

What Is Sales Enablement Software and Do You Need It?

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Sales enablement software is getting lots of interest, thanks to pressure to boost results. Does your sales team need sales enablement software?

As with many emerging software categories, sales enablement software's definition can become a bit fuzzy. In essence, though, sales enablement is the act of implementing strategies, tools and processes that continually increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your sales ecosystem.

Ray Smith, CEO of sales software provider Datahug, said it is all about equipping sales reps with the knowledge, training and tools they need to be successful.

"We expect more from salespeople nowadays because so much information is available on the internet about the product and the category of product they are selling," said Smith. "When that face-to-face or phone interaction occurs, they need to go beyond what the customer knows already and deliver real value."

Sales enablement software is undeniably beginning to catching on with enterprises. As many as 400 vendors are said to offer one kind of sales enablement tool or another. Forrester Research narrows this fragmented group down to about 100.

"The issue of buzzwords in an emerging market such as sales enablement is that every vendor uses its own words and in its own vested interest," explained Steven Wright, a Forrester Research analyst.

In this article, we attempt to clear up some of the confusion by discussing:

- Functions typically included in sales enablement software
- Why the market for sales enablement software is growing
- How sales enablement software can improve training efforts
- How managers benefit from sales enablement software
- Other benefits of sales enablement software

Sales Enablement Software Functionality

Sales enablement software's functionality typically encompasses the following:

- CRM and CMS integration
- Knowledge and tools to accelerate sales development
- Process automation
- Sales management
- Guided selling
- Better reporting

A CRM system and/or a content management system (CMS) is often the underlying foundation of sales enablement software. Tools that enable the sales development team to deliver tailored calls and emails into their target accounts at scale are often layered on top of this foundation.

Account executives or closing reps also need a repository of content that they can present to customers and prospects. These include basic sales pitches, as well as case studies, assessments and guided product tours. Once they are equipped with what to say, they need a guide that tells them when to reach out, when to follow up and when to include more stakeholders in the conversation, Smith said.

Additionally, sales enablement should help managers play their part and effectively coach their reps. Tools and training can help determine where to focus their efforts. Effectively managing the pipeline can help both managers and reps better manage the sales pipeline and focus on the deals that have the best chance of closing.

In addition to making the sales force more effective, sales enablement software should help manage the necessary back-end integration to CRM, salesforce automation (SFA), enterprise content management and lead-to-revenue management, said Forrester's Wright.

Further, Pete McChrystal, CEO of Accent Technologies, a provider of sales software, listed guided selling as a vital area of sales enablement. This can assist reps with scoring and qualification to better prioritize how their time is spent, help them with next step recommendations, provide sales plays and playbooks with embedded coaching and relevant content, and offer easy ways to research buyers and prospects.

Why Is Sales Enablement Software Market Growing?

The sales enablement software market is growing due to:

- Sales process inefficiency
- Pressure to deliver results
- Increased competition
- Demand to reduce organizational cost per sale

An obvious measure of the strength of the market for sales enablement software is the sheer number of vendors in the space. Another is the high average annual growth rate of 38 percent, according to Forrester Research's study of 18 of the top sales enablement vendors.

A big reason for growth of this kind of software is the keen scrutiny of sales. While technology has helped areas such as manufacturing, the supply chain and distribution achieve much higher levels of efficiency in recent years, sales has tended to lag behind and stick to its old modes of operation, McChrystal said.

Top management is no longer going to stand for a hit-and-miss approach to sales, said Aragon Research analyst Jim Lundy.

"The pressure to deliver in both sales and marketing is reaching intense levels," Lundy said. "Both areas of the enterprise need to take action to help their organization reach higher levels of performance and engagement."

This goes as far as greatly reducing the cost per sale to the organization. "We are seeing increased pressure on enterprises to reduce the escalating costs from their selling model to remain cost-competitive and to protect thinning profit margins," said Mark Magnacca, president and co-founder of Allego, a provider of sales training software.

Sales Enablement Software's Role in Training

Sales enablement software can play a major role in training, by placing training materials at the sales rep's fingertips, offering learning libraries for self-paced skill development and permitting coaches to easily assess opportunities and situations requiring intervention. This can be a big step up for those organizations that still rely on classroom training and national sales meetings to brief their sales reps.

"Event-based training is costly and highly ineffective. Not only is 80 percent of the information learned forgotten within the first 30 days, but this type of training leave reps without a means to continuously practice their pitch, resulting in them practicing in front of prospects," said Magnacca.

As a result, video is being integrated into sales enablement platforms as it is an easier and faster way to absorb new content. This can save sales teams up to 35 percent of the time that would otherwise be required for in-class training, Magnacca said. Aberdeen Research backs this up, finding that video-enabled sellers have 9 percent better customer retention and 8 percent more reps achieving their quota.

Sales Enablement Software Helps Managers, Too

For managers, sales enablement software should detect risk areas within opportunities, deliver greater accuracy in forecasting and provide better reporting.

"Sales enablement reporting should be able to highlight the number and level of buyers engaged, challenges uncovered, number of meaningful conversations generated, value messages delivered," said McChrystal. "It can also aid managers in diagnosing and delivering analysis on what strong performers do versus average or weak performers."

In many ways, sales enablement is a hybrid of sales and marketing. It even fans out into a diverse set of functions such as human resources, branding and corporate communications.

Other Sales Enablement Software Benefits

Additional sales enablement software benefits include:

- Fix gaps in the sales process
- Increase sales performance
- Free up sales people's time by automating repetitive tasks
- Unified messaging

One way companies can utilize sales enablement tools to improve their business is by isolating where deals lose control and implementing measures to remedy it, thus fixing gaps in the sales process. This might entail improving the team's ability to understand the customer, presenting their sales pitch, building engagement or getting deals closed.

"Once you understand what needs to be fixed, then you can start to try out new tools to address those weaknesses," Smith said.

Most traditional sales force platforms tend to focus on providing visibility into sales activities. Sales enablement tools, on the other hand, may assist sales staff to perform better. They can improve the efficiency of the many necessary but time-consuming and repetitive sales tasks, increase close rates by helping staff understand which assets do best in which situations and give staff the tools they need to be flexible and responsive to common purchase barriers.

"A sales enablement platform gives reps more time to sell by reducing the effort required to search for materials and information to use with buyers," said McChrystal. "It also surfaces or recommends content and other resources based on the sales situation. On average, a good platform will give reps about more 10 percent more selling time."

Unity of messaging is another gain. Sales people are famous for devising their own presentations, sales tricks and pitches. At times, this can lead to tremendous variation in messaging.

A sales enablement software platform provides approved content and messaging to mobile devices, laptops and other devices without having to ransack the website to locate it. Thus the temptation for reps to create their own content is greatly reduced, which keeps value message and branding in line with approved standards.

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