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Thought Leadership Paper
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Navigate The Future Of Selling With Revenue Intelligence

How Complete, Clear, And Timely Customer
Insight Drives Better Customer And Business
Outcomes

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Revenue intelligence is a comprehensive approach to data gathering and analysis that captures every customer interaction, understands what was said in those interactions, and delivers insights at scale, thereby empowering revenue teams to make decisions based on data instead of opinion.

Executive Summary

B2B companies must recalibrate their approaches to hearing, understanding, and meeting their customers' needs. A wide range of demographic and behavioral changes have given rise to business consumers — a new generation of B2B buyers whose experiences as consumers have shaped both their preferences and behaviors when buying online. This change in behavior demands that sellers shift focus from acquiring and converting a maximum volume of leads to an approach dedicated to uncovering and delivering maximum value to customers through an extended conversation based on the customers' context.

Gong commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the state of customer data strategies at B2B organizations. Forrester conducted an online survey of 213 respondents with B2B sales executives and decision makers in North America to explore this topic. We found that organizations that put a full picture of customer understanding and insight at the core of their business decisions — a state this study calls revenue intelligence — differentiate themselves through accurate, timely, and actionable customer insights. These sellers thrive by translating their data abilities into better business and customer outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- › **Dramatic shifts in buyer behavior demand that sellers change their approach.** B2B consumers increasingly prefer self-directed journeys and digital channels; sellers must become more relevant to those customers throughout the customer lifecycle. Most sellers today leverage customer relationship management (CRM) tools to record, consolidate, and operationalize customer insights. While CRMs provide powerful capabilities and are necessary for customer data management, many out-of-the-box solutions fail to consistently capture conversational insights, leaving significant context out of the conversation between sellers and buyers.
- › **Lack of complete customer context turns off customers and leads to wasted spend and time.** Businesses that operate without a full spectrum of customer insights struggle with data that is stale due to a lack of timely data entry, distorted by incomplete or contradictory signals, and limited to surface-level signals that can mask deeper issues and insights lurking underneath. Businesses that operate in this manner face challenges with wasted sales time and effort, inefficient marketing programs, and broken customer journeys.
- › **Committing to revenue intelligence unlocks customer context and value.** Most sellers in our study agreed that putting revenue intelligence at the core of data-driven decisioning makes it easier to achieve key business goals like improving customer experience, loyalty, and retention. Sellers that have adopted revenue intelligence reported their data is more accurate, timely, relevant, and actionable. Furthermore, they translate the power of their customer insights into better revenue performance and customer outcomes.

The Rise Of The B2B Consumer Changes Everything About Selling

B2B sellers are witnessing a dramatic shift in their customer relationships. Their customers are increasingly behaving within their business buying decisions as they would in their everyday consumer lives. Progressively, B2B consumers prefer self-directed journeys and digital channels; sellers must become more relevant to their customers throughout the customer lifecycle. That said, rather than simply redoubling their efforts to convert more leads, sellers must find and express maximum value when engaging customers through an extended contextual conversation, delivering highly relevant, personalized experiences.¹

Recent macroeconomic conditions brought on by COVID-19 have only accelerated the urgency for this shift in sellers' mindsets. Face-to-face interactions have been almost completely disrupted, and the trend of buyers' preferring clearly established lanes between digital and human connections will only strengthen, raising the stakes for delivering a consistent experience rooted in customer context and relevance.²

As selling becomes increasingly complicated, organizations risk missing their sales targets when they attempt to capture and convert leads without timely and thorough customer insights that reveal buyers' needs and preferences. This means that, to flourish, B2B sellers must:

- › **Break free from traditional marketing and sales silos.** B2B sellers must develop customer-centric engagement strategies to win, serve, and retain customers. But these strategies must overcome organizational silos that threaten to splinter customer experience, fragment customer insights, and typically favor product-centric go-to-market strategies rather than relevant messages that drive value for customers.
- › **Put customer data at the core of their decision making.** Modern marketing runs on data, and success requires that B2B sellers have confidence in the timeliness, accuracy, and completeness of the customer data that should sit at the heart of how, when, and where they go to market.

