LinkedIn

real sales

Sales Technology:

Empower your team through times of change

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Leading sales teams through change

Real Sales takes a refreshingly honest look at today's sales industry from the perspectives of real-life sales leaders. It explores the recurring, inter-connected themes of technology, leadership, performance, collaboration, and talent; realizing that each plays an important role in enabling sales professionals to better nurture their relationships, be it with prospects, customers or with the wider team. After all, by having genuine connections, leaders can improve business success.

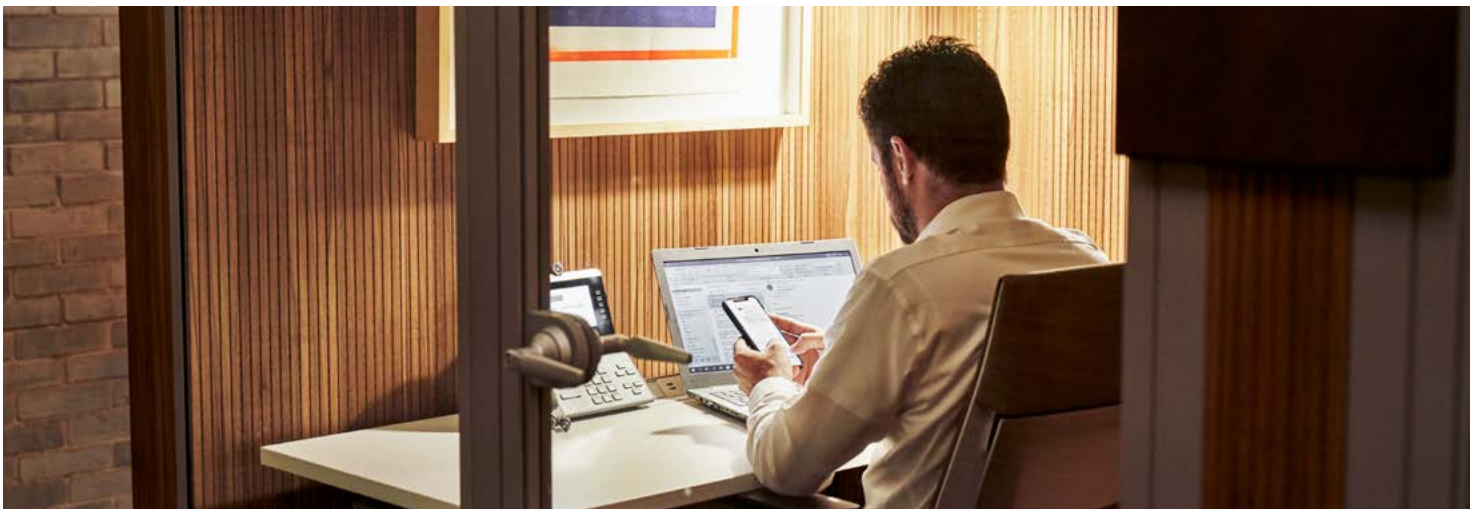
Sales leaders from across the globe have reflected on their technology infrastructure. This whitepaper presents the research and explores how technology is already better enabling their sales teams, accelerating performance, and breaking down barriers to greater impact and increased efficiencies. Additionally, it reveals how technology could work harder for them, and their teams, as they navigate through immediate challenges and future directions.

Technology has never been more instrumental to business survival than it is right now. Sales professionals in particular rely on these tools more and more with each passing day.

For some time, the sales technology stack has helped sales teams simplify processes and enhance productivity. It has enabled more targeted outreach and greater agility. It has allowed teams to track leads, crush quotas and more. However, its value is being put to the test as business practices shift to address the uncertainty of both today and the future.

Despite all the major change currently shaping the world, the fundamentals of sales remain the same. Relationships still need to be nurtured and deals still need to be closed. However, any gaps or cracks in infrastructure are now more visible than ever, and will ultimately impede a team's ability to do its job.

With this in mind, it would be strategic to unlock the full potential of a sales team's existing technology stack today. Sales leaders should be taking advantage of every opportunity technology provides – and should be ensuring their teams are confident in the stack's uses and benefits. This could help organizations survive the current turbulence and withstand any further change that's to come.

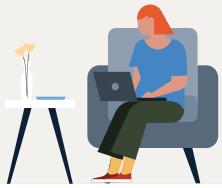


The key findings

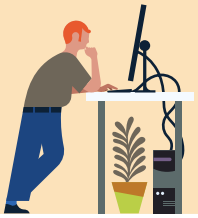
Sales organizations are upping the ante on their use of technology to help navigate these unprecedented times.

