

# Building the Modern Industrial B2B Sales Force





## *At SPA, we have been working to drive profitable growth for our clients for the past 25 years.*

During that time, we've had the pleasure of working directly with sales management and sales reps to implement strategic pricing tools and training to drive organizational change and improvement. Our clients' change-management initiatives in pricing, margin improvement and value-selling often start in the boardroom but ultimately are successful only at the hands of the sales teams themselves. We at SPA have long understood the importance of working through sales organizations to impact business results. To truly drive sustainable change, both tools and training are critical—and they must be integrated.

A lot has changed in the industrial B2B manufacturing and distribution world over the past 25 years. In the early '90s, salespeople planned their days around pay phone stops and faxed orders into the office for processing. Technology has brought countless new capabilities for sales organizations, but it has also brought disruptive forces. Industries have become more commoditized, as well as more susceptible to being overtaken by large national players and ecommerce platforms.

In the past couple of years, a revolutionary movement called Sales Enablement has started to sweep through the economy. With roots in the tech sector, Sales Enablement is a sales-focused effort to bring to sales reps the tools, training and technology to accomplish a simple but profound goal: Drive greater revenue, in less time, at greater profitability, and at lower cost. Historically, many departments would lead disparate aspects of this mission. IT would lead technology; training and development would lead training efforts; and sales operations would lead tools deployment.

It all made sense. Each specialty drove its element to support sales. The main problem was that functional needs came first and sales came second. Naturally, the use of these assets (think CRM) faltered, and the sales team's critical needs went unaddressed. Return on investment was low, and sales frustration was high. A new approach was needed, one that put sales needs first and functional support second. Although Sales Enablement means many things to many people, this perspective shift is fundamental to the revolution.

By implementing a sales enablement strategy, manufacturers and distributors can streamline analytics, buyer engagement content, sales training, tools, and technology to optimize the way they approach customers through their sales force. Certainly, mobile sales technology has been on the rise for years in many industries, but we have not yet seen it find the right footing with the businesses we've been serving for the past two decades in industrial markets.

With increasing awareness of sales enablement, companies of all sizes are considering how to modernize by taking advantage of this ever-growing landscape of tools, technology and training. The challenge now is that it has become a cluttered, fragmented space. Tech companies have popped up to tackle virtually every element of selling with apps, platforms and SaaS. All that can leave sales leaders overwhelmed as they try to choose the right strategy for approaching sales enablement within their company.

With this guide, we offer a practical approach to Sales Enablement for companies in the industrial B2B manufacturing and distribution verticals we know best. Our decades of delivering improved profits to our clients in these verticals have given SPA the expertise to understand clients' needs and opportunities. Your company needs more than an increase in margins. Profitable growth is the pathway forward. Now is the time to implement a Sales Enablement strategy to set your organization on the path to profitable growth using the right tools, technology and training.

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# What is Sales Enablement & Why Does it Matter?



Does your team have the tools and skills they need to add value in the Amazon era?

Does your company struggle to achieve year-over-year growth? Do your salespeople fail to hit quota? Is their productivity declining? Does your team have the tools and skills they need to add value in the Amazon era?

Sales enablement comprises the tools, training and technology that allow an organization to reach its customers better, generate new business, grow existing accounts and minimize customer defection. Sales enablement helps customer facing team members to have the right conversations with the right customers in the right format at the right terms at the right time.

A successful organization approaches sales enablement holistically. Companies reach their customers through multiple channels, and an organization typically has more customer-facing personnel than just outside salespeople. Sales enablement may extend to customer service representatives, technical specialists or even those that drive email marketing programs. Anyone who can enhance your customer's experience can be part of an enablement strategy.

Companies need to optimize every touchpoint with the customer. To do that, they need the right tools, training and technology. A tool could be a CRM system, but it could also be non-technological, such as a good, well-organized product catalog, or a leave behind for sales calls. It may be analytics, which can help a sales rep better identify prospects for a product. It's all about advancing the sales process by aligning these resources to each stage. How do you equip your customer-facing team for success as they prospect, engage with, and sell to your customer?

## Why Sales Enablement Matters

Everybody is looking for new ways to connect with and retain customers in this fast-changing market. Those with the best data, tools and training will win. Sales enablement helps you:

- Better understand your customer's business and their requirements
- Align your company's capabilities with your customer's strategic roadmap
- Create and capture value from current and future white-space opportunities
- Establish value and preserve a price point that ensures ongoing profitability

You could spend a lot of money on sales related initiatives that don't have an impact on your company's ability to grow. Many organizations have. Instead, think about which analytics, buyer engagement content, sales training, tools, and technology you can put into sellers' hands that will drive revenue generation the most.

A good example is CRM, and the difference between using it for management vs. enablement. Although CRM systems are common among today's sales organizations, many companies have struggled to connect CRM usage with successful sales outcomes. This is in large part due to CRMs being seen by the sales team and others as a system for accountability. However, viewing CRM from an enablement point of view can allow you to arm your team with valuable tools that help them do their jobs better. Rather than only using a CRM to log call activity, imagine driving the right sales collateral based on the sales situation – right when your salesperson needs it. Or using a CRM to recommend products, based on market insights, that a salesperson could pitch to a customer.

