The LinkedIn State of Sales Report 2020

India Edition

A Note on the Methodology for this Report

This India edition of the State of Sales report is part of the global State of Sales project, which includes nine other national reports: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States.

For each country, we surveyed 500 buyers, and 500 salespeople and sales managers. For the entire State of Sales project, we surveyed more than 10,000 people globally.

For the India 2020 survey, Market Cube, a research panel company, conducted two online surveys in November and December 2019. Two sample groups were surveyed: **sales professionals and decision makers**. The first was a sample of 508 salespeople and managers from India who primarily work in B2B sales. The second was a sample of 500 business decision makers from India who have influence over purchasing decisions at B2B companies.

Both samples include respondents over 21 years old who are employed at companies of different sizes and industries. The report also references a group of "top sales professionals" who are defined as sales professionals who report that they exceeded their sales target by at least **25%**.

INTRODUCTION

The State of Sales Has Clearly Changed

In sales right now, the only constant is change. The coronavirus has changed certain aspects of how selling happens in India. For one, it elevates the importance of virtual selling.

Many sales leaders in India quickly became curious about the potential impact of coronavirus. One stat that proves their interest in this topic: Between February and March, their engagement with coronavirus-oriented content on LinkedIn more than tripled (**3.5X**). At the same time, we are seeing more time spent on LinkedIn Learning courses about "inside sales," "social selling," and "Sales Navigator" as professionals work to position themselves for this new world of sales.

Hand in hand with these immediate impacts, enduring trends also accelerated, like the growing reliance on sales technology, data usage and building trusted relationships.

Let's examine some of the emerging trends driven by coronavirus impact. According to McKinsey & Company:

2X	APAC B2B decision makers show **~2X** more preference for digital interactions over traditional sales interactions.
96%	of B2B companies have shifted to remote selling during the coronavirus.
83%	of B2B companies expect to maintain their sales model changes.

[1] McKinsey & Company, Survey: Asian B2B decision maker response to COVID-19 crisis, May 11, 2020

While the coronavirus is driving some changes in the short term, many trends that were already in motion are gaining strength in the current environment.

Key Enduring Trends

Long-term metrics are stepping to the forefront.

Understanding data and analytics is an increasingly important tool for survival, and sales organisations are embracing long-term metrics of sales success, such as customer satisfaction.

The data-driven sales org is on the rise.

Sales organisations are putting data to work before the sale. Data is increasingly crucial for sales orgs, and sales executives must take greater control of how their sales organisations use it.

Sales technology is transforming the sales organisation.

When face-to-face meetings are limited, sales technology has increasingly moved to the forefront of how sales professionals strengthen existing relationships and build new ones.

Trust gets deals done.

Our survey data indicates that buyers want trust in the sales process—and they are finding it. For sales professionals, achieving trust with buyers is often the first step to getting deals done.

Building a sales team with the right skills is a win.

Buyers and sales managers are largely in alignment on the key traits/skills in salespeople. That paves the way for smoother, more effective interactions between buyers and sellers.

Top-performing salespeople do things differently.

We'll show you some key ways top performers differ from their peers and what these insights mean for your sales team.

LinkedIn plays an expanded role for both buyers and sellers.

The survey results show that both buyers and sellers are increasingly relying on LinkedIn in their day-to-day jobs.

INTRODUCTION

The State of Sales Has Clearly Changed

Even before the current economic challenges appeared, sales managers in India understood that leading through change had become a required skill for their role.

87%

In responding to LinkedIn's State of Sales survey, 87% of sales managers in India agreed that a manager's capacity to navigate change is more important than it was five years ago.

More than ever, transformation is an inescapable reality in the sales organisation, and the pace of change is only accelerating.

Read on as LinkedIn and Joseph DiMisa, Korn Ferry's Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, dive into the emerging and enduring trends that are transforming the state of sales now and into the future.

"Top sales organizations were already making a shift toward emphasizing trust, adopting sales technology, and prioritizing existing customers, but this crisis has accelerated the need tenfold. Trust is quickly moving from face-to-face meetings to a sales organization's ability to understand a client's pain points and quickly identify a solution.

In today's evolving world, customers are also changing by becoming more skilled at researching a solution, finding the ballpark pricing, and quickly identifying most of the pros and cons of a product. A sales organization needs to differentiate themselves by creating better thought leadership and data-driven insights to help build trust and loyalty."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

EMERGING TRENDS

The Immediate Impact of Coronavirus on the State of Sales

The McKinsey & Company survey of APAC B2B decision makers and companies provides sales professionals with direct insight into the impact of the coronavirus.[2]

55%

Optimism among APAC B2B decision makers is relatively high and growing: Half (**55%**) believe the economy will rebound (up from **47%** in early April). [2]

2X

APAC B2B decision makers show **~2X** more preference for digital interactions over traditional sales interactions, with more priority now on self-serve and digital ordering methods.[2]

96%

Remote selling is now the norm and perceived as effective: **96%** of B2B companies have shifted their go-to-market model during COVID-19, and **70%** believe the new model is just as effective or more than before in reaching and serving customers (up from **57%** in early April).[2]

83%

of B2B companies expect to maintain their sales model changes: **35%** are "very likely" to sustain these shifts 12+ months after COVID-19 and another **48%** are "somewhat likely" to do so.[2]

"We are seeing a few trends among sales organizations adjusting to the current climate. First, everything has shifted to virtual selling, using video conferencing, sending emails, creating webinars and info sessions. It is a big adjustment for many direct sellers. The most successful reps will adjust more quickly and learn to build relationships through different digital channels.

