The State of Sales UK 2017

A LinkedIn survey on sales technology, adoption and success

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CENSUSWIDE
THE SURVEY CONSULTANTS

The ‘Sales Tech Revolution’ is in full swing

At a time when new technologies are transforming virtually every aspect of our professional lives – from the way we do our jobs to the very nature of the work – a significant shift in sales tech is happening right in the heart of sales.

Investment in sales technology is increasing, particularly in emerging technologies like social tech. B2B sales tools are expensive. When companies commit to purchasing sales technology to integrate into their businesses, they are spending millions, not thousands, of pounds.

In our second annual State of Sales report, we saw strong evidence that companies will increase this spending. Our key findings include:

- **Use of in sales tech is accelerating.** From professional social networking sites, to CRM and productivity apps - sales teams are increasing their spend year over year on new technology.
- **Social tech is rising dramatically.** Over the years, the leveraging of social networks has grown from a little known tactic, to an approach embraced by a majority of sales professionals. While it is being used regularly today, and is proven to be instrumental in helping top salespeople exceed their targets, indications point that it will be used more frequently in the future.
- **Millennials are early adopters, but seasoned professionals are catching on.** Younger salespeople are pioneering new technology, and younger decision makers are turning to social media more readily. But Generation X and baby boomer sales professionals aren't too far behind.
- **Technology builds trust, the crucial ingredient.** Good relationships are the cornerstone of a successful sales process. Compared to economic considerations, such as price or the return on investment, trust comes out as the most important factor when closing the deal.

To examine this trend and take stock of the state of sales technology today, we commissioned CensusWide, a global research fieldwork and consultancy company, to conduct this year's State of Sales 2017 report. Two online surveys were conducted between April 13th - 28th.

The first was to a sample of 1000 professionals from the UK who primarily work in B2B sales. The second was a sample of 1018 business decision makers from the UK who have influence over purchasing decisions. Both samples were aged over 21 years old and employed at companies of different sizes and functions.

PART 1

Investment in sales tech is increasing

Sales technology is already deeply embedded in organisations.

Today, **90% of sales professionals say that they are using such technologies to shorten lengthy sales cycles, close bigger deals and grow their revenue**, with only 10% reporting that they are not using any sales technology at all. Now, more than ever, the digital sales stack has become just as essential to sales as the time-honored handshake.

And this revolution shows no sign of slowing down. **Half of all sales professionals (50%) surveyed expect their company will increase technology investments in 2017**, an increase from 35% in last year's **State of Sales** study. What's more, **for top salespeople, those who exceeded their projected target revenue by more than 25%, this figure jumps to 67%**.

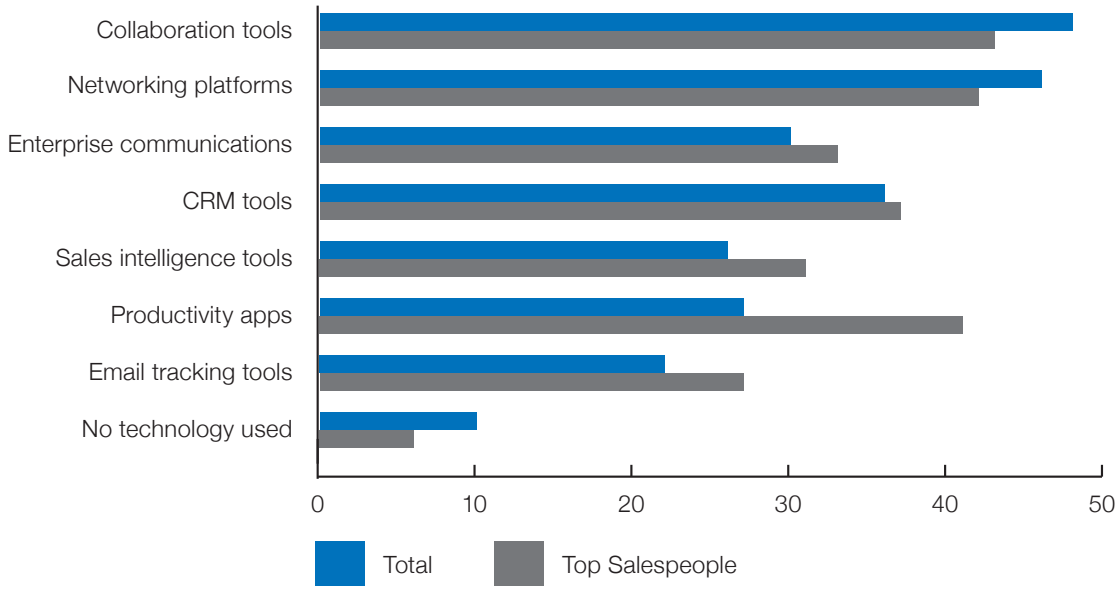
According to this year's survey, **90% of sales professionals report that sales technology is either "important" or "very important" for closing deals**. Respondents say it is the insights that technology can provide on their prospects that make the biggest difference. By leveraging professional and social networks, salespeople can gain a clearer understanding of customers and their needs.

