

# SELLING TOOLS OF THE TRADE: WHAT ARE THE MUST-HAVES?

December 2015

“Back in the day” a smile and a handshake were the weapons of choice for sales people aiming to kill their quotas. Today, these tricks and tools of the trade have evolved, and modern sales people are collaborating with each other and connecting with their buyers more effectively as a result. In this knowledge brief, you’ll learn how they’re doing it...

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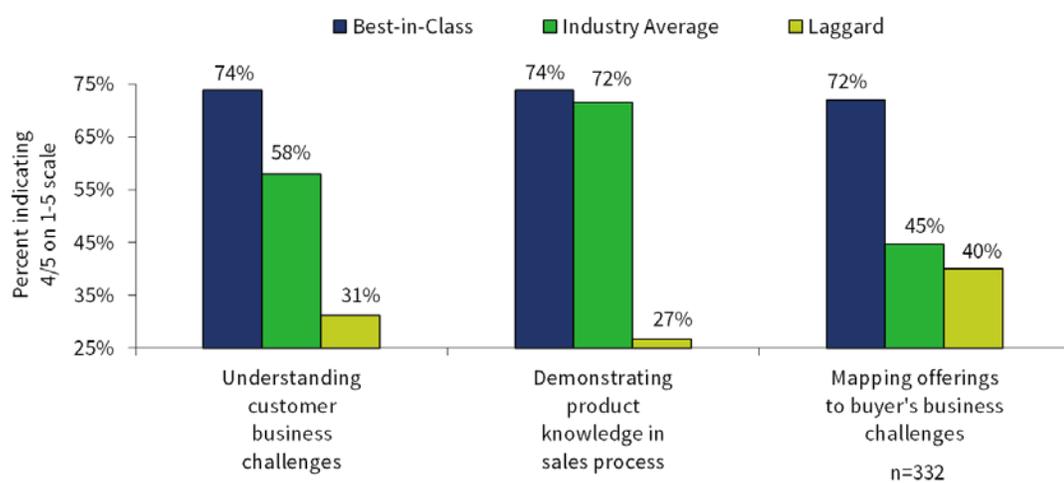
**Best-in-Class sales organizations are 66% more proficient at understanding their prospects’ business challenges, compared to All Others (74% vs. 44.5%).**

Long gone are the days when all a seller needed was a quota to hit, a territory to target, and a can-do attitude to continually close deals. Is your sales team equipped for success?

Modern business-to-business (B2B) sales opportunities aren’t won with charismatic smiles and firm handshakes alone; it takes content, comprehensive presentations, clear value propositions, and multiple complex and challenging interactions. Like the classic old standard of charming buyers with a smile, modern sellers now put their buyers at ease by demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of those buyers’ business challenges. Where, in the past, handshakes instilled confidence, conveying reliable and in-depth product knowledge is what holds up today. Ultimately, the modern sales magic happens when sellers are able to effectively map product offerings to buyers’ business challenges. These are the new trade secrets of sales today, and in this knowledge brief, we’ll explore how you can maximize the impact of these tips for your sales team with collaborative and interactive sales technology.

To set the stage, in Figure 1 below, we can see how Best-in-Class sales organizations (the top 20% of respondents in sales performance) lead the way across all three competencies — understanding buyers’ business challenges, demonstrating product knowledge, and mapping products to buyers’ challenges.

**Figure 1: Linking Performance to Behavior: What Best-in-Class Sales Organizations Do Better**



Source: Aberdeen Group, October 2015

While when and why to smile or shake a buyer’s hand generally comes naturally (except, of course, for the notoriously long lasting hand-shakers out there) Best-in-Class organizations take notable steps to ensure that their sellers know their buyers, their products, and how best to align the two. Digging a little deeper into Figure 1, when we look at the Best-in-Class performers versus Industry Average performers, we see that both cohorts have a firm grasp on product knowledge. Taking a jump to the left in the chart, the 16% gap between the Best-in-Class and Industry Average performers for understanding the business challenges of their customers indicates that this is the broken part of the equation. Sales organizations that can’t keep pace with the Best-in-Class are falling behind because they don’t understand their buyers’ business challenges. So as a sales leader, how do you fix this?