53% of sales leaders are rethinking their approach to sales

51% of sales leaders are using new technology to help tackle the challenges of the current climate



Technology plays a key role.



Sales technology is an integral part of the job

48% of an average salesperson's day is spent using sales-specific technology

Organizations are using on average four different sales technologies. The most popular tools are:

57% Sales intelligence tools for reporting and analytics

57% Customer relationship management

The benefits technology brings are incredibly valuable.

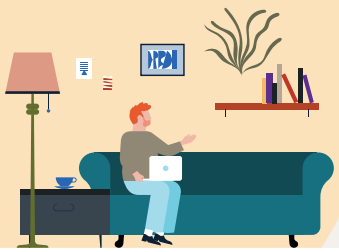
The sales technology stack is already working hard

Sales technology is increasing data accuracy 50%

Increasing productivity and efficiency 50%

Simplifying the sales process 48%

The key findings



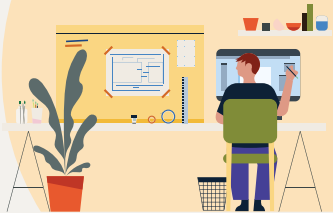
Sales organizations recognize technology is crucial to their team's productivity

45% report it significantly improves their sales teams' ability to do their job

But, there is an opportunity for sales technology to evolve further

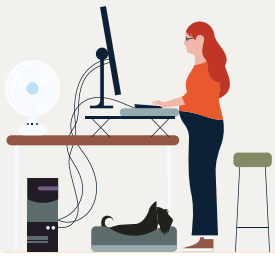
4 in 10
sales decision-makers find digitally transforming the sales team a challenge

3 in 10
sales leaders find providing a unified data source for the whole organization a challenge



And organizations need to ensure that sales teams are adopting the technology smoothly

4 in 5 sales leaders
report that the performance of the technology their organization uses requires either some or great improvement.



54% **Of sales leaders**
require improved training for staff and another

52% require improved technology

Selling in tough times

Global unrest at an unprecedented scale is leaving no department untouched. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority **(96%)** of organizations' sales teams report that they are experiencing challenges while trying to manage the effects of COVID-19.

As you might expect from a discipline with relationship building at its core, the main challenges are: not being able to physically visit customers **(60%)** and valuable networking events being cancelled **(55%)**.

And it's not just about customers. Sales professionals thrive off the energy of a sales floor. Being in the same room can help sales teams build momentum and foster collaboration. Over half **(53%)** of the decision makers surveyed cited limited opportunities to meet face-to-face as a team as a main challenge due to the pandemic.

Taking that physical connection away means that over half **(53%)** of sales professionals have had to rethink how they sell. At the same time, the **51%** of sales professionals say they are implementing new technology to help overcome the sales challenges associated with restrictions on travel and meetings.

53% of sales professionals say recent challenges have made them rethink their approach to sales, while **51%** say they're using new technology to help tackle the tough sales environment.

The new normal?

Though sales professionals are used to operating with a degree of uncertainty, the current pace of change is beyond what many could have ever imagined. It's not just the pandemic that is fueling uncertainty. A plethora of social, political and economic challenges are affecting business as well.

In order to thrive in this new world, organizations will have to make sure their sales teams are equipped with the right tools, and mindset, to keep pace.

Impact of sales technology

Technology has changed and improved the sales discipline since the invention of the telephone in the 1870s. It's not new news. In today's digitally dominant world, unsurprisingly, nearly all **(97%)** sales organizations around the world report some benefits from using technology.

While some sales teams are raising the level on usage to tackle more recent challenges, many teams already admit they're spending just under half of a typical day using technology. During this time, they are using around four different technologies or systems.