The survey also found that **top performing salespeople are more likely to use a multi-layered, technology-first approach** that leverages sales intelligence tools for deep research, CRM to manage relationships, and enterprise communication tools to work across their team.

Additional findings include:

- **Sales tools are used by nearly all top sales professionals In fact, 94% of top salespeople report using sales technology on the job** and only a small minority — 6% — use no sales tools whatsoever.
- **The type of sales role influences which tools are used**. Inside sales account executives are particularly tech savvy. **Almost half (45%) use CRM tools, and 37% are using productivity apps**.
- **Lead-generating sales professionals are the biggest tech users**. More than half (53%) of sales professionals whose job is generating new accounts report managing relationships using CRM tools.
- **A third (33%) of those focused on managing and growing accounts are using CRM tools** to maintain and nurture relationships.

Technology used by sales people



PART 2

Social tech leads the way

Over the years, the leveraging of social networks has grown from a little known tactic, to an approach embraced by a majority of sales professionals.

While it's being used regularly today, and is proven to be instrumental in helping top salespeople exceed their targets, indications point that it will be used more frequently in the future.

And there's also evidence that cold-calling is no longer having an impact. When today's buyer wants information about a product or service, they are looking for material that is useful, relevant and, most of all, not overly "salesy".

Reaching out to prospects through cold calling is not as effective. Almost half (45%) of business decision makers would respond to a cold call less than ten per cent of the time. However, they are more likely to respond to someone that was introduced through their professional network.

Strategically leveraging social networks continues to be a powerful tactic that is resulting in meaningful impact and bridging buyer-seller gaps. Being in tune with a buyer's social media activities makes it easier to connect the dots and deliver a more tailored, customised experience from a place of real context. **In fact, this experience is so important that 62% of B2B decision makers said they wouldn't engage with a salesperson if the communication was not personalised.**

As a result **66% of sales professionals expect to invest more time leveraging social tech techniques in the next twelve months**. This is a striking increase from the 44% who felt this way in last year's study.

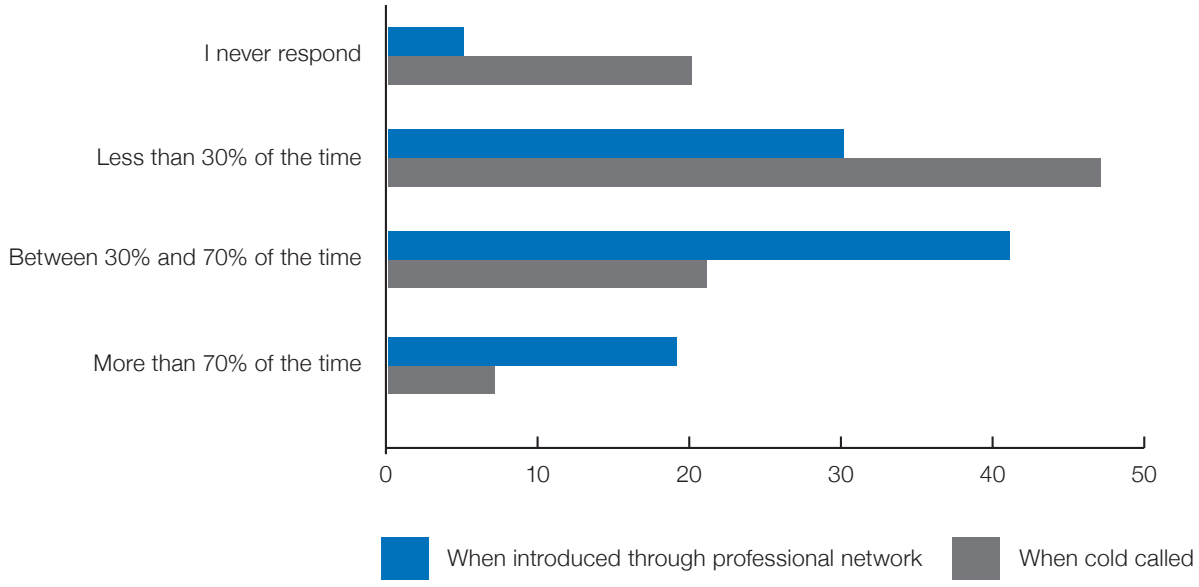
Moreover, 9 out of 10 sales professionals surveyed who actively use social tech techniques today agree that it helps them (1) connect with the right prospects at the right time, (2) build stronger relationships with customers, and (3) establish a stronger professional brand.