The core of many sellers' customer understanding most often lies with CRM technology. CRMs help businesses record, consolidate, and operationalize customer insights, but they are hardly a "set-it-and-forget-it" means to mastering customer context. Sellers have an opportunity to differentiate themselves through customer knowledge that is more timely, deeper, and more actionable — by adopting a revenue intelligence approach that insists on the importance of capturing every customer interaction, understanding what was said in those interactions, and then delivering insights and recommendations at scale across the organization.



B2B buyer expectations look increasingly like B2C consumer patterns, raising the bar for how sellers must listen, understand, and respond to buyers' needs.

SELLERS MUST FIND EFFICIENT WAYS TO PROMOTE CUSTOMER RETENTION AND DELIGHT THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION

B2B sellers in this study demonstrated that they understand the importance of customer context and understanding by how they describe the key business goals they are pursuing this year. Respondents were most likely to be focused on improving customer loyalty and retention and improving the customer experience this year, followed closely by better understanding/responding to customer needs, then winning new customers. This reflects a business maxim that it's more cost-efficient to retain an existing customer than it is to acquire new ones, while putting even more emphasis on mastering the insights that power and direct these improvements (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

“Which of the following are your primary business goals for this year?”



Sellers are focusing on improving the experience and outcomes of existing customer relationships, even slightly ahead of winning new customers.

Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

CRM IS A NECESSARY (BUT NOT NECESSARILY SUFFICIENT) TOOL FOR MASTERING CUSTOMER CONTEXT

CRM has revolutionized customer relationships and earned its place as a foundational technology for customer engagement. Reflecting this state, nearly nine out of 10 study participants reported deploying a CRM to understand and serve their customers today.

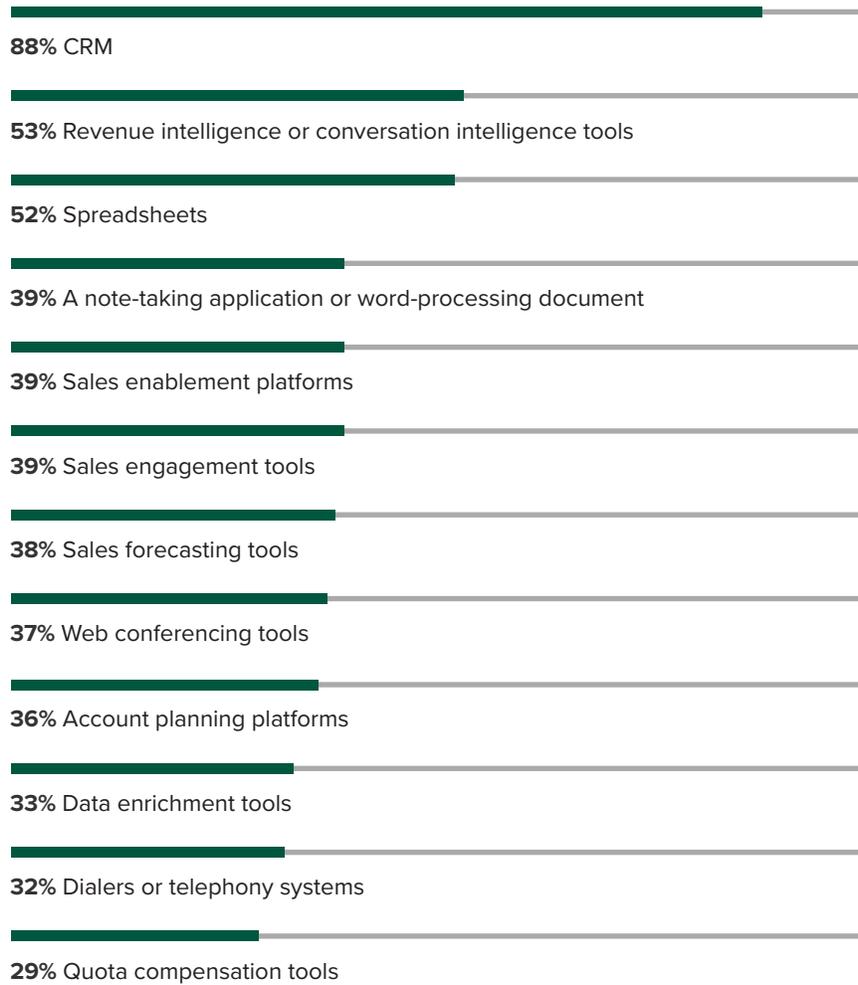
However, firms are adding a host of complementary technologies to substantiate, deepen, and automate customer insight collection — and sellers are increasingly including these tools in their customer relationship technology mix. For example, over half of respondents in this study said their firms have onboarded revenue intelligence or conversation intelligence tools; these enable sellers to capture the full spectrum of customer interactions, needs, and expectations, which provide the context necessary to accurately and completely address customer needs. Nearly four out of 10 respondents said their firms have onboarded sales enablement, engagement, and forecasting tools as well (see Figure 2).

