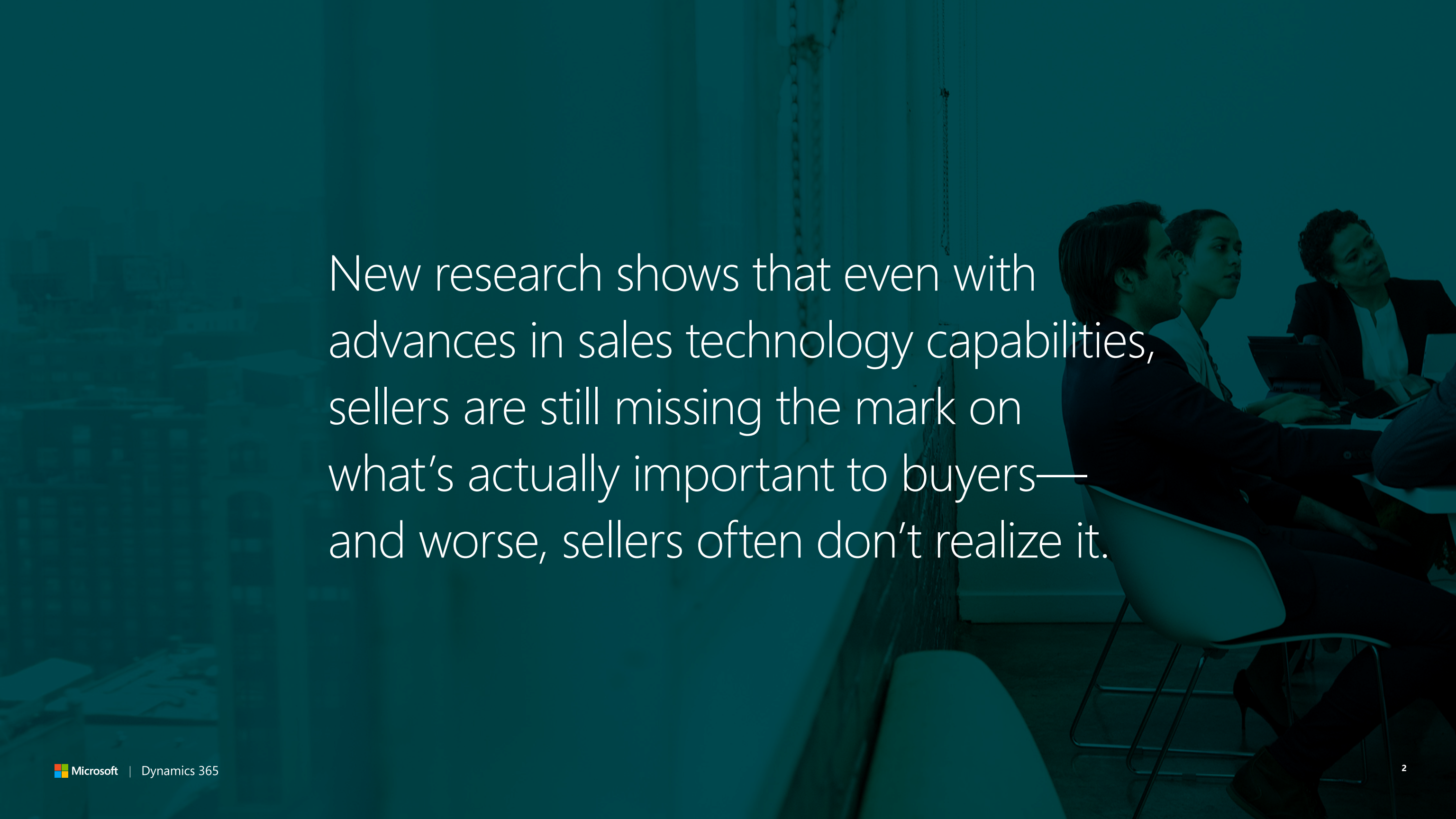




Empowering the modern seller

A new definition of engagement





New research shows that even with advances in sales technology capabilities, sellers are still missing the mark on what's actually important to buyers—and worse, sellers often don't realize it.