Second, there's a realization that quota attainment and incentive payments are going to be affected, thus causing organizational enhancements to continue to drive productivity. Most organizations are making adjustments to motivate and reward reps to keep focused on the customer and their needs.

Finally, we're seeing a rise in the use of data-driven selling. We are finding that sales organizations are placing more emphasis on using data to help a client make informed business decisions based upon quantifiable information and numbers."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

[2] McKinsey & Company, Survey: Asian B2B decision maker response to COVID-19 crisis, May 11, 2020

ENDURING TRENDS

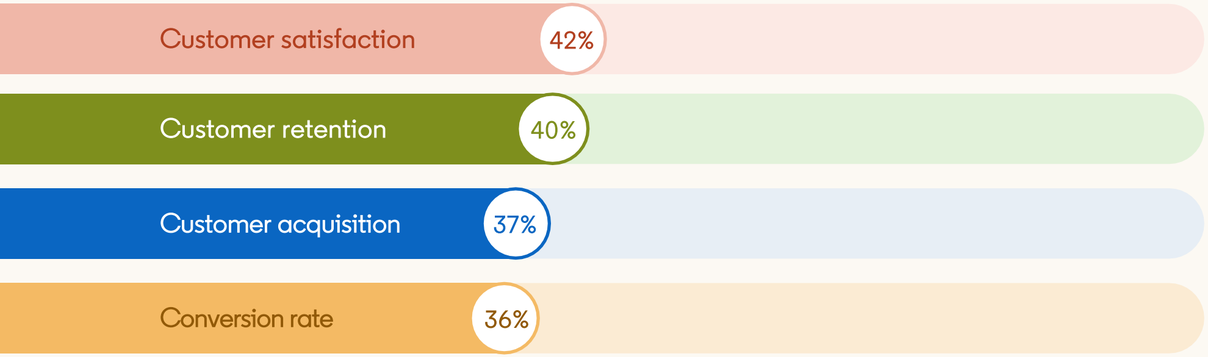
Measuring Success with Long-Term Metrics

The Survey Said:

Our survey data indicates that measurements of long-term value are gaining favour over traditional short-term metrics, such as quarterly quota. When asked to identify how sales reps should be measured, four metrics were selected by more than a third of respondents in India. The top two metrics looked past the quarterly horizon.

42% selected customer satisfaction, the most popular metric according to the survey. Another 40% selected customer retention/attrition. Rounding out the top four metrics are customer acquisition cost (37%) and conversion rate (36%).

Top Metrics for Measuring Sales Performance



The Takeaway:

The emphasis on long-term metrics indicates an incredibly sophisticated view of sales success in India, which is supported by the traits sales managers emphasise when hiring. Sales leaders are prioritising customer retention more than ever and quickly reorganising their organisations so that their salespeople are in position to help current customers.

ENDURING TRENDS

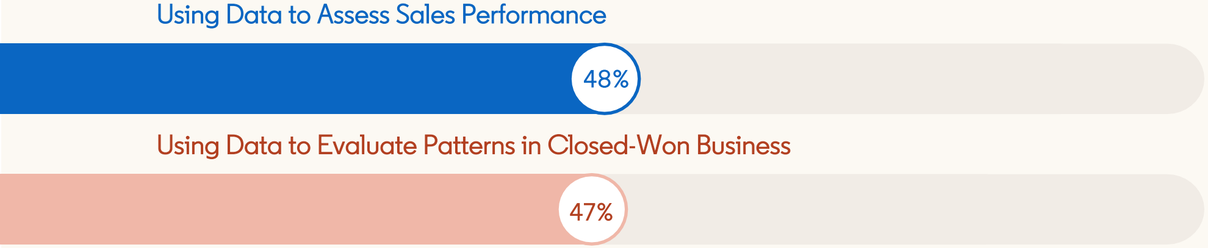
The Rise of the Data-Driven Sales Org

The Survey Said:

Like virtually every other sector of business, sales organisations in India are embracing data. This increased use of data affects everything from how territories are assigned to how salespeople prospect for clients to how sales organisations measure success. In this period of uncertainty, sales organisations are charting a clear path forward by using data to identify and target the strongest industries, geographies, and accounts.

Sales organisations are using data to analyse and improve performance.

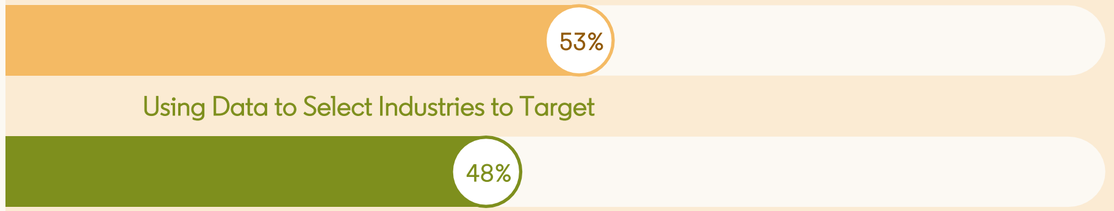
Almost half of respondents (**48%**) say their companies are using data to assess the performance of salespeople. For instance, **47%** of respondents say they are evaluating patterns from closed-won business—to apply these learnings to future deals.



Sales organisations are putting data to work before the sale.

Large percentages of salespeople say they are using data to prospect: **53%** say they are using data to select accounts to target, and **48%** are using data to select industries to target.