Technology that roots sellers' actions in customer context are critical enablers of improving customer experience and relationships; however, fewer than half of decision makers said their customer data tools provide excellent support for these objectives today. Forty-nine percent said their customer data tools support improving customer loyalty and retention very well while a similar percentage said the same of how well tools support efforts to better understand and respond to customer needs (44%) and improve the customer experience (43%). This gap represents risks to businesses that need their customer insights to be comprehensive, timely, clear, and available to the employees that need them *when* they need them.

A commitment to revenue intelligence drives achievement of this data management vision; thus, revenue-intelligent companies align their customer data strategies to ensure that their customer data includes signals that are comprehensive of every customer interaction across every touchpoint (web conferences, phone calls, emails, texts, etc.). Furthermore, these signals are translated into customer insights at scale (what is each customer saying about how they want to do business with us?) and translated into actionable steps that revenue-intelligent firms can leverage to ensure decisions are rooted in insights, rather than assumptions. Tellingly, respondents at revenue-intelligent organizations were more than five times as likely as others to say they see revenue intelligence or conversation intelligence tools as their primary source of capturing customer interactions today.

Figure 2

“Which of the following customer data tools does your organization use today to understand and serve your customers?”



CRM is by far the most widely adopted customer relationship tool on the market, but many sellers are looking to supplement CRM with solutions that improve insights into customer interactions, needs, and expectations.

Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Incomplete Customer Insights Break Customer Experiences, Lead To Waste

Nearly all sellers in this study agreed that they need accurate customer insights to properly understand and serve their customers. Data effectiveness rests on three pillars: timeliness, data objectivity, and thoroughness. Unfortunately, 62% of sellers reported they struggled with at least one of these pillars today:

- Stale data results in lost customer context.** Twenty-nine percent of respondents said their CRM systems struggle because employees do not enter data into the system in real time. As a result, sellers aren't able to respond to customer needs as they shift and evolve — both over time and across different customer-serving roles.
- Distorted data equals discordant service.** Twenty-eight percent highlighted that CRM systems can too often lead to data subjectivity, which can sow confusion and lead to broken or confusing customer experiences, as different parts of the organization aren't able to unite behind a single view of the truth for how to meet customer needs.
- Limited data means sellers are working in the dark.** Twenty-six percent said that they struggle with employees entering insufficient information into their systems of record. This issue means that critical customer signals are never made available to organizations seeking to guide customers to the next-best action in the buyer journey (see Figure 3).