The modern sales predicament

Most sales leaders are interested in one business goal: Hitting their numbers.

More tactical sales leaders may point to different solutions, such as:

- 1 **better “engagement”**... but this remains elusive, it’s even hard to define
- 2 delivering the right **message to the right person**... but they still can’t do this easily
- 3 **360 customer views**... but it’s harder than ever, because of more data and more channels
- 4 **sales rep productivity**... sales leaders have invested in productivity apps for decades, but has it helped?

But new research, conducted by Microsoft to look at the complexities of the modern sales process, shows that even with advances in sales technology capabilities, sellers are still missing the mark on what is actually important to buyers—and worse, sellers often don’t realize it.

Automating sales activities is often used to simply improve productivity, but that doesn’t always deliver what buyers want. Data on its own can’t meet buyers where they are in the purchasing cycle and give them the interaction they desire. Misusing technology can even get in the way of the buyer’s experience while giving sellers a false sense of confidence.

Successful sales organizations have figured out how to use fundamental sales strategies and data-driven insights to reach buyers in a seamless sales experience. Our research highlights key areas that high-growth sales organizations focus on—and low-growth companies are more likely to ignore. Sales teams can drive growth by following the high-growth companies’ example and relying on select traditional sales techniques, implementing the right digital tools—in the right way—and changing the way they think about engagement.

“It’s a problem when a rep comes in and starts pushing a product...and they just think oh, you’re ready to move on this.”

—SVP, FORTUNE 500



MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN BUYERS AND SELLERS

BUYER

- I want information online
- I want to reach out to reps
- I prefer not to be contacted by phone

SELLER

- Buyers want information from sales reps
- Buyers want reps to reach out to them
- Buyers want personal relationships

Buyers vs. sellers

IT SOUNDS SIMPLE: Understanding what buyers want is essential for successful sales organizations. Please the buyer; make the sale.

But many sales reps don't even realize when they're missing the target. Sellers are consistently misaligned with what buyers really want, both in the information they present and the way they approach the buying and selling process. Our data show buyers are more likely to say they had an average or good experience in their last sales interaction, while sellers are more likely to say they provided an excellent experience.

It's more than just mismatched optimism. In most cases, buyers want to research the majority of their information online, prefer to be the ones to initiate contact in the sales process, and prefer not to be contacted by phone, the data show. On the flip side, sellers believe buyers like it when sales reps reach out to them, prefer to build a personal relationship, and want to learn more about products and services from them than buyers actually do.

Why do these misalignments exist? Sellers aren't customizing their process to the experience their specific buyers are looking for.

Sixty percent of buyers feel that while sales reps have a good understanding of their industry,

they have only a limited comprehension of their individual company—a critical problem when customers want a pitch created specifically for them. And when looking at sales content, buyers vary on how targeted it needs to be. The majority of buyers—71 percent—want content that's specific to their industry or their very business.

Only 28%, especially lower-value buyers, think general content is fine. Buyers are least satisfied with information available through social media, company websites, and vendor collateral. Customizing the sales experience to specific buyers involves understanding them, and yet only 38 percent of companies require reps to have a thorough understanding of both the buyer's industry and company.

Adding to the challenge is that each sales team's prospects have their own unique set of expectations and needs. Understanding them and the context in which they're going through the buying cycle may seem like an impossible task, especially when the data show that buyers and sellers are often so far apart. With advances in modern technology, though, sales organizations can tailor actionable insights to refine their approach, timing, and content—which leads them to a new definition of buyer engagement.

New definition of engagement: traditional sales meets technology

Engagement is offering value to the buyer in context to their business, in the format they prefer, and when they want it—all to help deliver impact.

But achieving that takes the right mixture of sales technology and personal interactions, spread across both digital and offline channels.