of sales organizations globally report some benefits from using technology

Figure 1. **How sales technology is being used**

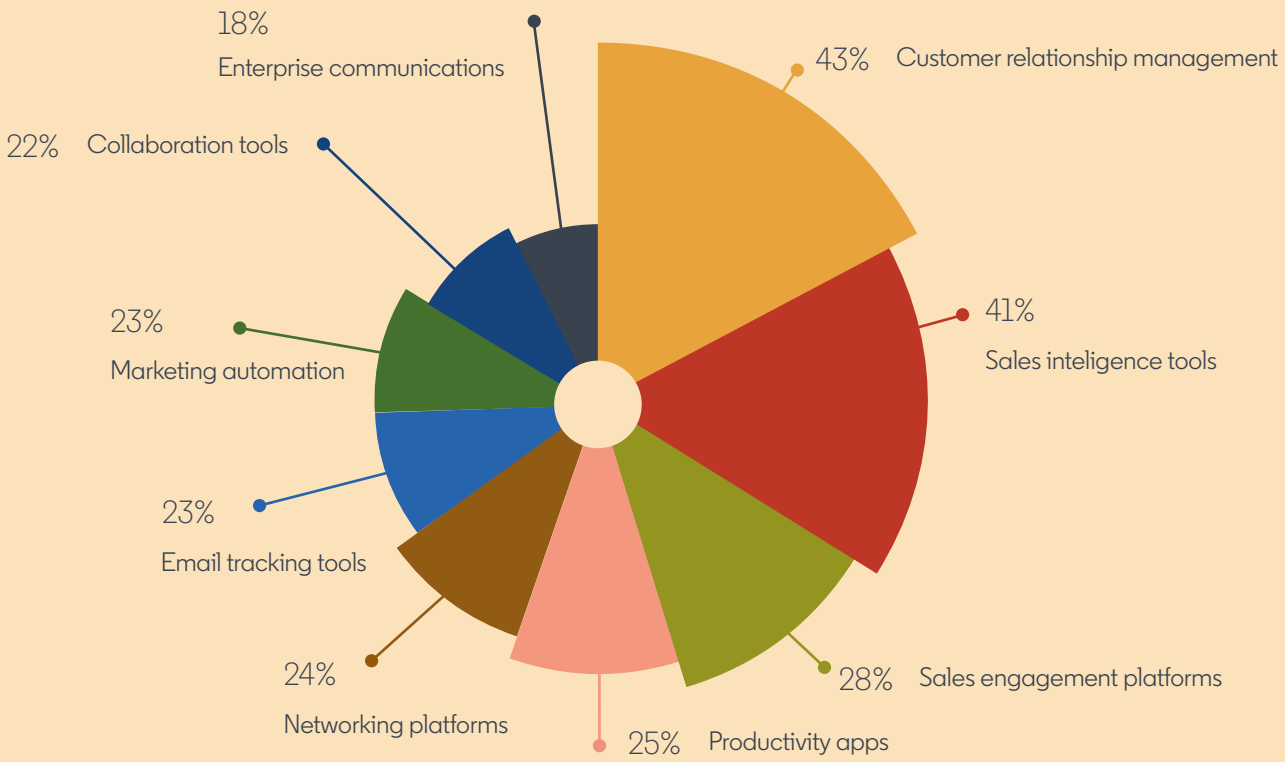
	Global	10 - 49 employees	50 - 249 employees	250 - 999 employees	1,000 or more employees
Average percentage of an organization's sales team's day that is spent using sales technology	48%	39%	43%	52%	56%
Average number of different sales technologies that are being used	4	3	4	4	5

The data shows that sales technology plays more of an important role as an organization grows in size. The average proportion of a sales team's day that is spent using sales technology increases when comparing SMBs to large enterprises. This is also true of the average number of sales technologies or systems forming the technology stack. Large enterprises set the global trend in both areas.

The technologies most popular with sales teams globally are also the elements of the sales tech stack perceived to offer the most tangible value to organizations of all sizes. As *Figure 2* shows, customer relationship management and sales intelligence tools come out on top.

The perceived value of these elements increases with the size of the organization too; large enterprises place at least **10%** more value on them than SMBs. Comparatively, the tools thought to deliver the lowest value for sales organizations globally are collaboration tools, email tracking tools and enterprise communication tools.

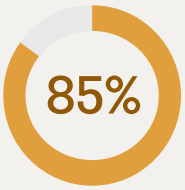
Figure 2. **Elements of the sales technology stack considered the most important to achieving business goals**



What sales decision makers see

Although usage and the perceived value of a sales technology stack varies from team to team, it's encouraging to see that the organizational impact of a fully effective sales stack is top of mind for sales decisions makers. Globally, almost nine in 10 sales leaders believe that a fully effective sales technology stack could help develop relationships with buyers by empowering sales professionals. Similarly, **90%** believe that it would make their sales team's job easier.

