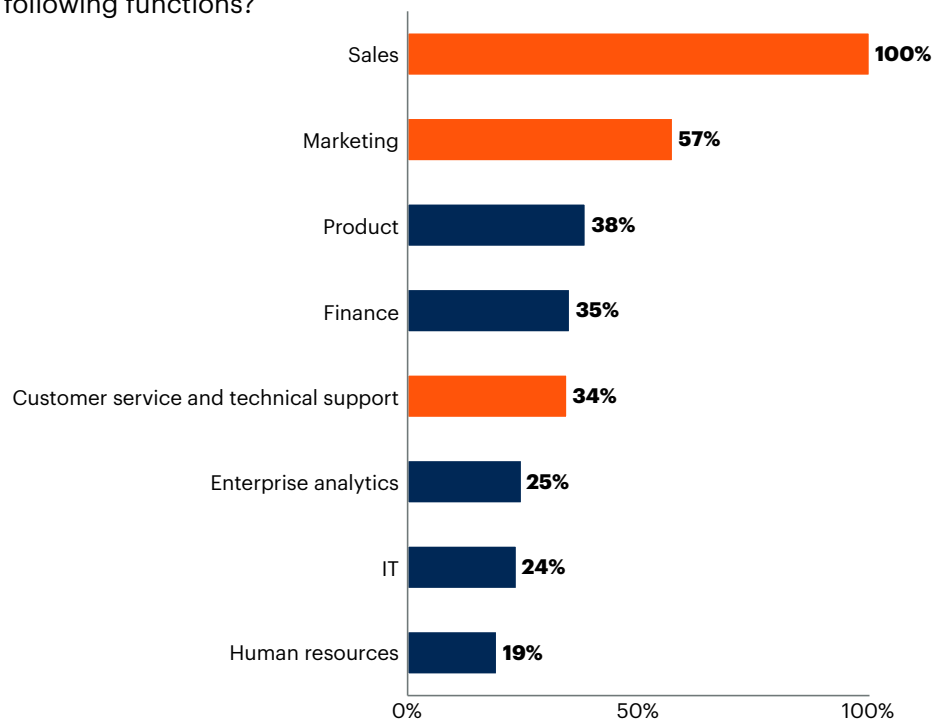
Sales leaders happy with their current analytics' return on investment should not relocate the capability in hopes of increasing its overall effectiveness. Instead sales leaders should improve sales analytics' ROI by focusing on improving data literacy throughout the organization and creating a culture where "information is a second language."

Key Finding No. 2

Sales operations' support is increasingly scoped beyond sales. Today, 57% of sales operations functions support marketing departments, 38% support product and 35% support finance.

Percentage of sales operations departments that support each function

Q: "What percentage of sales operations' time is dedicated to supporting the following functions?"



n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

Recommendations

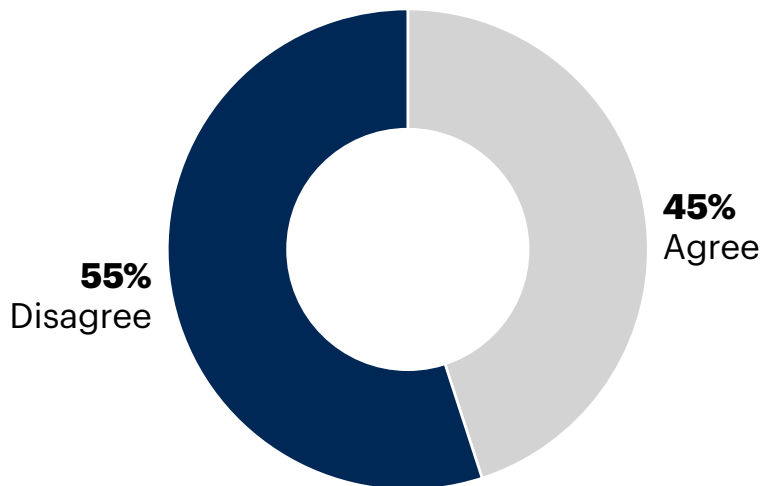
The trend of sales operations supporting other functions will increase in the coming years. A single revenue or commercial operations department is unlikely to become the dominant organizational structure, but sales operations will need to continue to collaborate with key players in the commercial funnel. This means sales operations cannot expect to rely on sales data alone and must work with marketing, finance, customer service and product to synthesize information from all functions and paint an accurate picture that leaders can use to make high-stakes decisions.

Key Finding No. 3

Forty-five percent of respondents say sales leaders in their organizations have high confidence in forecasting accuracy. This skepticism results in sales leaders acting on intuition instead of evidence, which often leads to reduced commercial outcomes.

Percentage of respondents indicating high confidence in forecast accuracy^a

Sales leaders have high confidence in forecast accuracy



n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

^a High confidence is indicated by a rating of 6 or 7 on a seven-point scale.