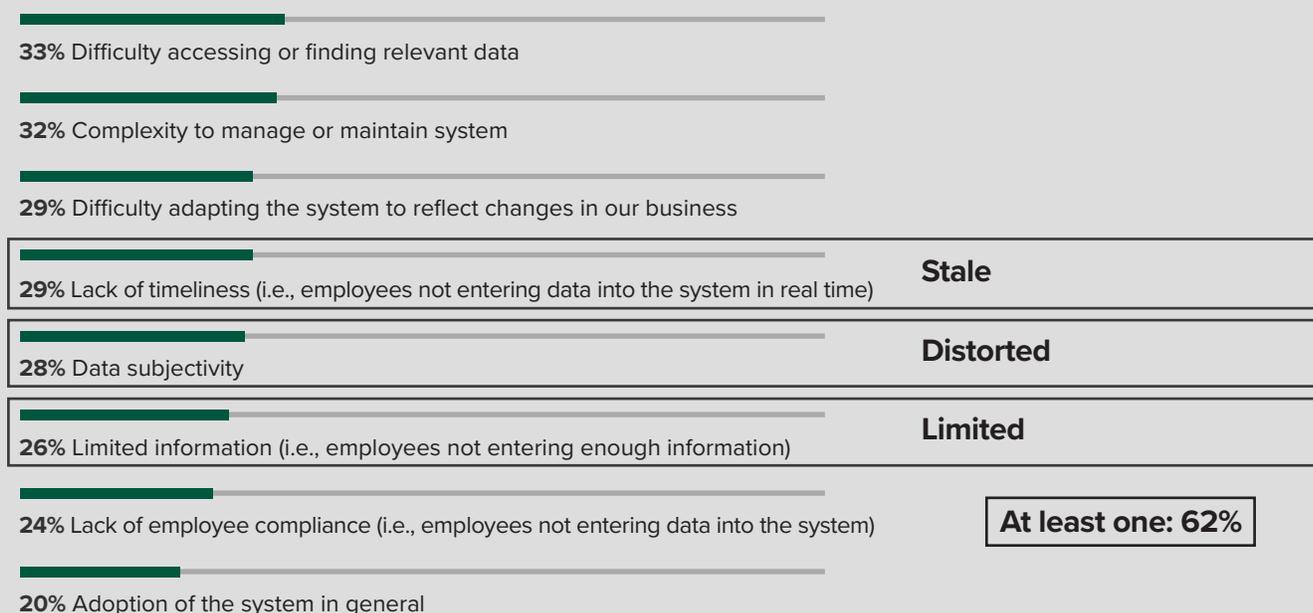


“What’s the result of making decisions based on inaccurate data? Poor prospecting, bad intelligence, and longer sales cycles.”
Survey respondent, open-end response



Figure 3

“Which of the following challenges does your organization face with its CRM system?”



At least one: 62%

Nearly two-thirds of B2B decision makers said their firms struggle with CRM data that is stale, distorted, or limited in nature.

Base: 181 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Broken customer insights lead to challenges with capturing data and translating it to actionable insights that sales can use to optimize next-best-action decisioning throughout the customer journey. When data is incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated, organizations find themselves hurting sales productivity and morale, wasting marketing spend, and creating friction within customers' purchase journeys. Forty-five percent highlighted ineffective use of sales rep time, and 41% cited issues with talent attrition as outcomes of broken customer insights. Additionally, 40% said that marketing programs that do not consider customer context are less effective and lead to broken customer journeys (see Figure 4).

These issues would be a major source of concern for most sellers even in a business-as-usual environment, but the economic uncertainty of the present moment raises the stakes even further. Organizations cannot afford to waste sales productivity, marketing spend, or customer goodwill and satisfaction with data that does not rest on a solid foundation.

Figure 4

“Which of the following issues does your organization experience when it has to operate from incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated customer insights?”



Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Complete, accurate, and timely customer insights are essential to promoting sales productivity and retention, as well as more effective marketing and customer journey support.

Committing To Revenue Intelligence Drives Better Customer And Business Outcomes

B2B buyers expect sellers to do their homework ahead of time, know their prospects' challenges, understand the competitive context, and define specifically where they can create immediate value. Furthermore, they are more willing than ever to drop existing relationships and take their business to sellers that can deliver.³ This study found that revenue intelligence positions sales teams to better hear, understand, and support customer context and that revenue-intelligent organizations enjoy advantages over their competitors as their customer data tools and practices enable their organizations to more effectively respond to customer needs and expectations.