This year's findings clearly show that incorporating social networks into a sales strategy is connected with sales success. **More than half (53%) of top salespeople strongly attribute closing more deals to this effort**, compared to 35% of all professionals.

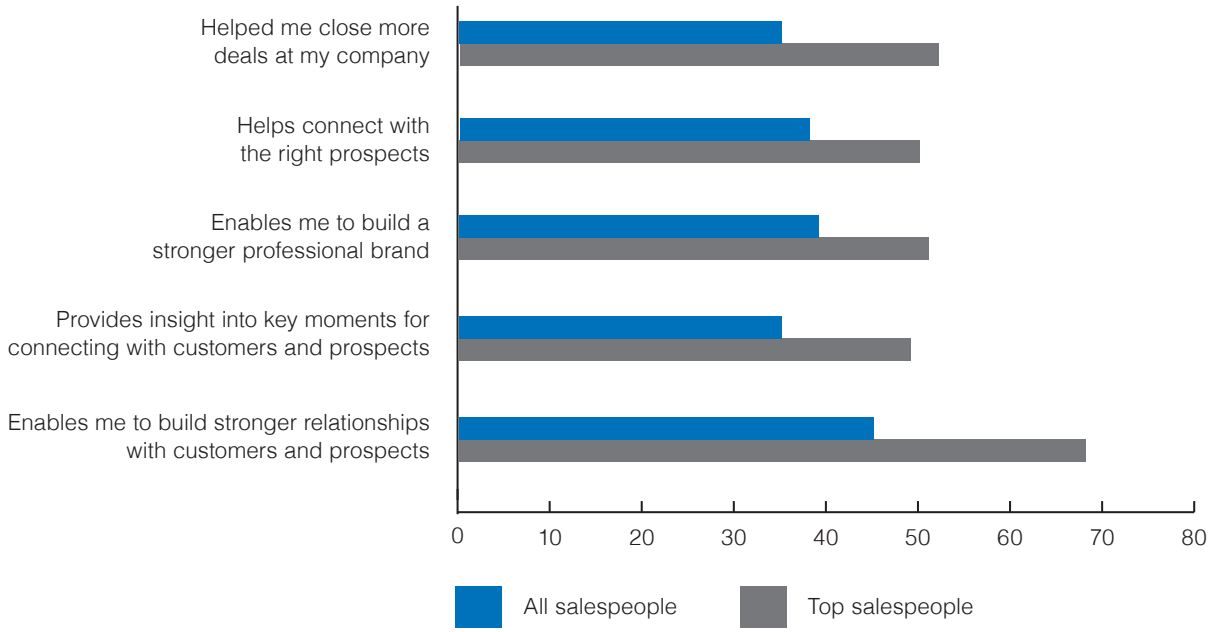
What's more, nearly all **(92%) agree it provides them with valuable insights into trigger points like job changes, promotions and news mentions which create an organic way to connect with customers and prospects**. This is now an expectation with **79% of buyers saying that they wouldn't engage with a salesperson if they didn't do the necessary homework that would give them insights or knowledge into their business**.