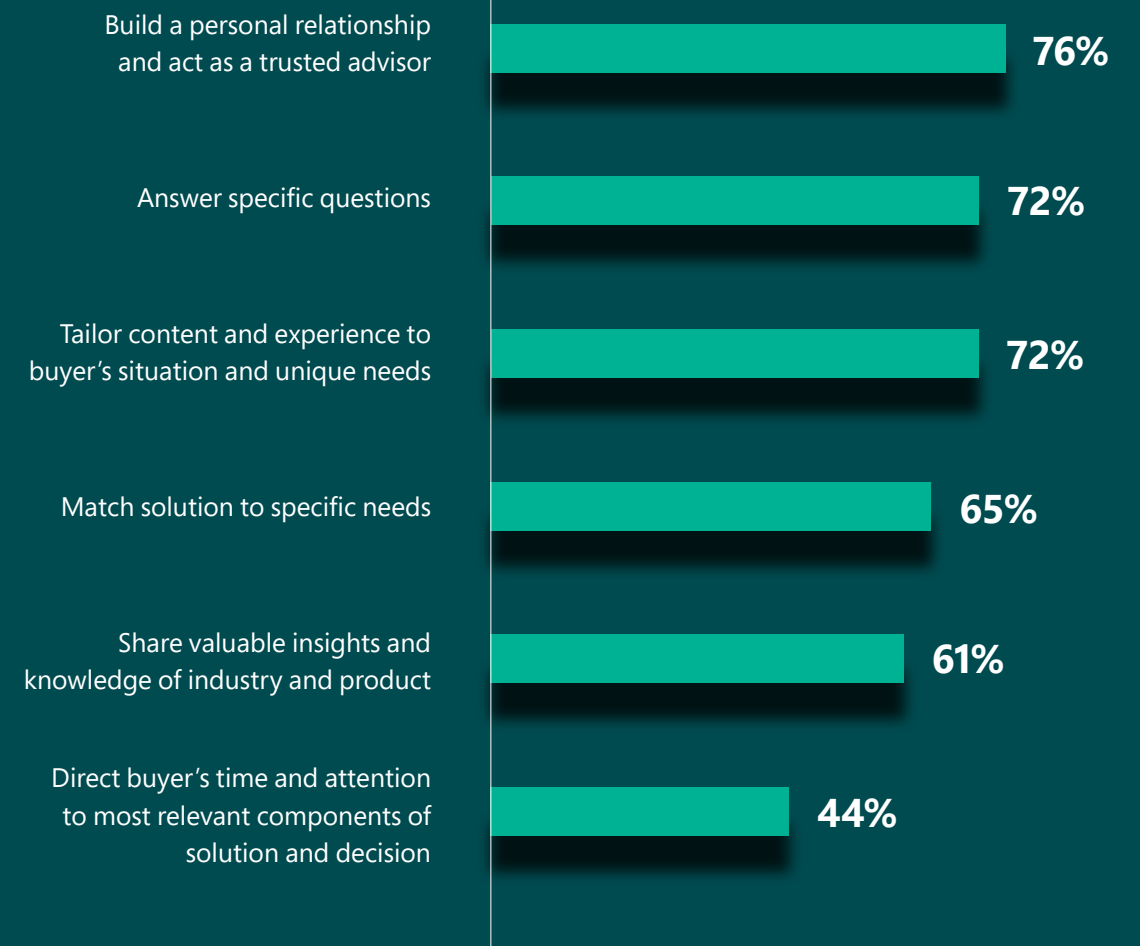
To bring the sales process back in line with what today's buyers really want, sellers have to accept that the ideal relationship is complex; buyers value engagement with sales reps, but on buyers' terms. Luckily, while sales fundamentals are irreplaceable, technology has enabled insights that enhance the talent of a sales team—and both are necessary to be a truly high-performing sales operation.