REVENUE INTELLIGENCE POSITIONS SELLERS FOR CUSTOMER OBSESSION

Study participants understand the power of a more complete picture of customer context, as 83% agreed that revenue intelligence would be valuable or very valuable for their organizations today. Specifically, 91% agreed that revenue intelligence would drive better customer loyalty and retention, 89% said it would help them win new customers, 85% saw benefits to improving the customer experience, 89% said it would help them win new customers, 85% saw benefits to improving the customer experience, and 84% thought revenue intelligence would help them better understand and respond to customer needs (see Figure 5).



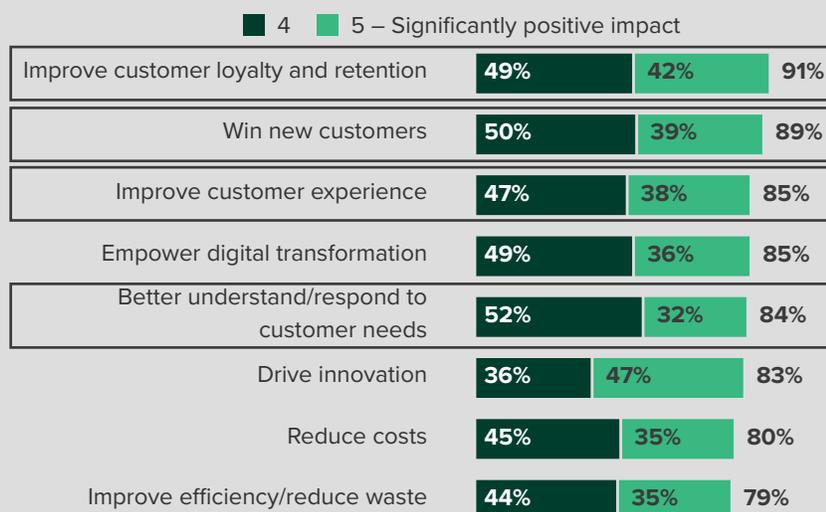
“We weren’t able to understand our market; the company missed out on customer trends and the interactions with our customers suffered.”

Survey respondent, open-end response



Figure 5

“What impact would taking a revenue intelligence approach to collecting, managing, and using customer information have on your ability to reach your key business goals?”



Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Revenue intelligence is widely seen as the key to driving improvement to essential customer and business outcomes.

REVENUE-INTELLIGENT FIRMS UNLEASH THE POWER OF CRM TO DRIVE BETTER BUSINESS OUTCOMES

Decision makers whose firms have embraced revenue intelligence reported that they have better outcomes from the insights their CRM systems deliver. These leaders reported significantly higher confidence respective to other decision makers in their CRM performance across several key dimensions:

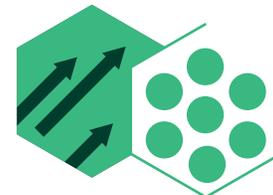
- > **Data accuracy.** Respondents at revenue-intelligent companies were 33% more confident that the data and insights supplied by CRM are accurate.
- > **Data timeliness:** Respondents at revenue-intelligent companies were 32% more likely than those at nonrevenue-intelligent firms to say their CRM systems supply the very latest customer information.
- > **Data relevancy:** Respondents at revenue-intelligent firms were 37% more confident that their CRM systems let them identify customer problem areas and issues.
- > **Insights actionability:** Respondents at revenue-intelligent firms were 26% more confident that their CRM systems provide predictive recommendations for addressing customer problems.

In addition to enjoying better performance from their CRM systems, revenue-intelligent firms also perform better in terms of bottom-line business results. Specifically, respondents at revenue-intelligent organizations were 26% more likely than others to say they overperformed on their revenue goals in the prior year and were 110% more likely to say they significantly overperformed by 10% or more (see Figure 6).

The present and future of B2B selling revolves around setting customer-centric strategies to win, serve, and retain customers. To arrive at this state, seller organizations must place their customers' full context at the core of their decision making. In turn, realizing this full context requires that data is as complete as possible and is accurate, timely, and actionable to guide customers through increasingly self-directed buyer journeys and to resolve issues where they arise.