Social networks are an important tool for B2B decision makers, too. More than half of respondents **(52%) say they look for an informative LinkedIn profile when deciding whether to work with salespeople**. Additionally, **75% of those surveyed consider it important for salespeople to be connected to other people at their company.**

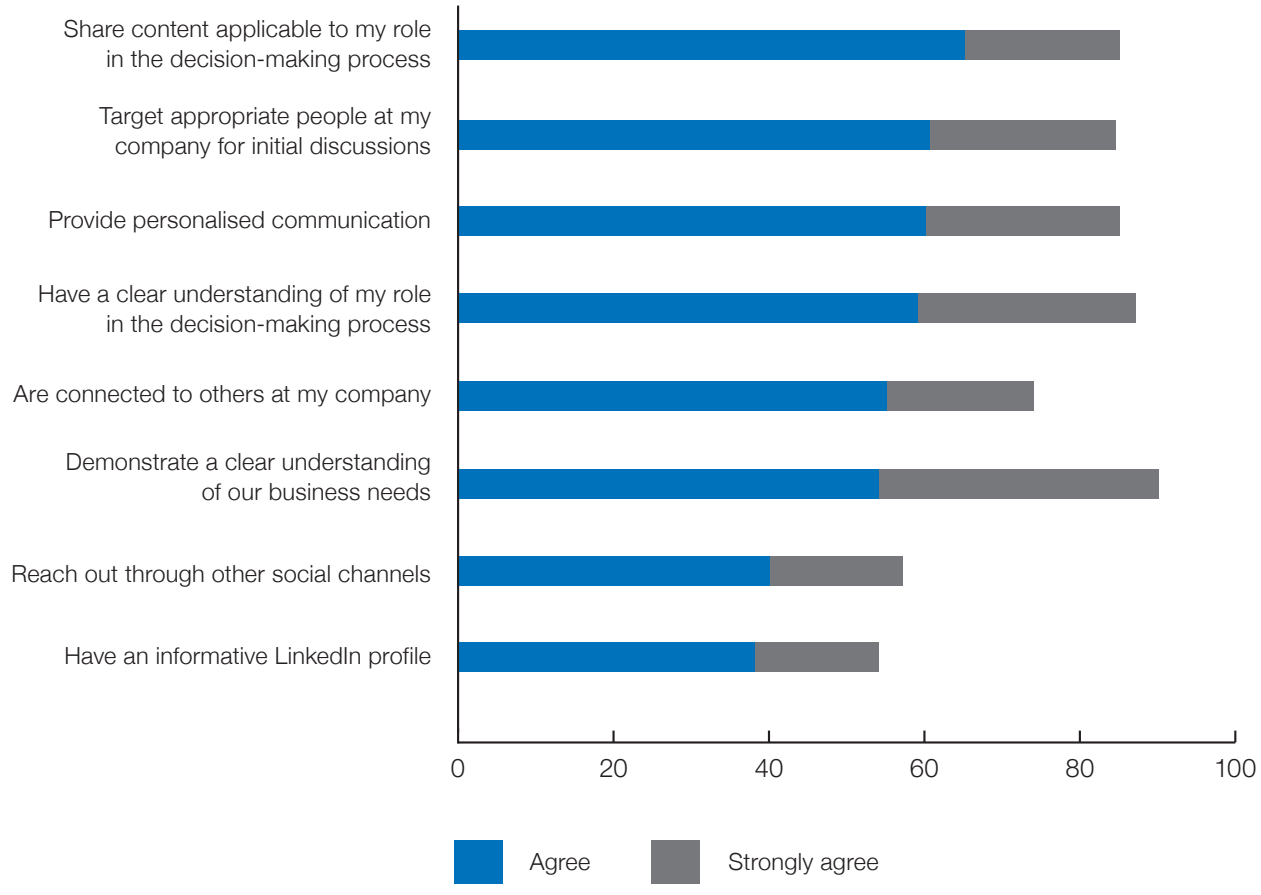
Percentage of time decision makers respond to salesperson



'Strongly agree' with the benefits of using social technologies



I am more likely to consider a brand's products services if their sales rep(s)...