In today's digital world, it may seem that buyers want to conduct all of their research by themselves online. But our research doesn't back up that idea. When engaging with specific vendors, buyers want direct personal interactions with sales reps during their purchasing process three to four times more than they want digital interactions. That may seem contradictory to data points mentioned earlier, but this is where a key distinc-

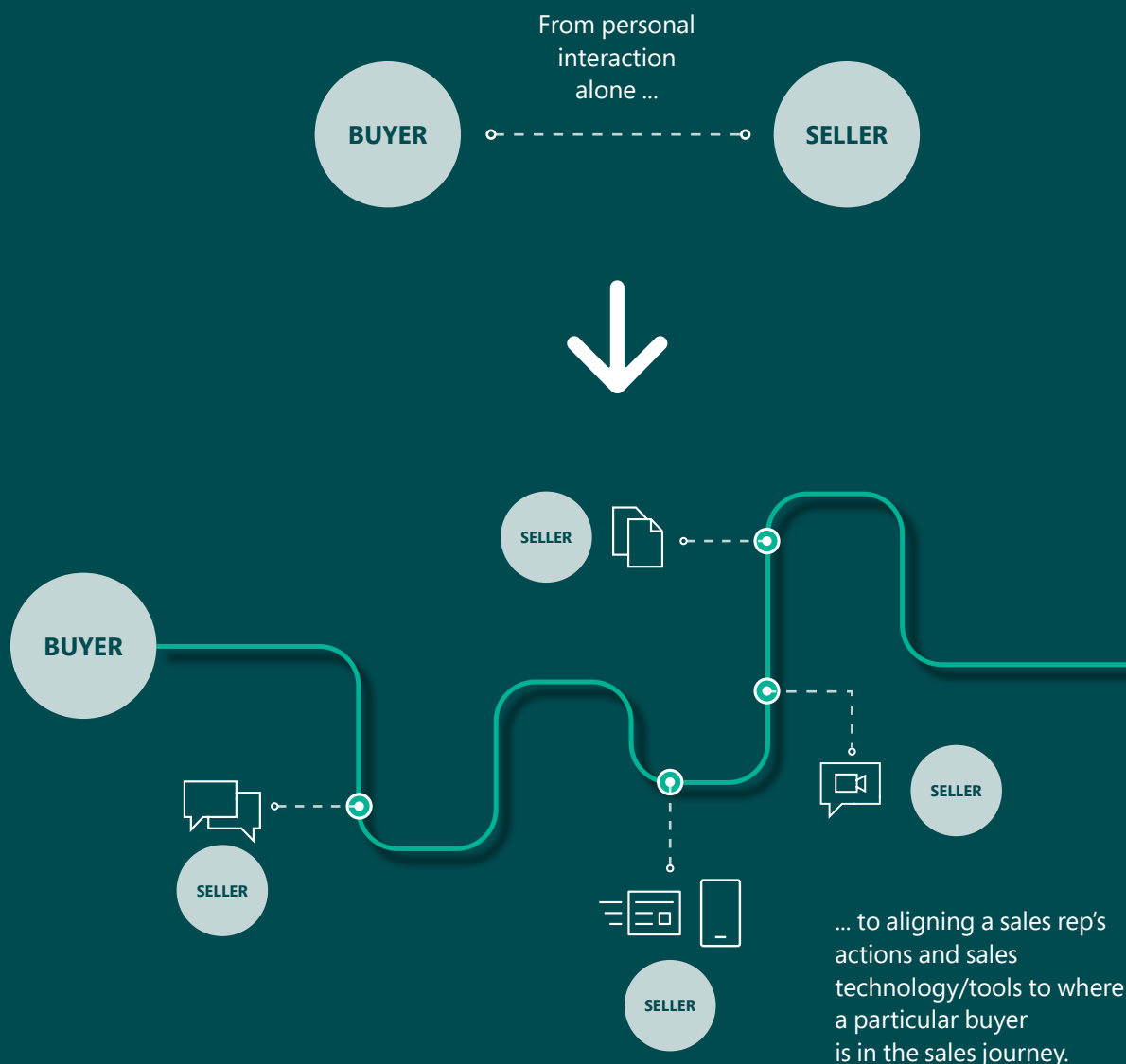
tion comes into play. Buyers don't want to avoid sales teams altogether—rather, buyers just want sales team engagement at precisely the time they need it.