Additionally, salespeople see LinkedIn, in particular, as delivering unique data to help inform sales strategy. **61%** of sales professionals in India said LinkedIn provided unique data.



ENDURING TRENDS

The Rise of the Data-Driven Sales Org

"Data is becoming more and more important for the sales organization. The key to this data will be how it is used during the selling process and the customer journey. The most effective organizations will be able to aggregate, govern, and leverage this data to give insights to both past sales efforts and to future forecasts. They will be able to match their process and organizational strengths to that of the customer buying process and specific needs.

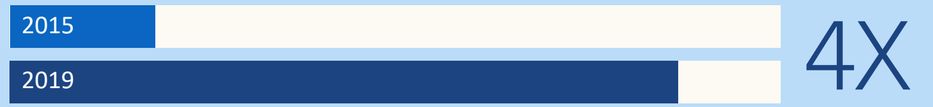
Having access to timely and relevant data will be key to success. Sales organizations with a clear data strategy for their go-to-market efforts reported that **11%** more of their sellers made goal and they won forecasted deals **8%** more of the time."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

The Takeaway:

Gone are the days of relying only on intuition to guide decisions. Data is increasingly crucial for sales organisations, and leaders who take control of how they use this information are going to thrive. Sales reps should also increase their data literacy to improve their productivity.

We are already seeing evidence of this happening. In India, Linkedin Research reveals that "data analysis" appeared in sales professionals' profiles more than five times as much (**4X**) in 2019 than in 2015.

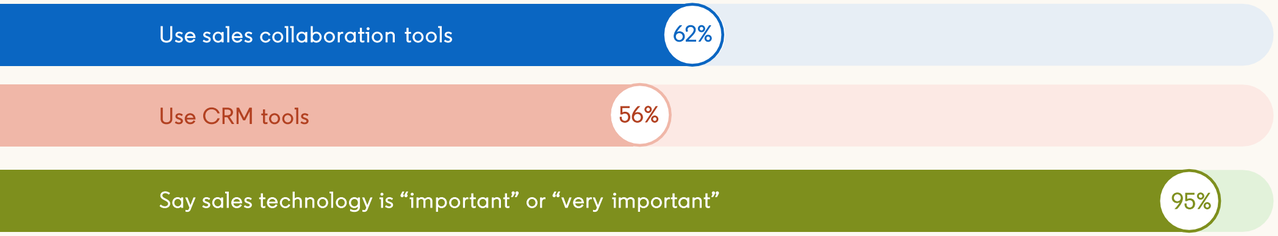


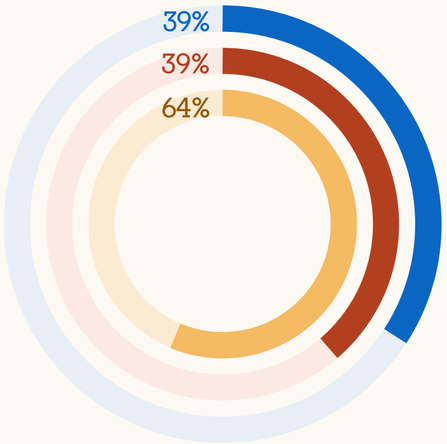
ENDURING TRENDS

Sales Technology Is Transforming the Sales Org

The Survey Said:

With face-to-face meetings limited, sales technology will only become more crucial to the sales process. Sales technology is clearly a key force reshaping the sales profession, as this cross-section of stats from our survey of sales professionals confirms:

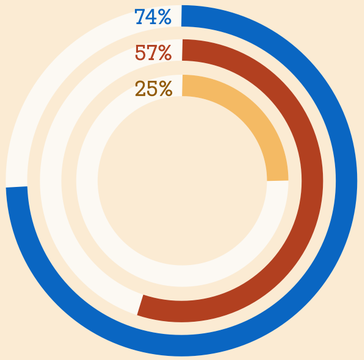




Sales technology is an essential part of the workflow for most salespeople.

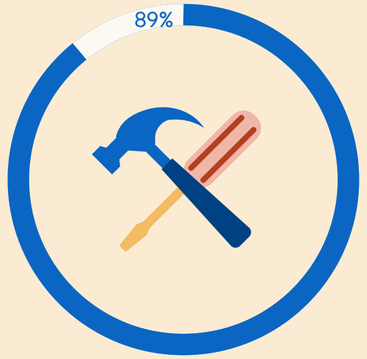
More than one-third (**39%**) indicate they use sales tech once a day, while an additional **39%** say they use it once a week or more. **64%** of respondents say they plan to spend more time using sales technology in 2020

Almost without exception, usage stayed consistent with last year’s report across the sales technologies covered in the survey.



Sales intelligence tools specifically are viewed as invaluable.

Among those who use sales intelligence tools, **74%** described them as extremely critical or critical in closing deals. The survey revealed a gap in the perception of sales intelligence tools being extremely critical in this regard when comparing top-performing salespeople (**57%**) versus the remainder of respondents (**25%**).



Among respondents using sales intelligence tools, **LinkedIn products topped the list, with 89% using LinkedIn.com, LinkedIn Premium, or LinkedIn Sales Navigator.**

ENDURING TRENDS

Sales Technology Is Transforming the Sales Organisation

But even with its growing presence, sales technology is not yet fully achieving these goals because it requires workflow integration and change management to truly achieve the benefits.