PART 3

Millennials are early adopters, but seasoned professionals are catching on

Our study finds that while millennials are leveraging a variety of sales technology tools as part of their daily sales strategy, their more seasoned counterparts are also adopting these tools, albeit to a lesser degree.

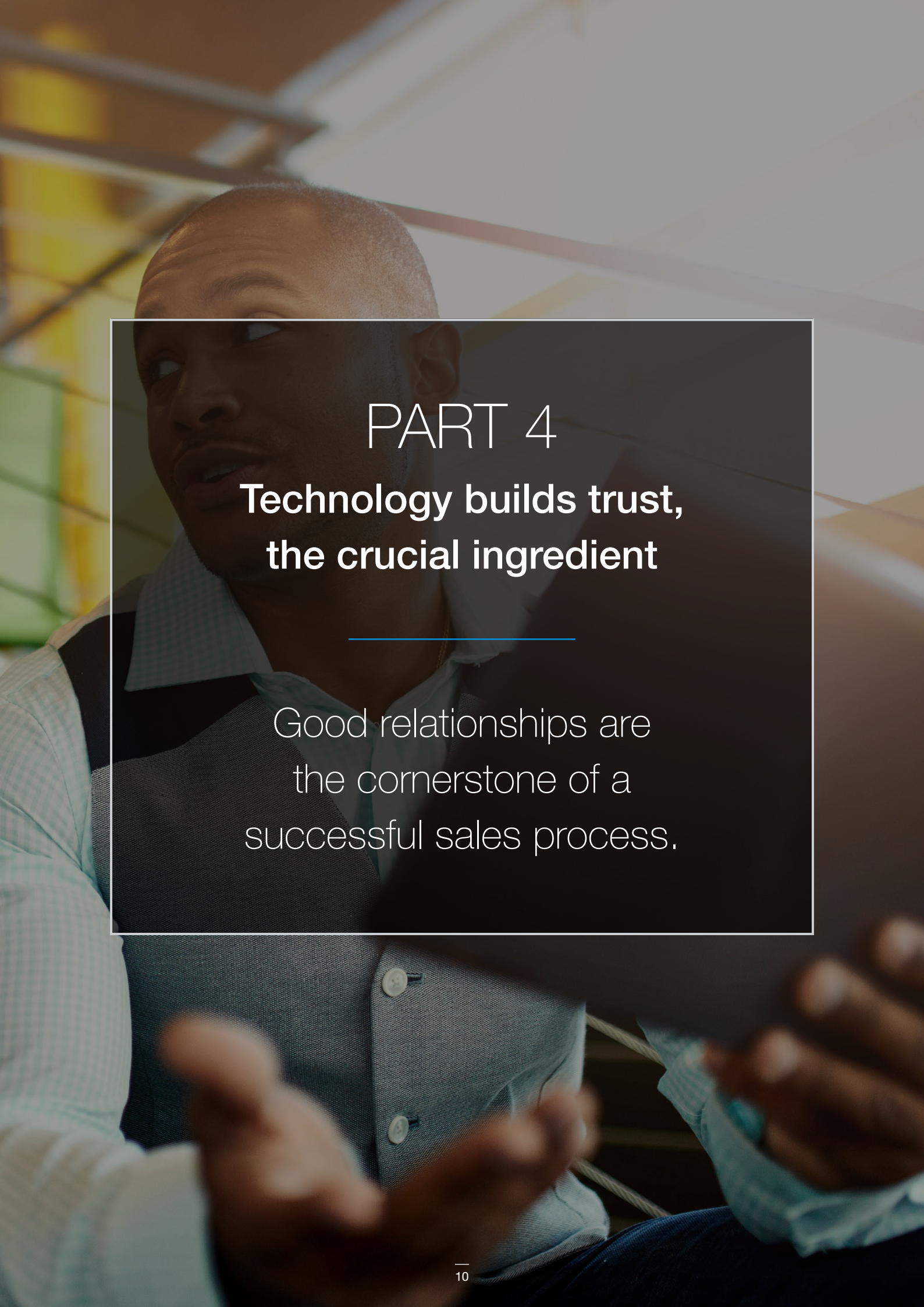
In particular, **collaboration tools such as Box, Google Docs, Microsoft Office and Dropbox are now used by 51% of millennials, compared to 40% of Baby Boomers**.