Despite full effectiveness perhaps not yet being achieved, the majority **(85%)** of organizations already affirm that their current stack improves the sales team's ability to perform.



of organizations agree their current stack improves the sales teams' performance.

"[The sales technology stack] has allowed us to balance our productivity versus the time spent on each tool. The integration of different technology tools across collaboration, enterprise, customer management, and sales channels has given us a leading edge to not only be productive, but to engage our sales staff more thoroughly. This not only increases our ROI, but employee productivity and happiness as well - all of which lead to more sales."

USA respondent

Aim high: Building a better sales tech stack

Solving one challenge with one solution is progress towards sales success. But solving multiple challenges with one solution puts organizations in the fast lane.
It's no wonder then that the main reported benefit of a well-integrated sales stack is its ability to help solve multiple business problems at once.
For most companies, technology is solving around four different problems. It's also evident that the larger the business, the more problems solved. This means corporations are seeing the most value from an integrated sales technology stack.

Figure 3. **Top three business problems currently being solved by organizations' sales technology stacks**

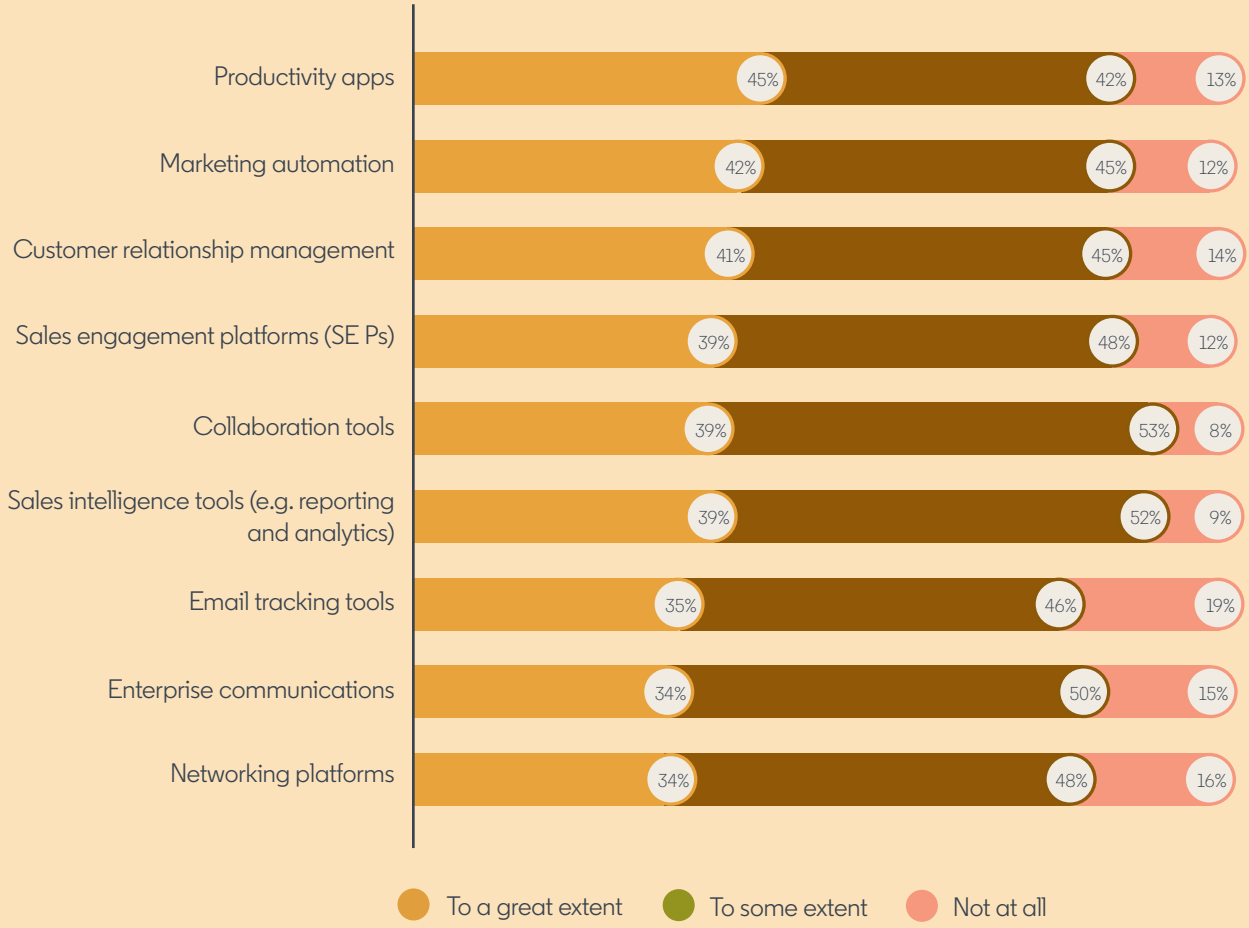
Interestingly, the top three problems solved by the sales tech stack are the same across the world, though the priorities vary between regions. In USA and Canada, increasing data accuracy is the top problem solved by the stack; in Europe, the sales tech stack helps increase productivity and efficiency; and in Asia, the simplification of the sales process is the top benefit of implementation.