"Getting the most out of sales technology tools is more about effective utilization. Recent Korn Ferry studies have found that on average organizations were using 10 tools with an additional four planned over the next 12 months. The key will be to integrate all technologies together and to embed it within the sellers' workflow, something less than **30%** of sales organizations felt like they had mastered."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

Sales teams, particularly at large enterprises, are evolving their organisational structures to help better integrate sales technology into their workflows. Many are building expanded Sales Operations teams in part to master sales technology and reap its benefits. The number of people in Sales Operations roles has grown by **40%** between 2017 and 2019 and increased **3.3X as fast** as the sales function overall.

The Takeaway:

Sales technology is an arms race, but it's not just about purchasing technology: It's about integrating the tools effectively into the selling process. Companies want these solutions to boost the efficiency of their teams and enable their salespeople to spend more time selling—currently only at **29%**—and less time on repetitive and administrative tasks.

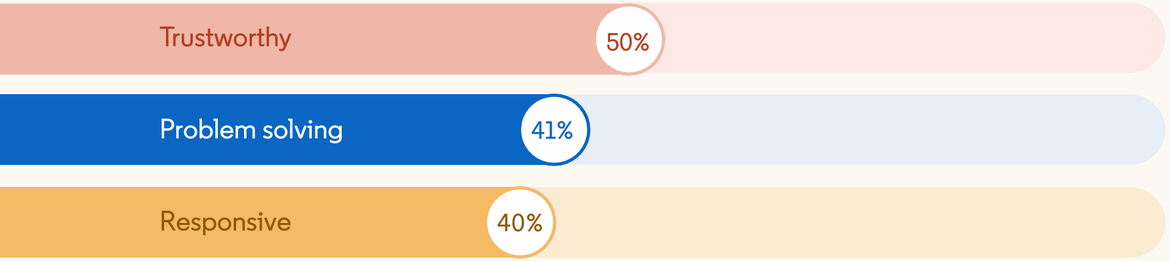
ENDURING TRENDS

Trust Gets Deals Done

The Survey Said:

Edelman's Trust Barometer shows a clear lack of trust in institutions with the majority of respondents seeing corporations, the media, and government as unethical. Only non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the Red Cross, Greenpeace, Oxfam, and other charitable organisations were the exception. In times of uncertainty, trust becomes more important.

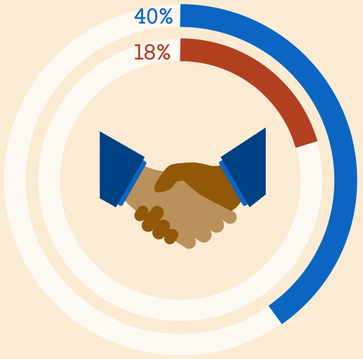
Not surprisingly, as organisational trust erodes, buyers seem to crave it even more. When asked what qualities they value in a salesperson, buyers in India ranked "trustworthy" (50%) at the top, followed by "problem solving" (41%) and "responsive" (40%).



In the survey, we asked buyers how sellers could put buyers first. Many cited "trustworthy" and "honesty" as key components of this kind of approach:

- "Has a good deal, transparent and honest"
- "Must be trustworthy and a confident person"
- "Is honest and transparent"
- "Should be trustworthy and knowledgeable about my industry, and ready to listen my problems and coach my team"
- "Knowledge of requirements, problem solving, confident, trustworthy"

Buyers in India are seeing this in their interactions with salespeople. In fact, 59% of them describe the sales profession in general as "trustworthy."



For their part, salespeople in India agree with their buyer counterparts about the importance of trust. More than one-third of sales professionals (40%) ranked trust as the most critical factor in closing deals, and an additional 18% ranked it second. This is followed by ROI and price as the two factors rounding out the top three in getting deals done.

With salespeople and buyers agreeing on the value of trust, it's comforting that our survey indicates that successful salespeople do win the trust of buyers—96% agree that the salespeople they ultimately buy from are "trusted advisors."

ENDURING TRENDS

Trust Gets Deals Done

The Takeaway:

"In these times, customer trust of their business partner is becoming more critical. Unfortunately, sales organizations will have limits in terms of historical trust building activities due to the lack of access. To be successful, sales reps will need to develop new selling motions to build trust using both information and data. Then, reps will need to understand how to share these outputs during customer interactions. The result is a need to rethink what sellers do and the competencies they require to succeed in this new world."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

Our survey offers some hints about how sellers can meet these increased expectations and start to build deeper relationships over time that ultimately lead to trust. Buyers "strongly agree" they're more likely to consider a brand when a sales rep:

"Demonstrates a clear understanding of our business needs"

"Has a clear understanding of my role in the decision-making process"

"Provides personalised communication"

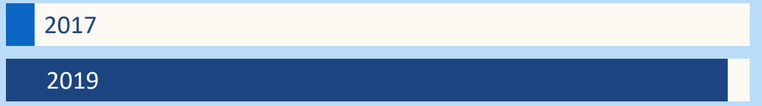
"Shares content applicable to my role in the decision-making process"

"Targets appropriate people at my company for initial discussions"

The bottom line:

We're already seeing a growing number of companies in India emphasise the importance of customer relationships and value. According to LinkedIn data, the number of people in Customer Success roles has quadrupled between 2017 and 2019 and increased **27.3X** as fast as the sales function overall.

Building trust begins even before a salesperson makes the first outreach to a buyer. By being prepared about who buyers are, what they need and what roles they play in the buying process, sellers can start developing trust from the first interaction.