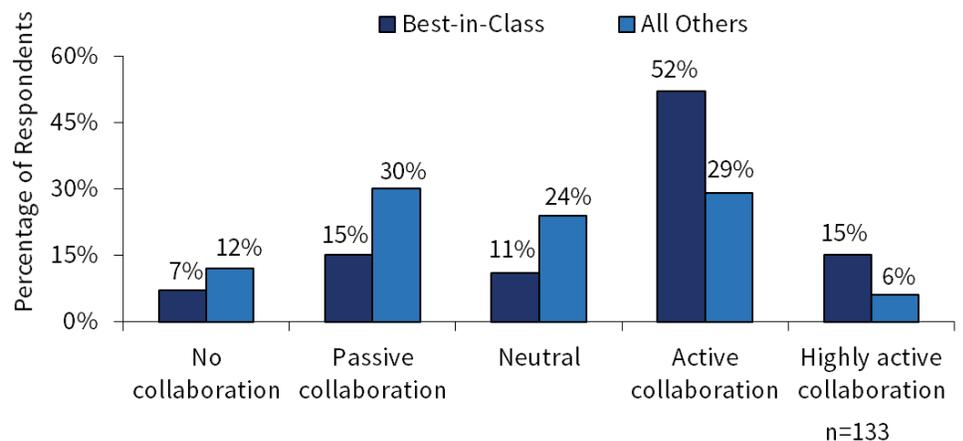
**Best-in-Class sales organizations are 69% more proficient at mapping products/services to their prospects’ business challenges, compared to All Others (72% vs. 42.5%).**

## There's Gold in Your Daily Sales Conversations – Use Technology to Dig In!

If you're doing even a halfway decent job of managing your sales team, your sellers should be talking to customers and potential customers every day. With such activity, how is it possible that any sales organization could have so much access to their customers, but report so little competency in understanding their buyer's business challenges as shown in Figure 1? Think of it this way, every conversation a sales person has with a customer or prospect is a single puzzle piece held in the hand of each seller. To put the whole puzzle together, every seller must be able to share his or her pieces, otherwise, it will always be a fragmented, incomplete view of the buyer. This is where collaborative sales technologies come in.

**67% of Best-in-Class organizations maintain an either active or highly active level of collaboration supported by sales technologies.**

**Figure 2: Leverage the Power of Technology for Collaboration**



Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2015

As we see in Figure 2, a combined 67% of Best-in-Class organizations maintain an either active or highly active level of collaboration supported by sales technologies, compared to just 35% of All Others. To return to the puzzle metaphor, instead of relying on your sellers to come together one-by-one, share pieces, and see what fits together — collaborative technologies allow sellers to have their pieces pulled together automatically. On the tech side, this looks like

aggregated sales data in CRM, central content libraries with insights into content utilization and effectiveness metrics, and live or on-demand access to sales training and coaching assets. Indeed, in Aberdeen's report, *Once is Not Enough: Why Sales Training Reinforcement is a Must-Have* (May 2015), it was shown that 57% of Best-in-Class sales organizations have such a process for collecting and sharing tribal knowledge. This tribal knowledge, however, isn't just limited to circumstantial applications (i.e. "you're on the 5<sup>th</sup> interaction with a buyer with X amount of dollars available, and who is giving you Y as an objection; here's what to do..."). With other collaborative technologies like web conferencing, sellers can actually record their interactions with buyers, break them down like a play-by-play highlight reel, and then share what worked and what didn't. What's more, if the seller can get the buyer on camera for the conference, that can also provide insight into patterns of body language, eye contact, and visible emotions that can unlock indicators or intent for buying.

From this brief overview of collaborative technology, there are a few important factors to highlight in order to make collaborative technology work in your organization.

→ **Ensure knowledge is captured in an actionable manner.**

For quantitative insights, (number of sales interactions to close, how many content assets were used, how much time did it take, etc.) make sure that you have your sales technologies integrated in a way that all data points can be aggregated in a central hub — typically, your CRM. For more qualitative insights (like good, bad, and ugly sales call recordings, effective talk tracks, or compelling pieces of content) ensure that there is a central library where these assets can be both stored and accessed. Your job as a sales leader is then to review and condense these insights, and reuse, repurpose, and redistribute them accordingly.