Recommendations

Assuming forecasts are generally accurate, the solution to poor perception is straightforward: Sales operations leaders must go beyond publishing regular forecasts and track and communicate accuracy over time. This can usually be accomplished monthly or quarterly by showing a roll-up of the forecasts compared to their actual totals.

Q Key Finding No. 4

Talent needs for sales operations are changing. Respondents expect data and analytics skills to be much more important for sales operations staff in the coming years than they are today.

04

Change in rank of importance for sales operations skills over five years

Common sales operations skills	Ranking for hires in 12 months	Importance in 5 years	Change in ranking
Data visualization	14	1	13 ▲
Quantitative skills	5	2	3 ▲
Analytical problem solving	3	3	0
Forecasting and modeling	21	4	17 ▲
Data governance	19	5	14 ▲
Strategic planning	2	6	-4 ▼
Technical aptitude	15	7	8 ▲
Experience with a specific CRM platform	11	8	3 ▲
Application management	17	9	8 ▲
CRM expertise	16	10	6 ▲
Application development	13	11	2 ▲
Statistical analysis	12	12	0
Project management	8	13	-5 ▼
Business acumen	9	14	-5 ▼
Effective oral communication	1	15	-14 ▼
Performance management	7	16	-9 ▼
Previous experience in sales	6	17	-11 ▼
Effective written communication	4	18	-14 ▼
Sales compensation design	20	19	1 ▲
Stakeholder management	18	20	-2 ▼
Sales compensation administration	10	21	-11 ▼
Territory design	22	22	0

n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

Recommendations

In the coming years, an increasing amount of data will pass through the sales function, and sales operations will be relied on more than ever. As the volume of data and the number of different sources continue to increase, sales functions will need operations departments that have analysis skills as well as synthesis skills. Sales operations will need to take a holistic view of all available data sources and combine them into actionable insights.



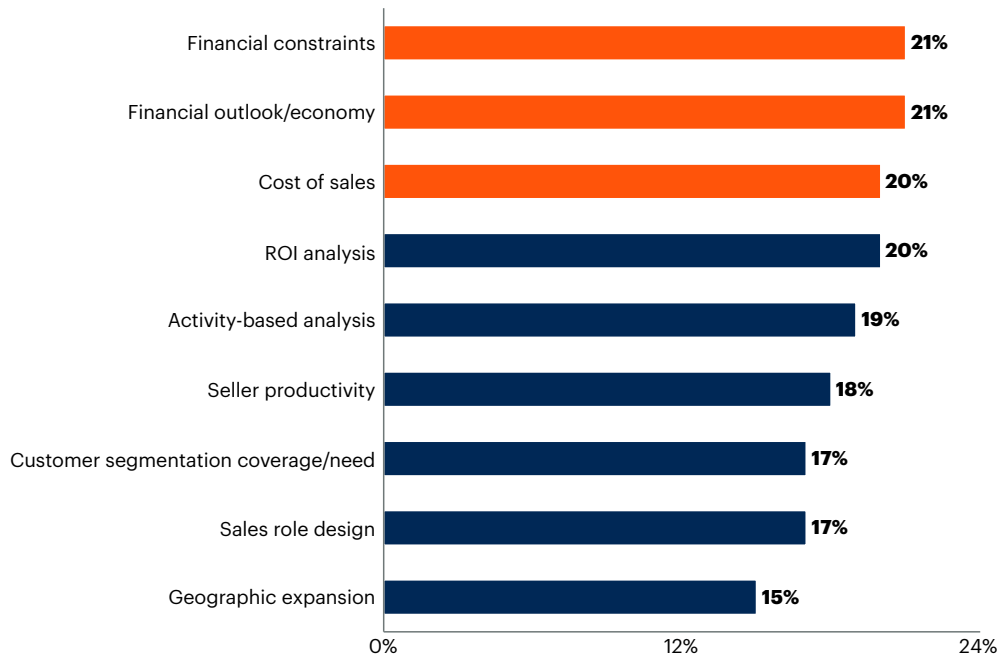
Key Finding No. 5

Financial concerns are the top factors sales leaders consider when determining sales force size. This focus on financial concerns is consistent with sales organizations that are uncertain about the future and looking to preemptively control costs.

05

Percentage of respondents indicating a response is the “primary factor” in sales force sizing^a

Q: “When determining sales force size, how heavily are the following factors weighted?”



n = 296

Source: 2019 Gartner State of Sales Operations Survey

^aPrimary factor is indicated by a rating of 7 on a seven-point scale.

Note: Numbers may not add to totals shown because of rounding.

Recommendations

Controlling costs — if not reducing them — in the face of market uncertainty is an effective strategy. Sales operations leaders can play a key role in sales expense mitigation by using metrics to drive better decision making and reveal hidden insights, and taking a proactive approach to controlling costs by carefully examining emerging financial constraints to avoid being forced into more drastic actions by external factors.

The Gartner logo is displayed in white text against a blue background. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a large satellite dish antenna in a desert landscape at sunset, with other smaller dishes visible in the distance.

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