The road ahead

There are clear benefits to be had, but many organizations still have a long way to go. Problem-solving aside, globally, over four in five sales leaders are reporting that the performance of their sales technology stack elements requires either some or great improvement.

Over four in five sales leaders report that the performance of the technology their organization uses requires either some or great improvement.

Figure 4. **How sales technology performance could be improved**



Q: To what extent does the performance of each element of your organization's sales technology stack require improvement?

Of those reporting an improvement is needed, over half **(54%)** require improved training for staff and another **52%** require improved technology.

These areas of improvement vary marginally between smaller and bigger organizations suggesting that in fact improvements in the technology stack are welcomed across the board.

Figure 5. **How sales technology stack could be improved**

	Global	10 - 49 employees	50 - 249 employees	250 - 999 employees	1,000 or more employees
Improved training for staff	54%	48%	54%	55%	59%
Improved/upgraded technology	52%	46%	42%	59%	59%

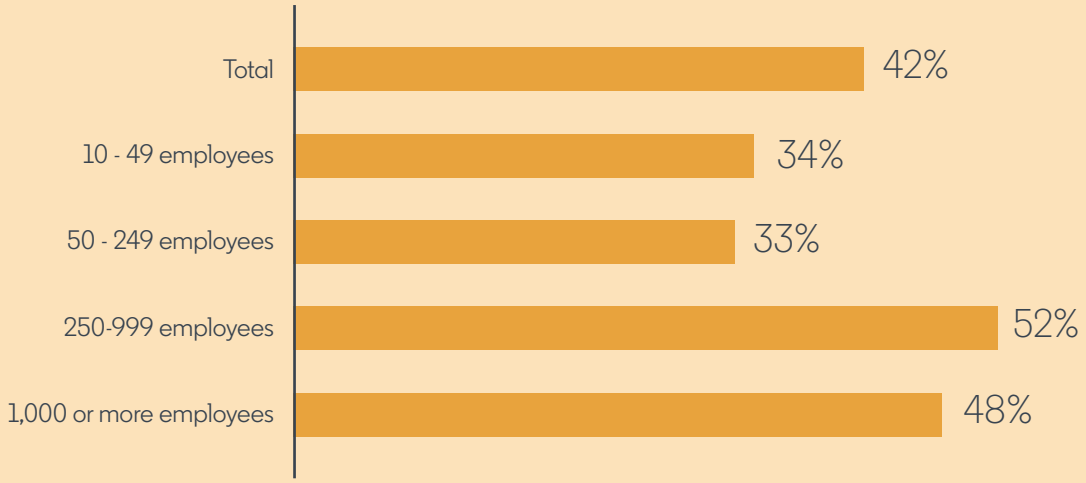
Though organizations are using several elements of the sales technology stack already, they could be seeing greater benefits if they use more parts, more effectively. Globally, just under four in ten report that the reason they haven't engaged with all possible elements of the sales technology stack is because they don't feel it would be beneficial to their business and over a third don't believe it would be relevant.

This shows adoption is a problem. Subpar solutions and inadequate integration have led to poor experiences, which then are clouding organizations' experiences of what's possible. With better implementation, integration and training – experiences would undoubtedly change. Technologies would quickly prove their worth and relevance.

A willingness by the wider business to invest in such tools would also help improve experiences, especially when **30%** of sales leaders say they are struggling to gain investment for the right tools.

of sales leaders are struggling to gain investment for the right tool

Figure 6. **Sales technology adoption is a challenge**



Respondents who find sales technology adoption a challenge within their organization.

What's apparent is the bigger the business, the harder it is to implement technology. But that shouldn't be a deterrent for those wanting to see change. What's important is determining how quickly a system can be implemented and the ROI involved. By having a clear implementation process, with enough budget and training, as well as sight on the opportunities ahead, businesses of scale can deliver on these plans.