→ [Related Research](#)

“Once is Not Enough:  
Why Sales Training  
Reinforcement is a  
Must-Have”

**In video-based selling, sales people can have the kinds of classic, face-to-face conversations with buyers at scale and from any location.**

- **Show the benefits of using shared knowledge.** As a sales leader, you probably know better than most that sellers are more apt to chase the carrot of commission than be prodded by the rod of “do this or else” authority. You want to show that cases like “Jimmy the new guy just closed his first big deal because he was able to riff off of the recording of Susan’s successful web conference with ACME corp...” directly lead to the coveted commission goal. It’s all about decreasing friction. Technologies go a long way to make life easier, especially for supporting sales collaboration, but you have to also make it easy and worthwhile for your sellers to adopt that technology.
- **Actively distribute the pieced-together puzzle of your buyers’ business challenges back out to your sales force.** Whether you can gather your entire team into one “war-room-esque” briefing meeting, or repurpose sales technology like web conferencing to reach every sales person wherever he or she may be, it’s important to regularly inform your sales reps on what the current picture of your buyers looks like. One quarter may correspond with an economic downturn, for example, and your buyers may be more sensitive to incurring expenses. Such fears may actually even be visible in their body language or audible in their voice intonation, and the better you can brief your team on these tics, the better you can prepare them to address or overcome them.

#### The Sales Tool Kit All Comes Together in Video-Based Selling:

The most comprehensive way in which sales organizations pull together the tools to understand their buyers, and demonstrate product knowledge to effectively map products to buyer challenges, is in video-based selling. In video-based selling, sales people can have the kinds of classic, face-to-face conversations with buyers at scale and from any location. Moreover, sales people can prepare for these interactions in advance using the shared tribal knowledge and

collaborative technologies noted earlier in this document to even more effectively maximize the value of this one-to-one interaction. Indeed, in Aberdeen’s report, *Making the Connection: How Top Sellers Leverage Web Conferencing to Win* (December 2015), the findings revealed that organizations with video-based selling in place

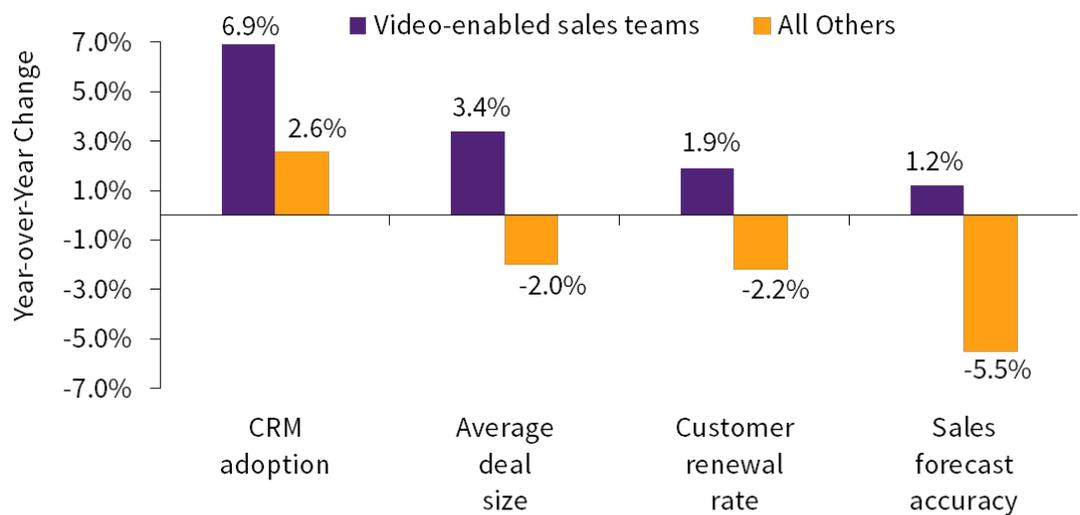
(supported by web conferencing solutions) reported a 43% greater proficiency at mapping products and offerings to their buyers’ business challenges, compared to non-enabled organizations (60% vs. 42%). This competency is also best encapsulated in video-based selling because it extends the data-informed element of selling (buyers expect you to know their revenue, headcount, BANT — budget, authority, need, timeline — criteria and other ‘on-paper’ capabilities that qualify them as buyers), and invites in the perceptive and social skills that allow sellers to respond and personalize their conversations to how buyers are feeling or presenting themselves during the conversation.