The data play that out. While 25 percent of buyers wanted digital content during the sales process and 18 percent wanted social media, 76 percent of buyers said they wanted in-person interaction with a sales rep and 50 percent wanted to talk to a sales rep on the phone. Buyers also rated these more direct interactions as more important to them. Again, most buyers feel that sales reps play a crucial role in the buying process—but only when those reps engage them at the right moments, add value, and guide them through the complex purchasing process.

WHAT BUYERS WANT SALES REPS TO DO



SHIFT THE WAY WE THINK OF ENGAGEMENT



Understanding what engagement really means for the sales team is vital to delivering on buyers' expectations—and it's an idea that should follow the customer throughout their whole buying experience.

Even though every sales team likely believes they've got a handle on their customer's experience, the data illustrate this confidence is often misplaced. Knowing about the buyer journey isn't the same as engaging a prospect at each point along the journey, optimizing every touch.

The most successful sales teams combine their sales talents with insights gleaned from digital tools to determine:

- what information and interaction a buyer wants,
- when in the process the buyer would find it most useful,
- and how to approach the situation.

This targeted method of understanding and adapting to each unique buyer's purchasing journey is the new sales engagement model.

There's a fine art to this approach—it's not quite magic, but it can feel that way to the buyer when performed correctly. Successful leaders are the ones who can pull the right levers for their team's unique talents, while simultaneously partnering that process with industry-leading insights.

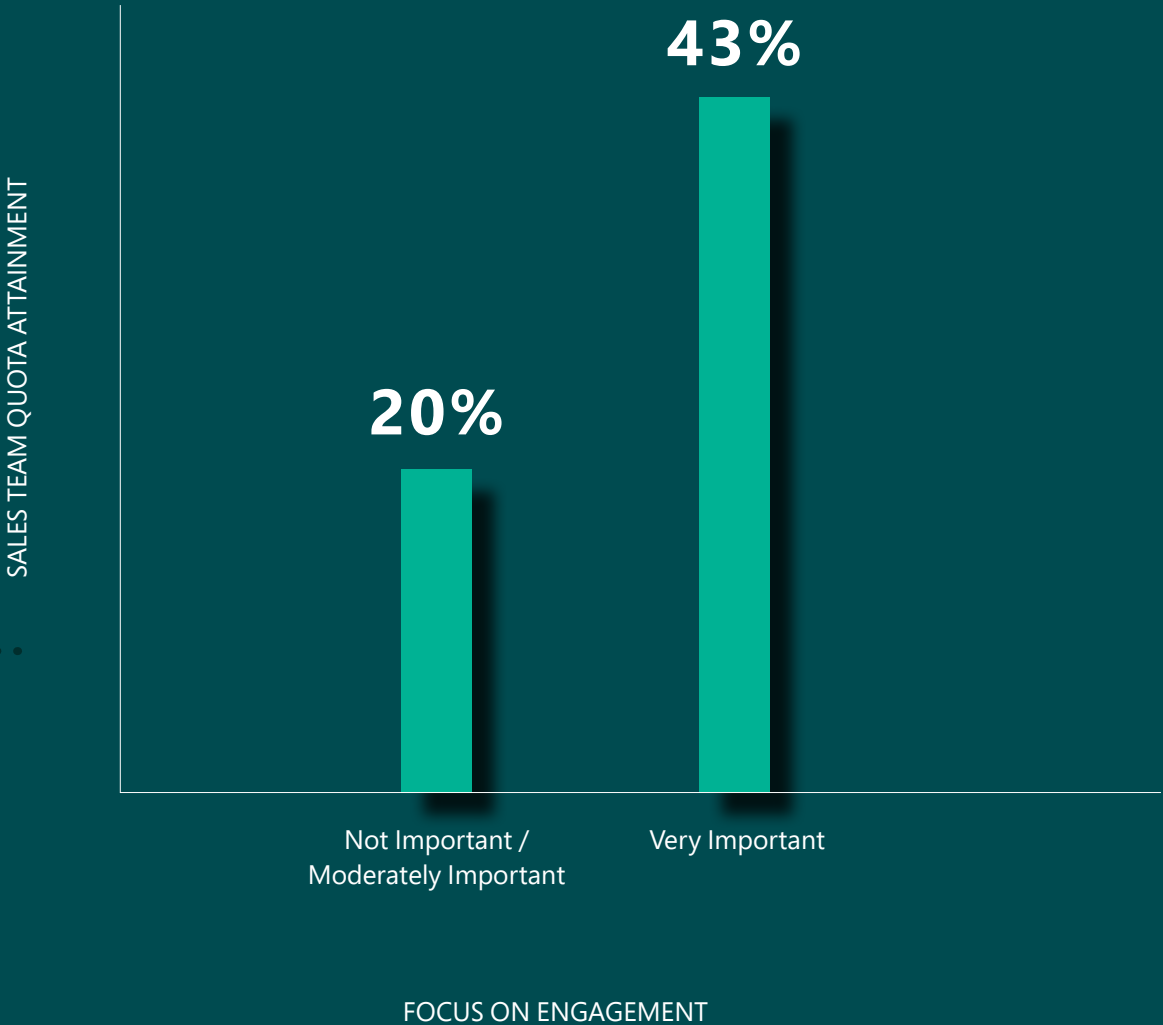
67% The percentage of the work day sales reps spend on customer engagement at high-growth organizations

