

The savvy sales leader's guide to building profitable relationships

Use relationship selling to connect with customers and accelerate sales



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Imagine having
a relationship
built on trust with
each of your customers.

Introduction

If every one of your connections turned to you for help in solving their greatest challenges at every stage of the sales journey, what would that do to your bottom line?

If you could provide every new prospect with relevant, useful insights that would make them more successful, how would your sales goals change?

A new model is emerging on the sales landscape. The entire process looks vastly different from how it looked just a few years ago. Although that's partly because of constantly evolving tools and technologies, the greater difference is in the mindset of buyers. Understanding that mindset and catering to it is what catapults a successful seller into rockstar seller status.

While this shift brings new possibilities, every stage of the selling process is also rife with new challenges. Greater access means more noise. Countless resources make it difficult to bring real value. These are just a few of the challenges you're most likely experiencing as a seller today. As the landscape shifts, you can stay ahead by adopting a relationship selling mindset.

Relationship selling refers to the process of building long-term relationships with your customers—relationships that will lead to future sales. It requires rethinking the way you communicate as a seller—not just what tools you use, but also how you use them to reach out, engage, and develop deeper connections.

You're no stranger to the idea that loyalty is key in selling. Establishing that loyalty requires building strong relationships throughout the customer lifecycle.

This e-book is your guide to navigating the challenges at each stage of the sales process. You'll discover how to use modern tools and techniques to find the right prospects, build trust and value for stronger relationships, and identify opportunities to meet—and even exceed—your sales goals.

Let's get started.

Companies that use relationship selling consistently experience:

12-15%

Increased productivity

30%

Improved win rates

87%

Improved year-over-year sales

—Nucleus Research, [Microsoft Lays Out LinkedIn CRM Strategy](#)

Stage 1

Identify the right leads

“These days, sellers can’t wait for buyers to come to them. Buyers are doing their research online, getting up to speed on their options on their own. Sales professionals have to go find those informed, savvy prospects where they are, engage them in conversation, and begin building relationships with them.”

—Jennifer Tomlinson, Global Channel Marketing Leader, Microsoft



Identifying and creating natural ways to foster and maintain professional relationships leads to deeper connections, long-term loyalty, and trust—and that trust translates to healthy sales. At this first stage of the sales journey, you’re intent on identifying new prospects—not just any prospects, but those who are able to make purchase decisions for their company.

You certainly have more resources today than sellers did a decade ago. The internet, social platforms, and professional online groups help you cast a much wider net, but how can you best capture the right contacts? Blindly shooting for the moon and hoping you land among the stars sounds great, but it’s just not realistic. There are several challenges to finding the right leads.



Challenge:
**Identifying key
decision makers**

Even after you spend a great deal of time and energy, it can be difficult to identify the right people. Your job is to build relationships with dozens of decision makers and influencers who work in diverse fields and are responsible for a wide variety of functions. Plus, given that roles are always changing and prospects are moving from one company to another, you're faced with a seemingly never-ending task.

Solution:

Imagine being able to connect with every member of a company's buying committee, prioritize your efforts and act on valuable insights to target prospects who make the most sense, and then take advantage of your existing connections to reach out to new leads and create a list to focus on those that matter most.

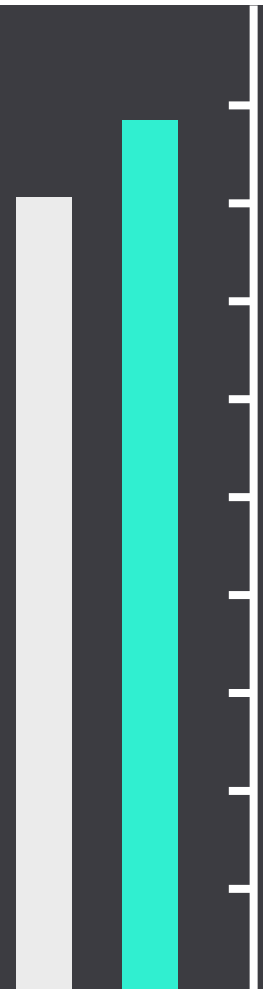
Technology makes it easier for you to find key decision makers and influencers. LinkedIn's professional network can exponentially increase the pool from which you can seek out and engage with new contacts and identify potential leads from your first, second, and third connections.

Predictive intelligence can use machine learning—not just past behavior—to help you augment your search for companies and people most likely to buy. And predictive lead scoring can align your sales and marketing team with a shared, objective definition of leads.

Over 80% of all respondents—and nearly
90% of top-performing companies—agree that

**developing authentic
relationships
is very important
to revenue generation.**

—[The Power of Relationship Selling](#), Heinz Marketing and Microsoft



Challenge:
**Connecting
with credibility**

Targeting the right prospects used to mean making countless cold calls and repeating the same sales pitch over and over. Today, buyers have higher expectations, and you have better tools that can target new audiences and shorten the sales cycle.