27.3X

ENDURING TRENDS

The Challenge of Building a Sales Team with the Right Skills

The Survey Said:

The increasing usage of virtual selling is demanding new skills among salespeople. The demand for upskilling can be seen from the **3.3X** higher proportion of salespeople in India who spent time on LinkedIn Learning compared to other working professionals in India in 2019. That said, are sales managers hiring for the traits that buyers want?

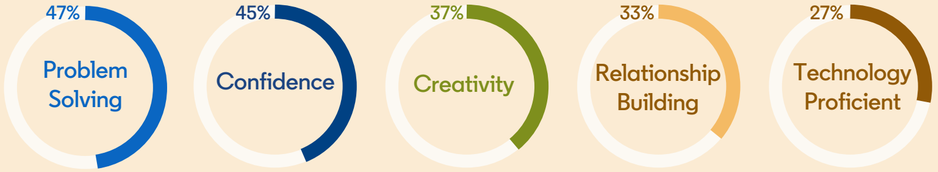
The answer is yes.

In two critical areas, we see remarkable agreement between what buyers want and the traits sales managers are hiring for:

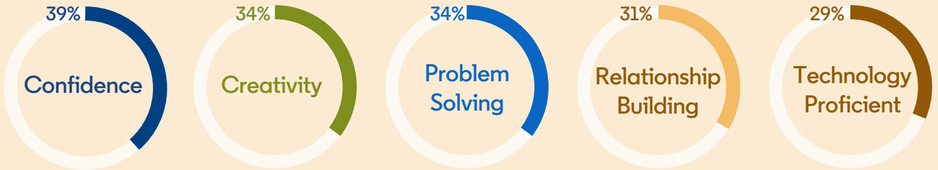
Buyers rank "problem solving" (47%) as the No. 1 skill or trait they want from salespeople, which is aligned with what sales managers are hiring for.

Problem solving ranks No. 2 in hiring for new salespeople (tied with "creativity"). In fact, buyers and sales managers in India are aligned on the top 5 skills/traits.