Technology is key to giving sales reps the right tools to achieve this new definition of engagement throughout a buyer's journey. Sellers who rate customer engagement as important say they are more likely to use email, sales intelligence, CRM, LinkedIn, reporting, and analytics. While most sellers believe sales knowledge base, sales intelligence, and contact data cleansing and deduplication are the most valuable technologies, fewer are actually using them.

And it's proven that engagement pays off. Sales teams that emphasize engagement are 2.3 times more likely to achieve quota success than those that don't. Sales reps at high-growth organizations spend 67 percent or more of their day on customer engagement, using technology to reach out to buyers more effectively. Reps at low-growth organizations, on the other hand, spend just 43 percent of their days on engagement.

2.3x more likely to reach quota when sales teams emphasize engagement

ENGAGEMENT DRIVES REVENUE



MAPPING TO THE BUYER'S JOURNEY



The ideal buyer journey

Using technology doesn't automatically make the sales process go smoothly, and it doesn't create positive engagement on its own. If that were the case, there'd be little difference between high-performing and low-performing sales operations beyond which has the most digital tools.

The real difference is putting the right digital tools in place and using them in the smartest ways and in the ways buyers want them to be used, gathering insights for strong sales teams to drive buyer engagement. Tools can be used to enable relationship-based selling, segmenting, and measurement, and create smart ways to automate relevant touches at the right moments in the buying cycle, all with the end goals of improving engagement and selling value at scale.

With all the possible capabilities that can be brought to life and data that can be generated, it's overwhelming to figure out where to focus the effort. Key in on these two steps: perfecting the discovery phase of the sales process; and then mapping the ideal journey.

Success is combining the discovery phase of the sales process and mapping it to the ideal journey.

- GROW BUSINESS**
Leverage intelligent insights and business processes to increase revenue while reducing acquisition cost.
- STAY FOCUSED**
Reduce distractions and know where to prioritize in a complex sales environment
- WIN FASTER**
Close deals faster with collaboration and familiar, intuitive tools.

Blending talent and technology:

DISCOVERY

A well-executed discovery phase is critical to creating the right journey for buyers. This is where a sales rep learns about the prospect's business, challenges, and priorities—getting it right can tip the scales between making a sale or not. The resulting engagement strategy will guide salespeople on selling value rather than functions and features, segment the buyer base, and use metrics to drive actions.