Cold calling has flatlined, but reaching out in other ways—social platforms or email—is still a chilly attempt to make a connection. A warm referral is four times more likely to result in a sale than a cold call. But turning cold calls into warm conversations is a tough proposition.

Solution:

Take advantage of existing relationships to increase the likelihood of getting a response from new leads. Broaden your reach by tapping into your company's network and your colleagues' relationships for warm introductions. Once you've begun building a relationship with a new account, use that connection to find others within the same company. Search for similar connections at other accounts to continue growing your network.

When you locate the right leads, you're halfway to your goal. Your next step is to use modern tools to make deeper connections, draw insights from data, and communicate seamlessly across any device to grow your customer relationships over time.



Stage 2

Nurture leads and build relationships

“If you could give your salespeople 33% more active selling time, what impact would that have on your business?”

—Matt Heinz, President and founder
of Heinz Marketing

Working on a relationship is a continuous cycle. It's not enough to connect with the ideal leads; those prospects must be wooed. In sales, that means providing the value your educated buyers are looking for. Imagine what your end-of-month reports would look like if you could anticipate the needs of every connection and deliver real value—in the form of useful information that drives business forward—to every customer.

In today's sales climate, that's not easy to do.

But with the right tools, you can tackle the challenges that stand in the way of becoming a powerhouse resource for your prospects.



Challenge:
**Capturing buyers’
attention**

Although tools and technologies have evolved to provide better targeting, buyers are now inundated with messaging. It’s difficult to cut through the clutter to get and keep buyers’ attention, much less earn a response.

Solution:

Fostering meaningful connections is the key to relationship selling. But it’s not enough to use the latest technology. You need to take advantage of that technology to capture data before you engage with a customer or prospect at a deeply personalized level, whether that’s by phone, by email, or in person. Powerful analytics let you discover your prospects’ pain points and deliver sound solutions that will build trust. Tap into your customers’ social platforms and pay attention to the topics they discuss, the issues they tackle, and the industry insights they share. Customer interaction data surfaces timely, relevant insights that move relationships forward.

72% of sales leaders agree that

**“buyers are more likely
to dismiss a seller if they
don’t receive value in
their first interaction.”**

—[The Future of B2B Sales Is Built On Predictive Tools](#), Forrester Consulting



Challenge:
Keeping pace

Keeping up with roles, marching orders, and objectives that are always in flux is difficult, especially when you have a large roster of contacts.

Solution:

Staying on top of changes among your contacts can provide opportunities for new connections, deeper engagements, and greater sales. Machine learning and real-time alerts provide insights into what your connections are up to—and the best next actions to take on each of those insights at every relationship-building opportunity.

There are dozens of small actions that open doors. When a contact has left a company, you have a chance to touch base and wish them luck or ask about their new position. When you receive a response to a connection request or email, your reply keeps the lines of communication open. When you hear about an upcoming industry event or networking opportunity, you can reach out to those nearby.

**Personalizing sales
relationships can lead to better
opportunities—and more
sales—for your business.**

[Watch our demo videos](#)
**to learn more about the
Microsoft Relationship
Sales solution.**