Top 5 Traits Buyers Value in Salespeople



Top 5 Traits Sales Managers Value in Salespeople

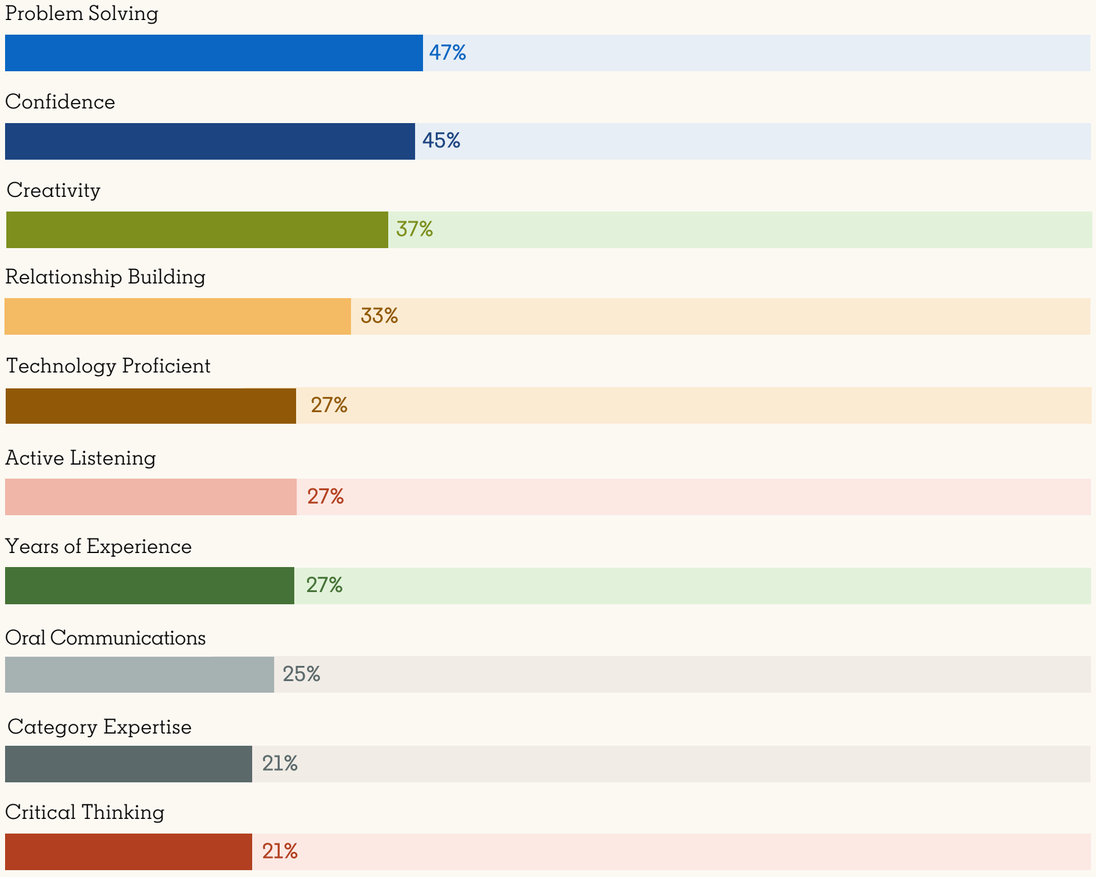


ENDURING TRENDS

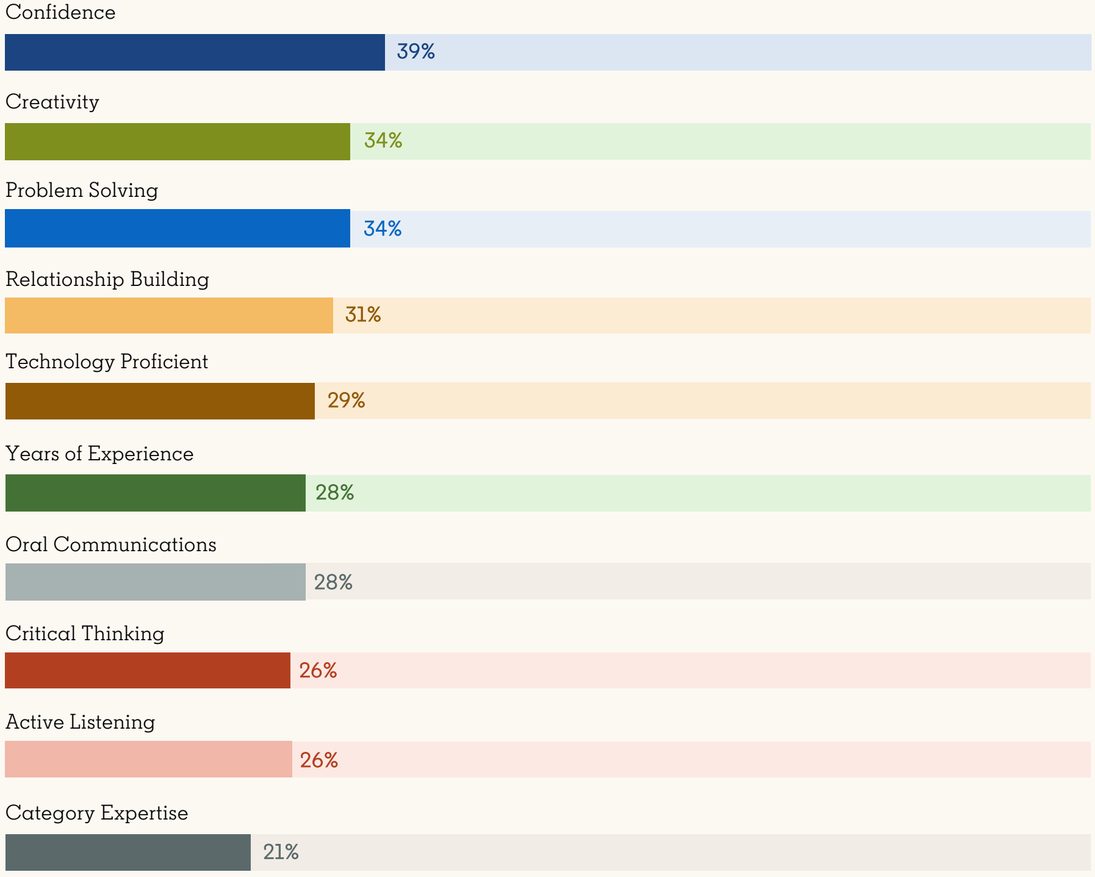
Building a Sales Team with the Right Skills Is a Win

Let's compare the 10 characteristics buyers desire from salespeople with characteristics that sales managers in India look for in the sales reps they hire.

What Traits Buyers Value in Salespeople



What Traits Sales Managers Value in Salespeople



ENDURING TRENDS

Building a Sales Team with the Right Skills Is a Win

The Takeaway:

Among the top six traits for both decision makers and sales managers in India, there is agreement on five: problem solving, confidence, relationship building, creativity, and technology proficient.

That's strong evidence that sales managers are largely hiring for the skills buyers want.

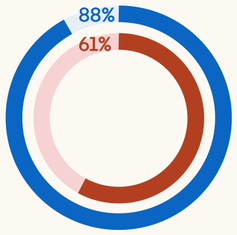
However, buyers are also looking for salespeople who can actively listen to what their needs or challenges are in order to help resolve them. They don't need another sales pitch with the pure intent of selling. They need salespeople to become their strategic partners to help solve their problems. Prioritising this skill is a pathway for your sales team to stand out in the marketplace.

ENDURING TRENDS

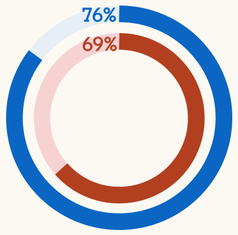
What Top-Performing Salespeople Do Differently

Sales leaders have always looked for ways to discover what the top cohort of salespeople do differently to achieve their success.

LinkedIn's survey provides some insight into a handful of things successful salespeople in India—in this case reps who reported they reached **125%** of their quota or above—do differently from their counterparts. **Here's what we learned:**



Sales Technology

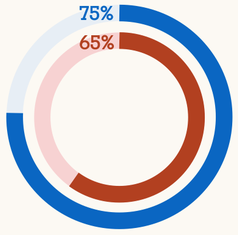


Sales Intelligence

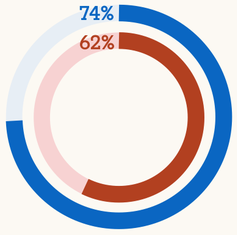
1. Sales Technology

In aggregate, more top-performing salespeople than non-top found sales technology very important to closing deals (**88%** **vs** **61%**), and in particular; sales intelligence (**76%** **vs** **69%**).