Yet many sales teams struggle to achieve discovery's main purpose: Tying buyer needs and pain points to the product or solution. Buyers need to see how the value of the offer relates directly to their business and problems, and that can only be accomplished through a salesperson's thorough understanding of the buyer through discovery. However, 57 percent of sales reps say they skip or cut corners in the discovery stage. This is especially true in the small- to medium-sized business space as reps want to move through discovery quickly and get to a demo. The top challenges sales reps face in the discovery phase are:

- tying the prospect's needs and pain points to solutions
 - skipping or cutting corners on discovery and moving on to later stages
 - mapping/understanding the prospect's organization
 - identifying the prospect's needs and pain points
 - lacking an appropriate call to action
- Value-based selling is a fundamental and ageless strategy, no matter what digital tools an organization uses, and the fastest-growing organizations say selling value is the most important part of their growth strategies. Forty-three percent of high-growth sales leaders list the ability to communicate value to the customer as their top tactic, while only 15 percent of low-growth organizations rank it at the top.

Most buyers feel that sales reps play a crucial role in the buying process—but only when those reps engage them at the right moments, add value, and guide them through the complex purchasing process.

POWERFUL TOOLS IN MICROSOFT DYNAMICS 365 FOR SALES: THE DISCOVERY PHASE



Use predictive intelligence to score leads and prioritize the time of the sales team



Easily find potential buyers in the networks of your co-workers and friends, secure warm introductions, and follow the activity of high-profile needs through LinkedIn



Quickly compile insights across email, social, and transactional data to ID buyer sentiment



With intuitive tools, quickly create and personalize sales documents for multiple buyer personas

41% of sellers say they don't have a good method of prioritizing customer/prospect outreach and selling activities

Blending talent and technology:

IDEAL JOURNEY

Crafting the ideal buyer journey requires a skillful combination of sales fundamentals and smart use of technology. A talented sales team—armed with data-driven insights, tracking relevant metrics, and adapting to what they discover buyers want—can boost engagement and grow sales. With improper use, though, digital tools can actually get in the way of providing a seamless experience and lose sales.

Take this example. A small business owner was looking to expand and needed new telesales software. He received several emails from a vendor, each time targeting businesses bigger or otherwise different than his. He deleted them. The same vendor sent an email offer of a free trial, but when the business owner filled out a form and received a call from a sales rep, the rep didn't know anything about the free trial offer. He didn't ask any discovery questions, but called again the next day pushing to close the deal. After several more tone-deaf phone calls, the business owner began telling his industry colleagues about his terrible purchasing experience.