“Revenue intelligence means we have the valuable information we need to increase sales, improve customer retention, and gain new clients as well.”
Survey respondent, open-end response

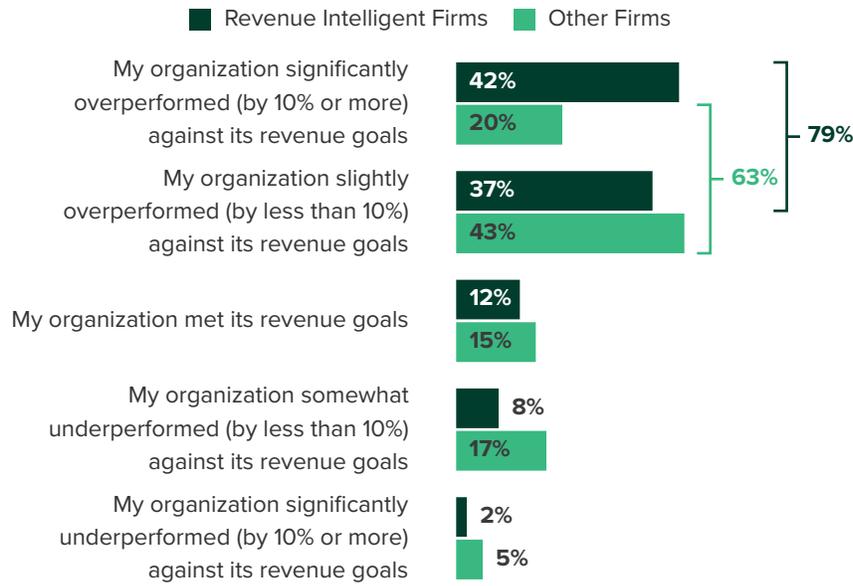


“[Revenue intelligence] makes my employees more productive, and profits have increased as a result.”
Survey respondent, open-end response



Figure 6

“How did your organization perform against its revenue goals last year?”



Revenue intelligent organizations were more likely to overperform on revenue, and far more likely to significantly overperform, compared to other organizations.

Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Key Recommendations

Forrester's in-depth survey of sales executives about their customer data strategies yielded several important recommendations:



Commit to customer obsession. Decision makers at customer-obsessed companies report having more loyal customers and increased revenue growth. Becoming customer obsessed requires accurate and timely data-based insights to more effectively interpret and respond to all of the underlying events and experiences that comprise the customer lifecycle.⁴



Secure the base. In the current economic downturn, many companies are operating in markets where shrinking budgets and client turnover are the norm, and the only hedge against disaster is a strong installed base. Organizations that neglect to stay in touch with their current customers and faithfully capture those conversations risk missing the warning signs that precede a defection or nonrenewal.



Prepare for a return to growth. When the economy turns positive again — and it will — the companies that have deployed the processes and technologies required to extract the maximum value from every customer conversation today will be best positioned to apply the same customer-obsessed approach to their engagement with new prospects.