In theory, this all sounds very well and good — sellers who are well-equipped with tribal knowledge and collaborative tools should be able to sell more effectively, and enriching this behavior with video-based selling should only widen the margin. Yet, with all your obligations and initiatives as a sales leader, you rarely have time for what should work “in theory.” You want to focus on what works in reality. Don’t worry, we’ve got you covered.

➔ [Related Research](#)

“Making the Connection: How Top Sellers Leverage Web Conferencing to Win”

**Figure 3: Video-Enabled Sales Organizations Are Pulling Away from Their Peers in Performance Year-Over-Year**



n=254

Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2015

As we can see in Figure 3, the theoretical gulf in year-over-year performance you'd expect between organizations with video-based selling and those without is a very real and measurable margin. What's more, each metric illustrates a unique yet valuable advantage in the sales arsenal achieved through video-based selling. These advantages also serve as useful takeaways, so remember:

- ➔ **Sales differentiation starts with shared, actionable knowledge.** Through direct CRM integrations, web conferencing solutions that support video-based selling ensure that the CRM is a hotspot for this shared data. This is why video-enabled sales teams enjoy 1.7 times greater year-over-year increases in CRM adoption (6.9% vs. 2.6%).
- ➔ **Earn greater buyer trust, earn a greater level of wallet share.** The ability to convey buyer knowledge and align products to deliver maximum value for those buyers is a staple of modern selling which earns buyer trust. Furthermore, the ability to react and respond to the buyer in

real time through video-enabled selling increases this trust by not only putting a face to a name, but also a feeling with a need. While sales organizations without this kind of personalized approach are shrinking their average deal sizes year-over-year by 2%, video-enabled sellers are going in the opposite direction at 2.7 times the rate of their peers with an increase of 3.4% year-over-year.

→ **Building relationships brings buyers back.** Barring any unusual or niche business models, the ideal situation for a sales organization is to bring in a wealth of net-new business, while maintaining as many existing accounts as possible. Video-enabled sales teams are able to move the needle of their customer retention rates in the right direction year-over-year (1.9%) and leverage this business advantage by more effectively managing the relationships with their new and existing buyers at scale. There will always be a challenge of effectively portioning out attention between new accounts and existing ones, but video-enabled sellers can more effectively manage this schism with a combination of recorded and live communication options. For accounts that need just a little attention, a pre-recorded video can be perfect to send to keep the account engaged. This tactic can be quickly repeated, which opens up much more time for accounts that need a more personal approach — whether they're new or existing customers. This is how buyer knowledge builds relationships, and in turn, customer retention.

→ **Better buyer knowledge means better sales forecasting.** Lastly, not only are video-enabled sales teams better at selling to their buyers; they're also better at reading their intent and reporting effectively. Through web conferencing solutions, your sellers can look their buyers in the eye, listen to their voices, and read their posture when those buyers say “yes, we're aiming to move forward,” “no, not right now but

soon” or even the dreaded “maybe...” to know whether it is indeed a “sure thing” or if there’s really only a 30% likelihood of the deal closing. This improved accuracy in sales forecasting — which video-enabled sales organizations improve at a rate of 1.2% year-over-year, while their peers worsen by 5.5% year-over-year — is not only a nice to have for you as a sales leader, but a need to have for better mapping products to your buyers’ business challenges in the future. When you can analyze those “not sure things” and allocate resources to move them along by being able to trust that the “sure thing” deals really are locked down, you can maximize the performance of your sales team in a predictable, repeatable way.

**For more on web conferencing best practices, read the full report —**  
*[Making the Connection: How Top Sellers Leverage Web Conferencing to Win](#)*  
(December 2015)

## About Aberdeen Group

Since 1988, Aberdeen Group has published research that helps businesses worldwide improve their performance. Our analysts derive fact-based, vendor-agnostic insights from a proprietary analytical framework, which identifies Best-in-Class organizations from primary research conducted with industry practitioners. The resulting research content is used by hundreds of thousands of business professionals to drive smarter decision-making and improve business strategy. Aberdeen Group is headquartered in Boston, MA.

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