# The State of Sales Enablement in Industrial B2B



Companies tend to lean on salespeople to go out and find business, motivated almost exclusively by the income they want to earn. When it works well, you can ride that shared success to the finish line. Unfortunately, industries are changing and this ad hoc approach to sales may not be sustainable for long. Now more than ever is the time to shift your thinking around how you can better enable your sales team. Here's why:

## The Changing Competitive Landscape

Distributors, in particular, are under increasing pressure to make the most of their investment in sales, especially as the role of those teams change in a multichannel world. If you are competing with companies like Amazon Business and other digital giants who excel at the transaction, offering quick order turnaround, free shipping, low prices, great customer buying experience and even good customer service, you're facing a real threat. Likewise, if you are a manufacturer selling through a distribution channel, your channel partners are facing this thread and it is time to decide how you enable them as well.

Sales enablement-driven tools, training and technology can help sales organizations get smart about where they invest. Enabling the seller to target customers that value the experience they offer and then working to maintain that value can prevent a customer from seeking cheaper alternatives online.

## Knowledge Loss

In addition to pressures from the rise of eCommerce giants, many industrial sales organizations are also facing a dramatic loss of knowledge as the baby boomers on their team retire in droves over the next decade. On the other end, companies are challenged to find and keep younger replacements, as well as get them up and running quickly when they do come on board. The reality is: If you can get your salespeople's feet on the ground faster and get them having the right

conversation with the right customer, they're going to find success more quickly. Your return on investment in that new rep will be swift if you can give them a roadmap for how they can be successful early on.

For companies that have generally under invested heavily in training and sales tools, success can be a challenge for a salesperson who is new to the industry. High turnover and inexperienced reps can damage your company's reputation more quickly than almost any other factors. Arm your teams with the tools, training and technology they need to do their jobs and you will find sales success and team stability. Give them with what they need to know to effectively sell your product and service mix to your customers and your sellers will find success and see a long-term career path that is mutually beneficial with the company.

## Differentiating Beyond Price

In increasingly commoditized spaces, it can be more difficult to differentiate from the competition than it is in other more specialized industries. Knowing who your ideal customer is and how to approach them could give you that 2 percent better chance of beating out the competition. With the right tools, training and technology, you may be able to earn a customer that maybe you didn't have a shot at otherwise. The person who makes the sale is almost always the person who is with an organization that has armed them with better tools, better information and better processes. And the buyer may pay more to work with that company based on their confidence in the service or the product. The truth is: few consumers opt to buy the cheapest laptop, pair of shoes or even the cheapest box of tissues on the shelves. In their personal lives, consumers are always looking for value, and that usually doesn't come at the lowest price. This desire for value over price is not unique to consumers, it is also prevalent in business.

Many long-standing manufacturers and distributors in industrial verticals look for any way to boost margin.

# A Practical Approach to Sales Enablement



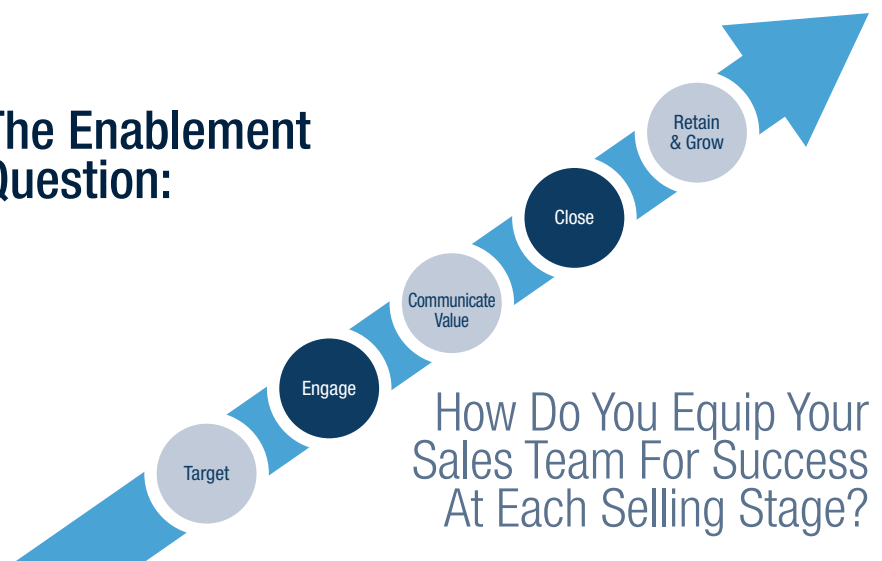
Buyers no longer need to look to a field sales representative to get the information they need to make a purchase.

The power in the B2B buyer-seller relationship has shifted to the buyer, and the role of the salesperson has changed. The salesperson is under increasing pressure to provide real value in the customer relationship. After all, if the relationship between a company and its customers is based on price, it's too easy for the customer to go elsewhere.

Given this, how can you equip your sales team for success at each stage of the sales process? Sales enablement doesn't have to be complicated. Start by outlining your sales process (similar to what is shown in the graphic below). Then identify the right tools, training and technology required at each stage for the salesperson to achieve their goal. For example, what resources can you provide that help your customer-facing reps identify, prioritize and understand the needs of your potential customer? The answer could include data-driven guidance, among other possible tools. Think about the relevant marketing collateral—digital and print—that you could serve up to your sales representatives based on the customer, segment and other criteria to increase the chances the customer moves to the next stage.

Sales enablement should elevate the conversations your team is having with prospects at every stage. How can you help sales reps align with your customers' strategic roadmap? Which white-space opportunities should they capitalize on? And how can they negotiate their fair share to ensure profitable growth going forward? To empower your sales team to compete—ultimately leading to long-term sustainable profitable growth for your company—make sales enablement part of your DNA.

## The Enablement Question:







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