Stage 3

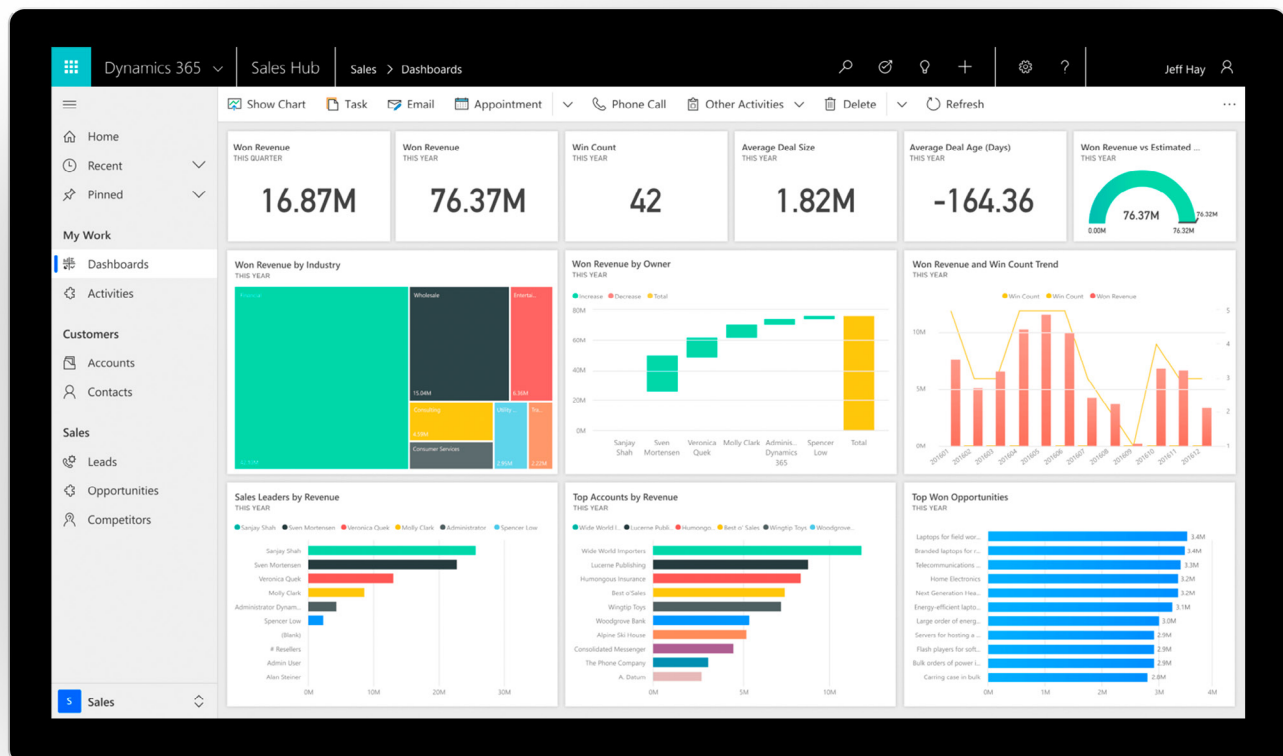
Capitalize on opportunities to convert

“Many companies allow good leads to fall through the cracks, but others lose revenue by letting their leads sit on a shelf.”

—Steve Mordue, Microsoft Business Applications MVP

Customers come to you because they have problems. You solve those problems. But what if you could anticipate and solve the problems they don't yet realize they have? Relationship selling focuses on listening to your prospects and customers and recognizing opportunities.

The challenge at this stage is identifying those opportunities and knowing when you have the best odds of being heard.



Challenge:
Understanding
your buyers' pains,
challenges, goals,
and needs

You've undoubtedly heard the infamous statistic that claims most buyers are nearly 70 percent of the way to a buying decision before they engage a salesperson. It's a tough sell when your customers have already researched the competition and are on the tail end of their purchase decision.

Solution:

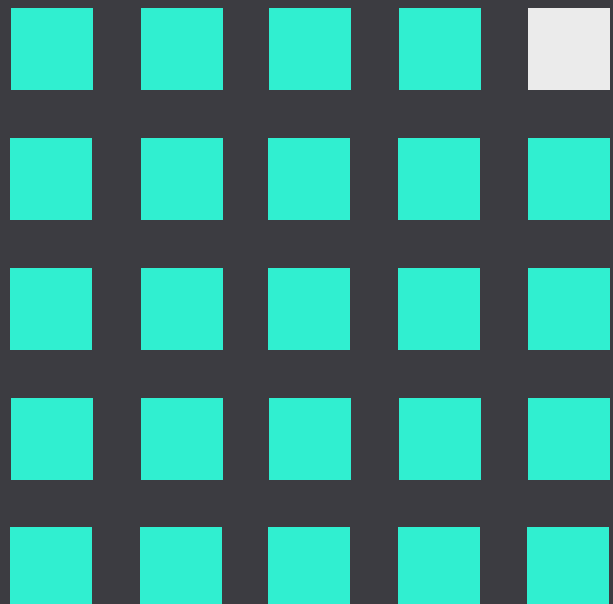
Contrary to popular belief, buyers don't want to do all the work themselves. Although it might be true that buyers aren't likely to depend on sellers for all the information they need to make a decision, that doesn't mean they don't welcome your educated advice. With valuable insights around company growth, recent news articles, and trends, you'll be in a better position to understand each customer's current needs and mindset and where they are in the buying cycle.

Relationship selling focuses on the person, not the sale. Armed with this relevant data, you can address real customer concerns and offer recommendations and insights to begin building trust.

96%

of sales leaders believe
their relationship with
a target account's stakeholder
or champion **played a major role**
in the outcome of a sale.

—[The Power of Relationship Selling](#),
Heinz Marketing and Microsoft



Challenge:

Knowing when your connections are most receptive

There will be times when buyers are just too focused on other objectives to listen. Bombarding them with information or requests will only serve to push them further away, weakening the relationship you've worked hard to build.

Solution:

Evaluate each customer relationship. Build a health profile from data based on transactions, customer sentiment, emails, and content exchanges, as well as frequency and level of interactions from CRM, email, and social networks. Predictive analytics doesn't just allow you to determine where new business opportunities lie. It also uncovers potential risks for each account—like reaching out during a prospect's busiest week—so you know which people to contact and how. With a clear picture of each sales relationship, you can proactively focus on those that need your attention and give space to those that don't.