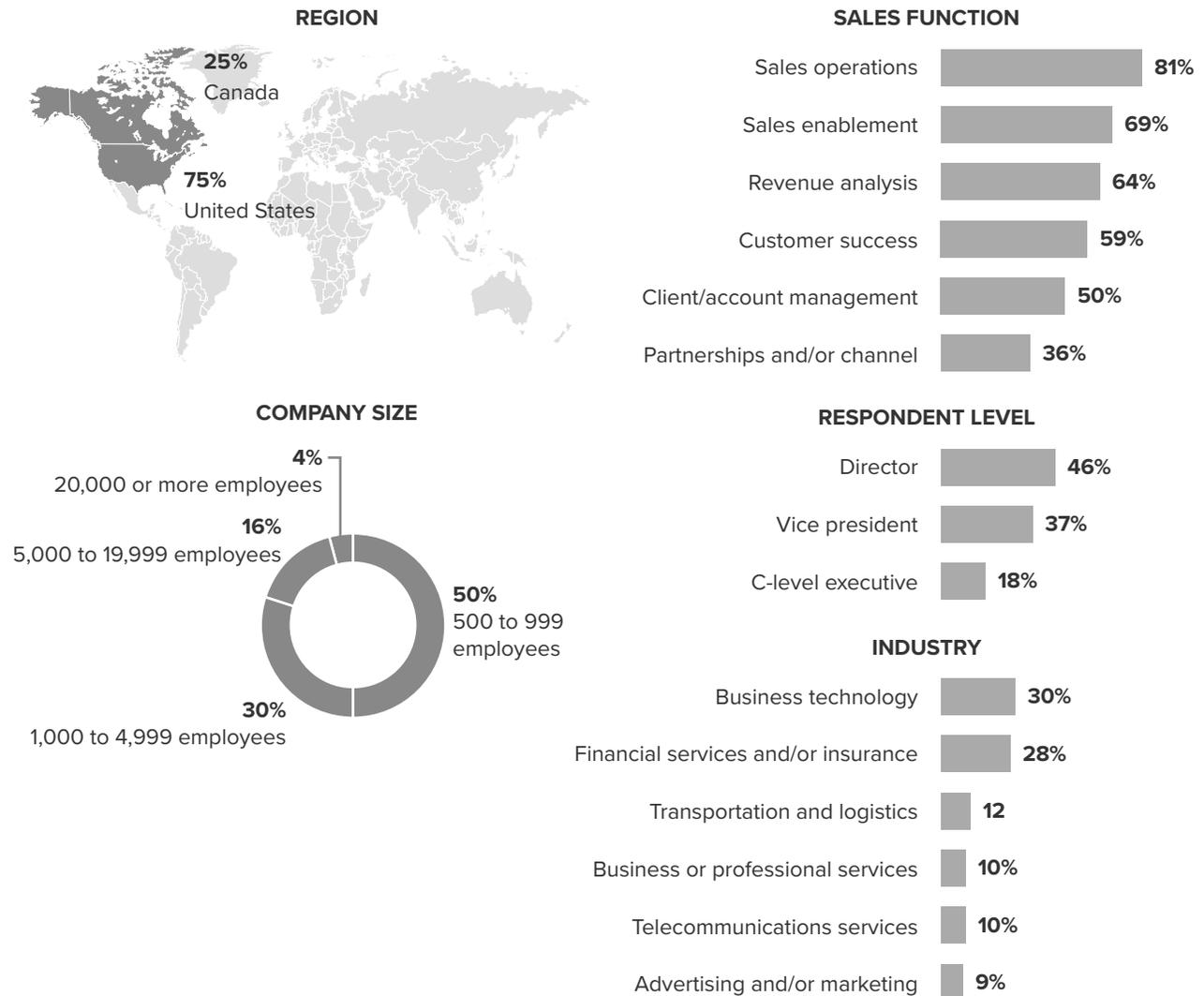


Free your sellers to focus on selling. Too many B2B organizations continue to rely on critical (and expensive) sales resources to manually capture customer interaction data. Companies taking advantage of new technology solutions that automate the process of collecting, organizing, and presenting customer data can turn those opportunity costs into insights and assets that can be shared across the organization.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 213 sales executives and decision makers in North American enterprises and midmarket companies to evaluate the state of their customer data strategies. Survey participants included decision makers in sales operations, sales enablement, revenue analysis, customer success, account management, and partnership/channel roles. Questions provided to the participants asked about the state of their customer data strategies, tools, and outcomes. Respondents were offered a nominal financial incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study began in November 2019 and was completed in July 2020.

Appendix B: Demographics



Base: 213 sales executives and decision makers at North American midmarket and enterprise companies
 Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gong, July 2020

Appendix C: Endnotes

¹ Source: “The B2B Consumer Grows Up,” Forrester Research, Inc., March 2, 2020.

² Source: “What B2B Buyers Crave,” Forrester Research, Inc., May 4, 2020.

³ Source: “Digital Ups The Stakes For B2B Sales Pros,” Forrester Research, Inc., February 13, 2019.

⁴ Source: “The Forrester Wave™: B2B Marketing Data Providers, Q3 2018 (Updated),” Forrester Research, Inc., February 24, 2020.