The data challenge

Data represents a goldmine of insights for sales leaders. From the sales leaders surveyed, it was believed that data and analytics had the power to make sales team more efficient **(55%)**, more accurate **(48%)** and increase customer satisfaction **(44%)**.

It makes sense then that the main challenge sales leaders would like their technology to solve is that of having a unified data source for the entire organization. And it's a view shared by those across all organizational sizes, though it is **11%** more pronounced in large enterprises compared to SMBs.

Providing a unified data source for the whole organization is the top business problem respondents wished their organization's sales technology stack could solve.

Figure 7. **Unified data is a challenge technology might fix**

Respondents who wish their sales technology stack could solve the challenge of having a unified data source across the entire organization

As organizations grow, so too does their use of data. This means larger businesses have the greater burden of maintaining multiple streams of data so it remains compliant and usable. However, with too many data sources, there's a chance businesses are spending more time managing this data than deriving its true benefits.

In order to stay on top of this challenge, the consensus is that one data source that works for the entire organization is best. Nearly nine in ten respondents globally agree that this would make closing deals easier. Making this unified data source a reality should be a high priority for organizations looking to increase their success rate.

of organizations agree that having one data source that works for the entire organization would make closing deals easier.

Quality as well as quantity

Data alone isn't enough. The data needs to be of sufficient quality so that sales teams can trust it. At present, four in ten don't fully trust the data available to them in their organization's sales technology stack, and **78%** struggle to make accurate decisions based on their system's data. The training gap in sales tech stack implementation would help solve this. If sales teams could identify for themselves what quality data looks like, that would then improve trust and increase usage.

Better tech means a better approach

From what we're seeing already, technology is an integral part of the sales process. It can help sales professionals strengthen their existing customer relationships, help them acquire new opportunities, and increase their productivity. It's proving its worth to organizations of all sizes and across all geographies. We can only expect technology to continue to evolve and help solve the many challenges faced by sales professionals today, and well into the future.

But building sales relationships is both an art and a science. Which means technology will only take organizations halfway there.

To achieve true success, sales leaders must take a holistic approach to tech and its potential to transform.

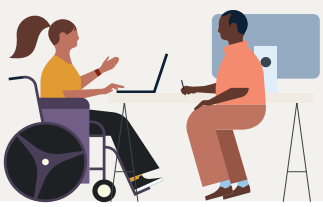
Looking at what thriving sales professionals and organizations are doing can help inform the next steps needed.

What's clear is that one tool is not enough. From what we're witnessing, there needs to be a spectrum of tools to match each organization's specific needs. Which itself poses the challenge of integration.

As well as the right suite of technology, organizations need to have tools that can work seamlessly with each other. Addressing this challenge should be a priority.

Data is also important. We see that the right data can make a powerful difference. But being able to interrogate data and derive the right insights is key to unlocking all these benefits. Technology relies on data to function, and so the two must be considered hand in hand. As such, proper training must not be overlooked.

There is plenty of opportunity for sales leaders to shape their road ahead. Understanding the benefits of a fully integrated sales technology stack, finding the right technology mix, and putting it all in a carefully considered implementation roadmap is key to surviving the uncertainty today and tomorrow.



Methodology

Methodology
LinkedIn Sales Solutions commissioned independent market research company Vanson Bourne to conduct a quantitative research study with 450 B2B sales decision makers in April and May 2020. Participants were from the USA and Canada (150), Europe (150) and Asia (150).

All interviews were conducted using a rigorous multilevel screening process to ensure that only suitable candidates were given the opportunity to participate.

About LinkedIn:

LinkedIn Sales Solutions makes it simple to establish and grow relationships with prospects and customers by helping you tap into the power of LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network of more than 660 million members. Designed for sales professionals, LinkedIn Sales Navigator combines LinkedIn's network data, relevant news sources, and your accounts, leads, and preferences to produce customized recommendations and insights. With LinkedIn Sales Navigator, you can focus on the right people and companies, stay up-to-date on what's happening with your accounts, and build trust with your prospects and customers.

About Vanson Bourne:

Vanson Bourne is an independent specialist in market research for the technology sector. Their reputation for robust and credible research-based analysis is founded upon rigorous research principles and their ability to seek the opinions of senior decision makers across technical and business functions, in all business sectors and all major markets. For more information, visit www.vansonbourne.com.