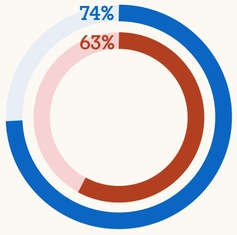
Top performers also find these other sales technologies very important to closing deals: enterprise communication (**75%** **vs** **65%**), networking platforms (**74%** **vs** **62%**), and email tracking tools (**74%** **vs** **63%**).



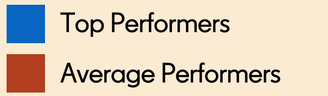
Enterprise Communication

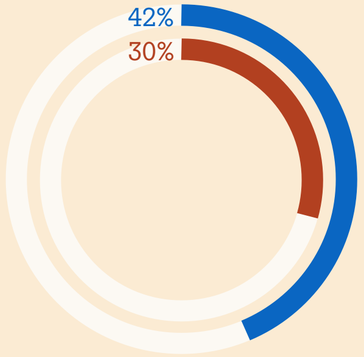


Networking Platforms

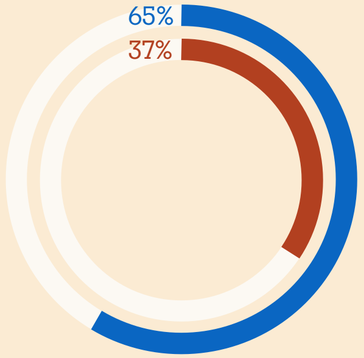


Email Tracking Tools





Additionally, top performers were significantly more likely to use LinkedIn Sales Navigator (**42%** **vs** **30%**). Across the board, top sellers in India are using these tools in smart ways at higher rates than their counterparts. This includes everything from connecting with the right prospects and gaining critical local market insights to building stronger relationships with prospects and customers.



2. CRM Data

Top-performing salespeople in India possess a higher confidence level in CRM data than their counterparts. Of the top group, **65%** are very confident, while only **37%** of the non-top are very confident. These figures may imply that the top-performing group puts in the time to keep their CRM data up to date, because they believe it's crucial to helping them exceed quota.

What Top-Performing Salespeople Do Differently

3. Training

All salespeople spend time with their managers. How they spend their time together differs. Top-performing salespeople in India were more likely to spend time with their managers in training (**48% vs 41%**). They were also more likely to receive training from outside sales experts (**54% vs 47%**). The embrace of training makes sense in an effort to keep pace in a fast-changing world.

4. Leads from Marketing

All salespeople in India rate the quality of marketing-generated leads about the same when it comes to the excellent/good ranking. However, the top-performing group believes it receives better leads overall.

72%

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of top performers described marketing leads as excellent compared to just 33% of their counterparts.

The discrepancy raises a chicken or egg question: Is the top group's performance stronger because it is getting better leads from marketing? Or is the top group simply better at turning leads into sales?

ENDURING TRENDS

What Top-Performing Salespeople Do Differently

"World-class sales organizations study their top performers to gain insights on performance improvement opportunities. They understand what defines 'good' within their salesforce—or more specifically their top 20% of performers. These sales organizations look at the sales process, where a rep spends his or her time, and the unique skills, traits, drivers and abilities that are being demonstrated on a consistent basis. Then they hope to replicate these attributes through building a success profile to assess and motivate the mid-level performers. We refer to this as 'moving the middle' or getting the middle of the road reps, typically the largest percentage of a sales population, to shift their actions and activities to look more like the 'A' players."

—**Joseph DiMisa**, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry

The Takeaway:

Top performers in India are not beating quota by chance. Rather, they demonstrate behaviours that lead to different actions and better outcomes—behaviours that can be taught. Sales organisations should apply these best practices by having managers coach reps on these behaviours and holding managers and reps accountable to them

ENDURING TRENDS

The Expanding Role of LinkedIn

The Survey Said:

For both buyers and sellers in India, LinkedIn has become an intrinsic part of the buying and selling process. Our platform is likely to become even more central with conferences, travel and face-to-face meetings limited.

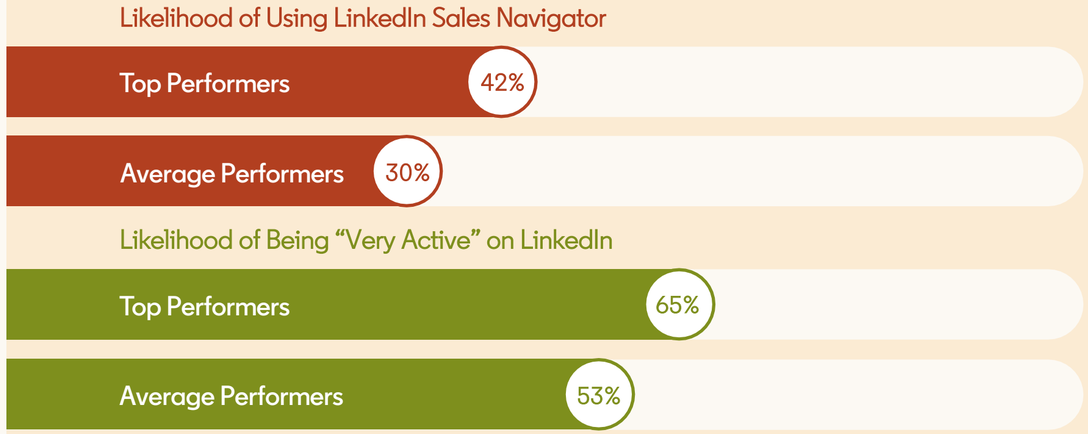
For buyers, almost all (**92%**) respondents agree or strongly agree that it's important for a seller to have an informative LinkedIn profile, and **89%** say that reaching out via LinkedIn influences their thought process positively.