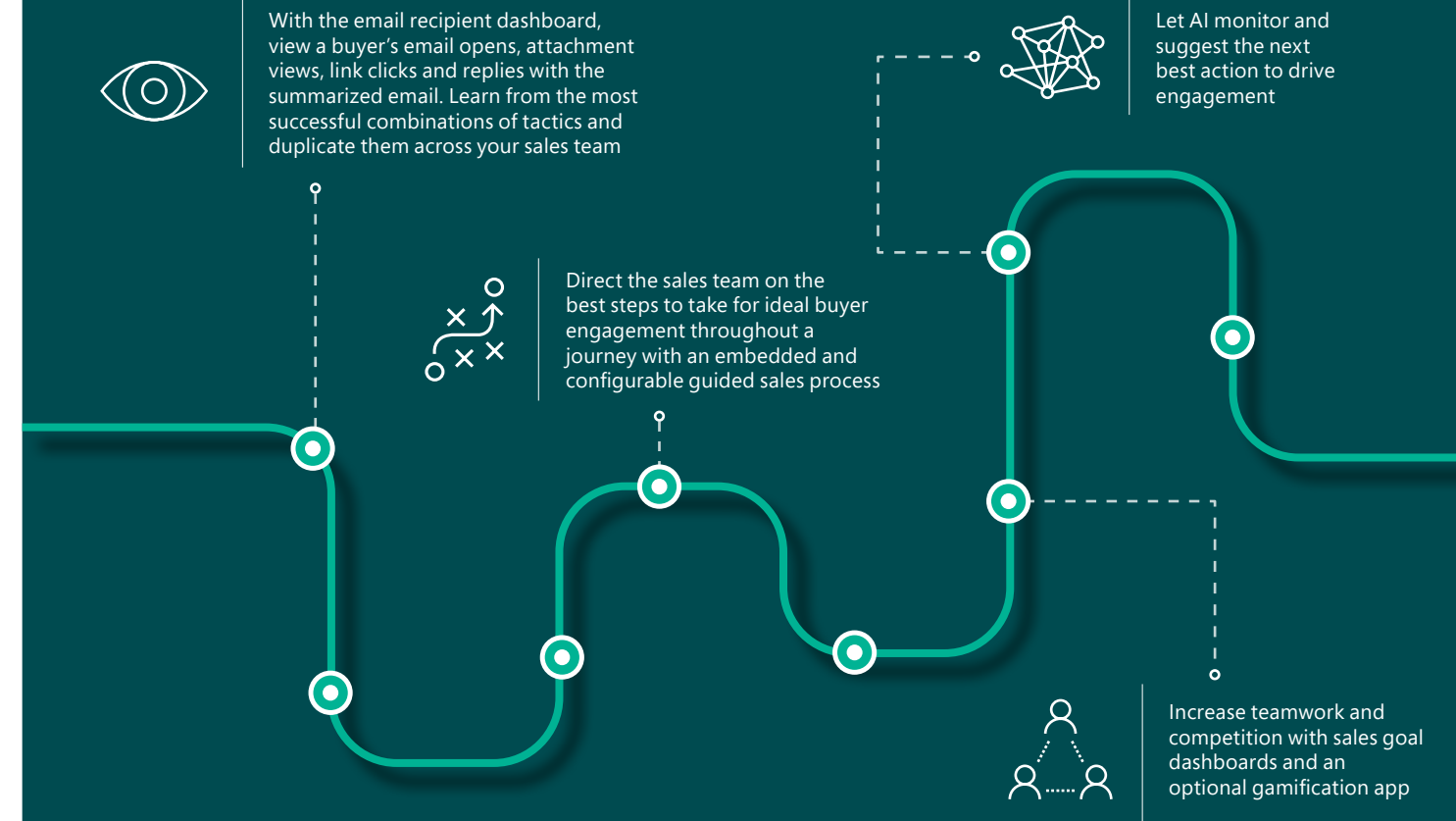
The vendor's misuse of technology to send poorly targeted emails that lacked internal sales alignment was the first error. But the rep's attempts to jump ahead in the buyer's journey and heedlessly push the sale highlighted both the shortcomings of the digital tools and the vendor's sales team.

Instead, use predictive analytics to recommend the next best action, whether it's content recommendations, upsell or cross-sell recommendations, or specific interactions with customers—which are then carried out by informed sales reps. This information enables each customer interaction to be personalized in real time.

Then, closely track measurements using metrics such as close rates and productivity—an activity that high-growth organizations do, while low-growth organizations often don't have metrics in place. Each organization should define its own engagement metrics. Even simple metrics help drive sales success.

Only 43% of sales organizations have invested in predictive analytics to better prioritize leads.

TOOLS TO MAP YOUR BUYER'S JOURNEY



76% of sellers strongly or somewhat agree that buyers increasingly expect relevant, personalized information based on where they are in their decision journey

Maximizing sales potential with digital tools

In today's new model of sales engagement, the only way to align sales strategy with buyers' expectations is to enhance the talents of the sales team with smart digital-driven insights. Technology alone isn't the solution, but sales organizations that ignore the capabilities of technology are leaving money on the table and falling behind their competitors.

Unlock the unique insights that sellers need when interacting with buyers by implementing a solution that combines relevant transactional and relationship data across your CRM, social networks, and your productivity, collaboration, and email systems.



It's not always easy to stay up to speed on 15 to 20 contacts at once. But (with Dynamics) our sellers can establish connections, cultivate and maintain relationships, and build their own networks, without spending a lot of time at events. They're more efficient at scale, and empowered to consistently provide better, more contextualized proposals for every customer and lead."

NITESH AGGARWAL

Infosys, Associate Vice President of Global Sales Effectiveness



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Visit the Microsoft Relationship Sales solution

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