Machine learning lets you know exactly when to re-engage an inactive buyer and helps you determine which customer emails are the most critical. Insights driven by artificial intelligence can deliver recommended next actions that enhance the experience for you and your customers.



Stage 4

Deliver relationship sales at scale

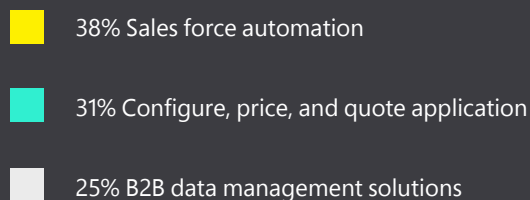
**You have prospect data.
Lots of it. And you're collecting
it every second of every day.**

Your data is analog. It's digital. It's in people's heads. It's on laptops. It's in mobile phones. It's in the cloud. It's in ink. It's in spreadsheets. It's in water cooler conversations. It's over lunch. It's in texts. It's in phone calls. It's in email. But you can't drive revenue with your

data unless you can filter it and then organize it into stories that drive the long-term relationships that lead to sales.

Meaningful relationships that last are those that are continually nurtured. Nurturing a few relationships is manageable, but nurturing dozens is more time-consuming. Successfully finding and engaging with the right buyers isn't enough. **Your relationships also need to be sustainable and scalable, and that presents a few core challenges.**

**When surveyed about their technologies,
38% of sales leaders agree that sales force
automation contributes the most to their
sales organization's success.**



—[The Future of B2B Sales Is Built On Predictive Tools](#), Forrester Consulting

Challenge:
Engaging with dozens
of stakeholders across
the entire sales book

Engaging with large numbers of stakeholders can quickly become overwhelming, especially when you're working with multiple companies.

Solution:

Create and organize personalized content to share with your customers so that you're ready to engage when they are. Imagine having data at your fingertips that tells you when someone interacts with your content—and when it's shared with other key decision makers—to provide new leads to add to your book. With predictive intelligence and machine learning, this is possible. And you can take it a step further and track your customers' interests and activities to better anticipate the content that's most useful to them. Ramping up for exponential growth involves using tools and techniques that make it possible to nurture every single sales relationship.

Challenge:
Keeping up with large
amounts of data

The more accounts you have, the harder it is to sift through the noise. CRM tools, productivity software, and social media all provide data and insights that help build these relationships. But taken alone, these tools tell only part of the story. In fact, the data gleaned from one of these sources might lead to sellers making assumptions to fill in the blanks.

Solution:

Prioritize tasks and engagement opportunities to keep tabs on—and grow—your customer relationships. Machine learning and analytics can provide valuable insights and drive actionable recommendations. Gather insights from every available source to get the knowledge you need to act. Seamless CRM integration can help you more efficiently keep track of sales activity without removing the focus from those relationships.

With automation and a guided sales process, you can easily manage complex customer relationships and scale with ease—to close more deals, faster. A highly intuitive interface, productivity capabilities, robust mobile apps, and familiar tools provide a connected experience that gets you up and running quickly.

Microsoft Dynamics 365 delivers \$16.97 for every dollar spent

—Nucleus Research, [Microsoft Dynamics 365 Delivers \\$16.97
for Every Dollar Spent](#)



Sales story

The view's better from here

Relationship selling powered by tech

Let's look at an example of how relationship selling drives sales.

Tomas is a sales rep for a lawn care equipment manufacturer. His customers include retailers, dealers, and lawn care service providers in the Midwest. To reach his quarterly quota, Tomas needs one more large order. Instead of spending hours searching for the right leads online, Tomas uses the advanced search tool on LinkedIn to quickly locate Jamie, a valuable lead at a lawn care company in Kansas City. Rather than cold calling her, he receives a referral from a colleague who's connected with Jamie. And he relies on recommendations based on predictive analytics to determine the best time and day to reach out to her.

Once Tomas connects with Jamie, he receives insight about her key needs. As he builds a trusted relationship

with her, predictive intelligence lets him know where he stands with the account so he can choose the right moments to engage. And as Jamie's trust in Tomas and his company grows, she feels comfortable introducing Tomas to the other four contacts on her company's buying committee. He begins tracking each buyer throughout the lifecycle of the account to deliver relevant content that builds trust. As Tomas continues to add connections and build relationships, a guided sales process helps him manage all these complex relationships without losing productivity.

Productivity software coupled with machine learning and predictive analytics tells an entire story that helps Tomas keep his relationship data in sync and provides information that drives contextual learning and recommendations.

Ready to boost your sales team's success?



[Learn more](#)

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