However, younger sales professionals are championing productivity apps at a much higher rate. Tools like Asana, Smartsheet and Trello are more frequently used by millennials with 32% using them daily, compared to 22% of Generation X, and 13% of Baby Boomers.

What's more **33% of millennials are using enterprise communication tools such as Salesforce Chatter and Slack**. In contrast, only 13% of Baby Boomers are using these tools to talk internally with colleagues.

From the client-side perspective, millennial decision-makers are turning to social media more readily.

According to the survey, 58% of millennials regularly look up sales professionals on social media, compared to 40% of Generation X and 32% of Baby Boomers. Additionally, **64% are more likely to speak with a sales professional that has a professional social media presence**, compared to 48% of Generation X and 35% of Baby Boomers.



PART 4

Technology builds trust, the crucial ingredient

Good relationships are the cornerstone of a successful sales process.

Compared to economic considerations, such as price or the return on investment, trust comes out as the most important factor when closing the deal.

Relationships have always been at the heart of sales, and trust is at the core of it. In today's increasingly complex sales environment, building rapport and establishing trust with buyers is just as important, and seemingly easier if sales professionals leverage their sales stack the right way.

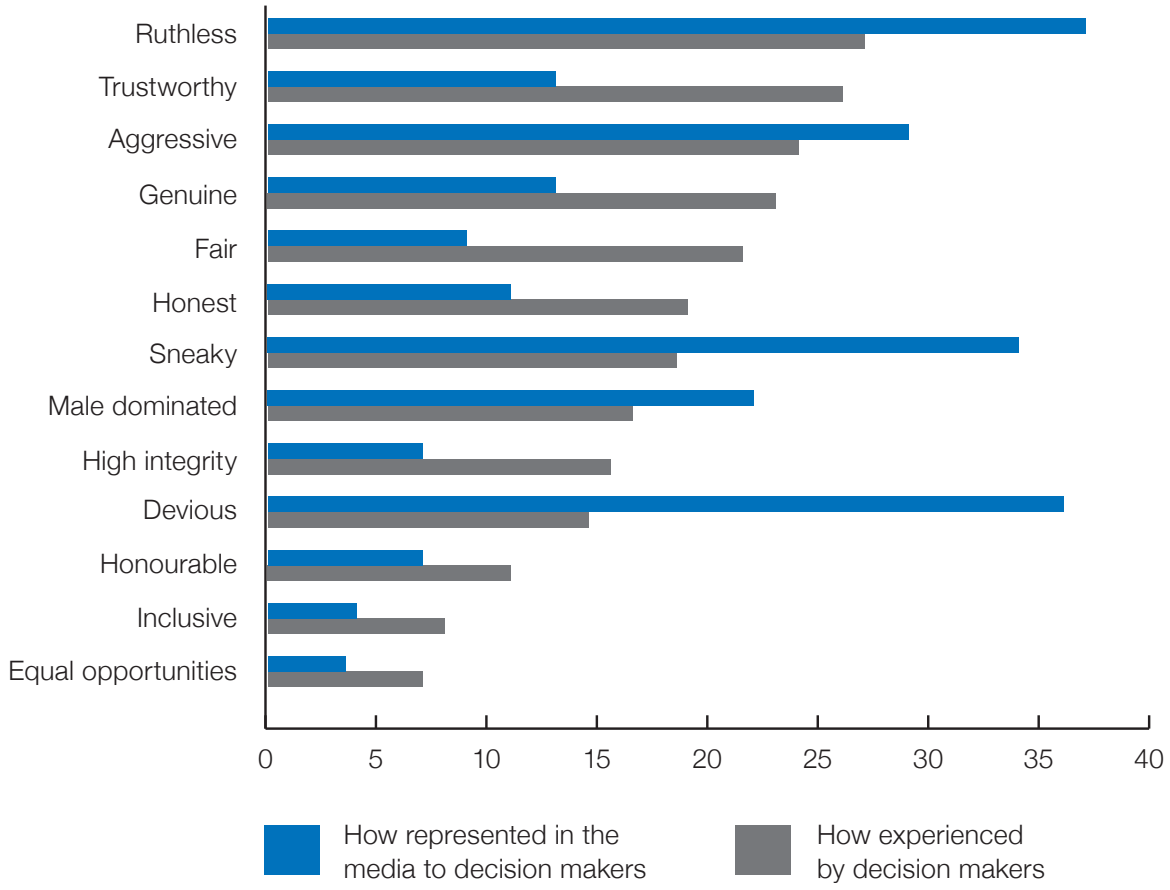
Salespeople no longer aim for the steak dinner and the hard sell; these days they opt for a softer, more strategic approach by mixing both online and offline experiences and establishing themselves as trusted advisors. Social platforms make it possible for sales professionals to build a professional brand which shows the full scope of who they are and their industry knowledge. It's through social that buyers can get a good sense of who the seller is, not view them strictly through the lens of the deal that's on the table.