The percentage of buyers who "strongly agree" or "agree" that an informative LinkedIn profile is important for salespeople has remained steady over the various editions of the State of Sales survey.

For buyers, almost all (92%) respondents agree or strongly agree that it's important for a seller to have an informative LinkedIn profile.

Like their buyer counterparts, salespeople are also perceiving that LinkedIn delivers significant advantages.

Top performers are significantly more likely to use LinkedIn Sales Navigator (42% to 30%) and more likely to be "very active" on LinkedIn (65% to 53%).

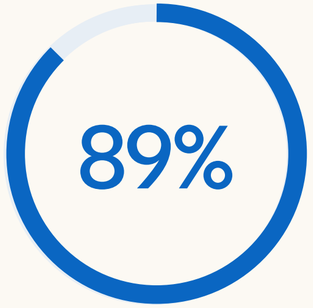


ENDURING TRENDS

The Expanding Role of LinkedIn

Salespeople see LinkedIn as delivering unique data to help inform sales strategy.

61% of sales professionals in India said LinkedIn provides unique data.



The survey also showed that, among respondents using sales intelligence tools, LinkedIn products topped the list, with **89%** using LinkedIn.com, LinkedIn Premium or LinkedIn Sales Navigator.

The Takeaway:

In the sales process, the use of LinkedIn goes both ways.

Buyers are visiting the LinkedIn profiles of sellers as one of the steps in the process of sizing up the salespeople calling on them.

For their part, sales professionals are using LinkedIn and LinkedIn Sales Navigator to gain a holistic understanding of their prospects, customers, and the complete buying committee.

For many buyers and sellers in India, LinkedIn is becoming an indispensable part of the buying process. Expect its importance to continue to grow in the coming years as the Gen Z and Millennial generations, who grew up with social media, take over the business world.

Conclusion

Every sales organisation is experiencing change, as evidenced by emerging trends such as virtual selling. Now it's a matter of adapting to and embracing enduring trends.

In today's world, sales managers understand that the organisations they lead are changing fast. Eighty-seven percent of sales managers in India agree that a manager's capacity to navigate change is more important than it was five years ago.

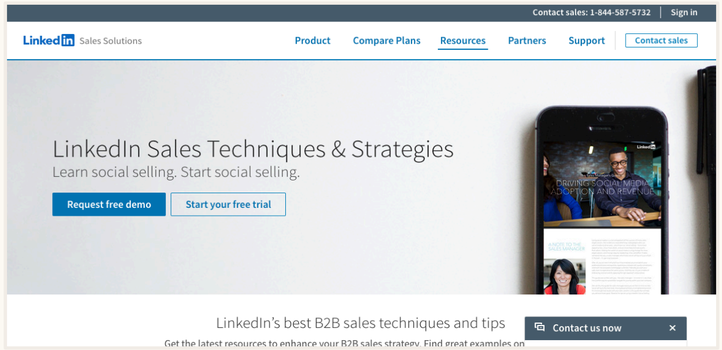
To lead a sales organisation through this change and ensure it thrives in the future, sales managers and Sales Operations leaders in India must embrace and act on the fact that:

- Long-term metrics are stepping to the forefront.
- The data-driven sales org is on the rise.
- Sales technology is transforming the sales organisation.
- Trust gets deals done.
- Building a sales team with the right skills is a win.
- Top-performing salespeople do things differently.
- LinkedIn plays an expanded role for buyers and sellers.

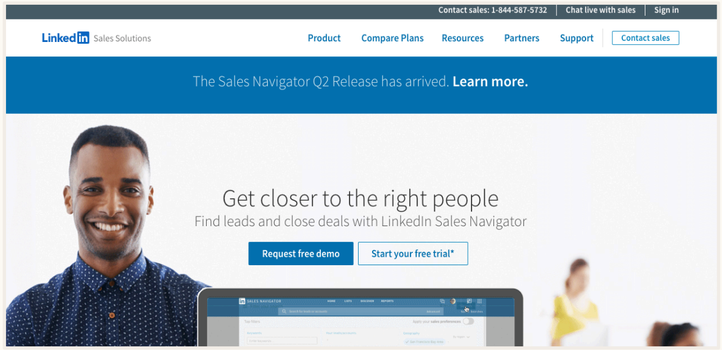
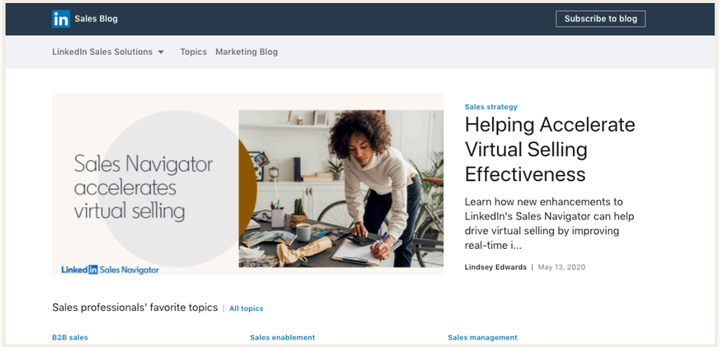
Incorporating these changes into your sales organisation will prepare you for the future that is approaching faster every day.

To learn more about the state of sales, LinkedIn recommends the following resources:

The Real Sales Resource Page



LinkedIn Sales Solutions Website



The LinkedIn Sales Blog