Salespeople who reach this status are no longer seen by decision-makers as being solely driven by the prospect of a sale; rather they're expected to be – and need to be – well-informed about the prospect's business and focused on building the relationship.

When asked what would make decision makers more likely to engage with a sales professional with whom they were introduced through a colleague in their professional network, **37% stated that the most important factor was that they mention specific information relevant to their current job**. Sales technology helps establish trust because it enhances the seller's ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a prospect.

In fact, almost three-quarters of decision makers **(74%) agree that the negative portrayals of sales don't do the profession justice**. They are more likely to describe sales professionals as "trustworthy" and "fair" — a far cry from how the media has historically depicted salespeople.

Comparison of perceptions of the sales profession

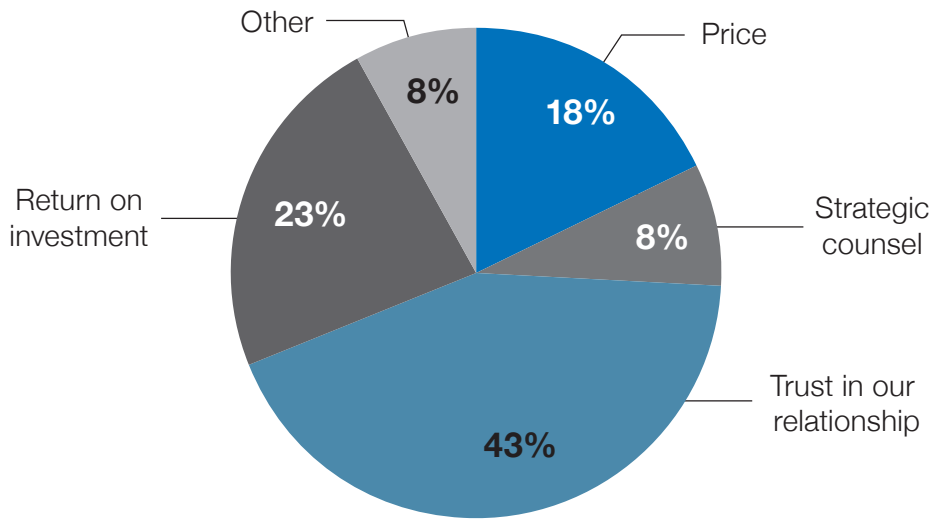


And for sales professionals themselves, trust is paramount as well. According to 43% of respondents, trust in their relationship with a client is the single most important aspect of closing a deal.

By comparison, 23% of respondents cited “return on investment” as most important, and only 18% report “price” as the key factor.

According to 43% of respondents, trust in their relationship with a client is the single most important aspect of closing a deal.

What factor is most important in helping you close a deal?



CONCLUSION

Sales technology is changing the game for sellers.

It is making them smarter about their prospects and customers, enabling them to surface the hard to find information that the offline world doesn't offer. It's also making them more efficient and productive, while helping them transform their position with buyers, and evolve their role from vendors to advisors.

The greater resource investment from companies in this sales tech revolution is making a difference in how buyers and sellers connect, and creating a path forward which shows no signs of slowing down.

FOOTNOTE
The technology sales stack has three primary layers:

- Professional and social networking platforms which cull crucial insight and build engagement (e.g. LinkedIn and Facebook).
- Customer relationship management (CRM) tools which build stronger and more productive relationships (e.g. Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics).
- Communication and collaboration tools which facilitate work between large teams (e.g. email, Dropbox and Google Drive).

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