

The Pulse: The State of Sales Enablement 2017

Sales enablement is a rapidly growing function that often still requires fundamental decisions about how it is structured and managed

Increased knowledge on the part of buyers is extending sales cycles and requires well-trained, highly effective sellers

SiriusDecisions research reveals the state of the sales enablement function, including how top performers align with general trends

After constructing a new apartment complex, property managers cannot simply walk away and hope it lasts forever. Rather, they must work with residents and contractors to monitor and maintain each structure and its infrastructure and fixtures. This is critical for protecting the value of the property, and ensures that residents have a pleasant, functional and safe place to live.

In a b-to-b sales organization, sales enablement and sales operations provide sales reps with crucial infrastructure and support to make them more efficient and effective. Understanding standards around the structure of the sales enablement function, as well as the function's priorities, budget and key performance indicators, is required to establish an effective team that can deliver the competencies that sales reps need to succeed. In this brief, we share results from the 2017 SiriusDecisions Sales Enablement Study that illuminate the current state of b-to-b sales enablement organizations.

About the Study

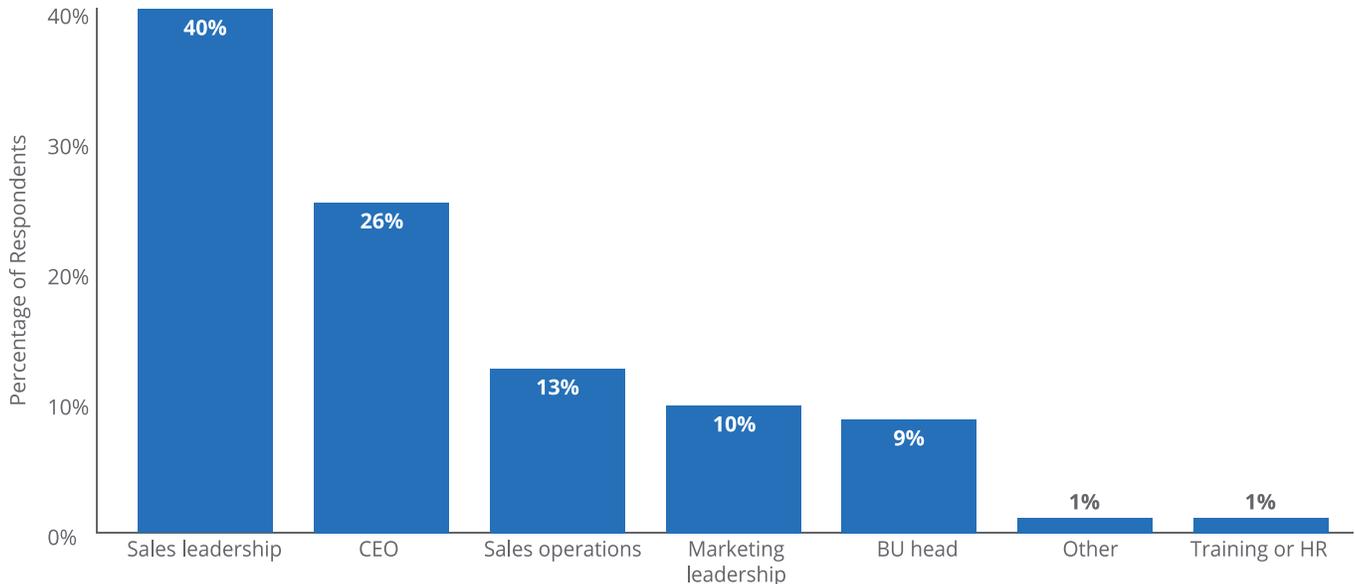
SiriusDecisions surveyed 250 b-to-b sales enablement professionals from a cross-section of organizations that sell a wide variety of products and services. Respondents came from 45 industries, with the heaviest representation in information technology, business services and advanced manufacturing. All respondents confirmed that they have personal responsibility for sales leadership, sales enablement or sales operations, with direct insight into the sales enablement function, and had at least two years' tenure with their current employers. Participants came from organizations of various sizes, with 43 percent from organizations with more than \$750 million in annual revenue.

The results highlighted in this brief include findings pertaining to all survey respondents, as well as those pertaining to high-performing organizations. High-performing organizations, defined as organizations that reported that 80 percent or more of their full-time sales reps achieved quota in the most recent fiscal year, accounted for 62 percent of all respondents.

How Is Sales Enablement Structured and Tasked?

An independent sales enablement function becomes more necessary with scale. Among organizations reporting \$750 million or more in annual revenue, 83 percent have deployed or plan to deploy an enablement team. While a plurality of respondents (35 percent) indicated that their enablement function is a unique, centralized operation, those planning to implement an enablement function within the next 12 months also accounted for the largest number of

Sales Enablement Reporting Structure



© SiriusDecisions Inc. All rights reserved.

respondents to a question about near-term initiatives. These results indicate a significant entrenchment in the mindset of corporate leaders around the necessity for a centralized enablement function as a lifeline for b-to-b sales reps.

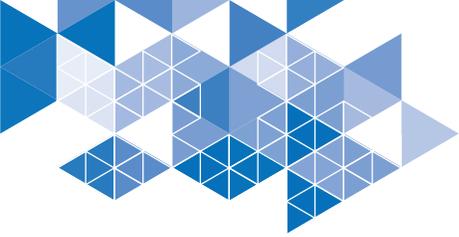
The largest group of respondents indicated that enablement reports directly to sales leadership (40 percent), followed by the CEO (26 percent), sales operations (13 percent) and marketing leadership (10 percent). This represents a stark contrast to 2015, when 24 percent of enablement teams reported to marketing. This trend is complemented by the business background of sales enablement leaders; 78 percent have sales rep, sales manager, sales operations or sales training experience, while only 28 percent have experience in marketing roles (e.g. product, solution, industry, field).

Among sales enablement teams that report to the CEO, a majority (61 percent) support organizations with more than \$750 million in revenue, confirming the findings noted above that the C-suite is increasingly focused on sales enablement. Among high-performing organizations, 47 percent of enablement teams report directly to the top executive, which is significantly higher than the rate for all organizations.

Sales enablement practitioners' priorities are many and far-reaching, with "deploy/train new sales technology," "improve the selling skills of our reps," "streamline internal communications to minimize non-selling time," "sales asset management purchase," "create or restructure sales enablement function" and "establish competency-based hiring profiles/interview guides by role" all scoring above 89 percent in terms of medium-to-high urgency levels. Partnering with a wide variety of departments (e.g. HR, marketing) provides essential paths for enablement to pursue these varied initiatives (see the brief "Introducing the SiriusDecisions Sales Enablement Range of Responsibilities Model"). High-performing sales organizations place a great emphasis on enabling first-line sales managers, with 89 percent stating that it's a medium- or top-level priority, which is 9 percent more often than low performers.

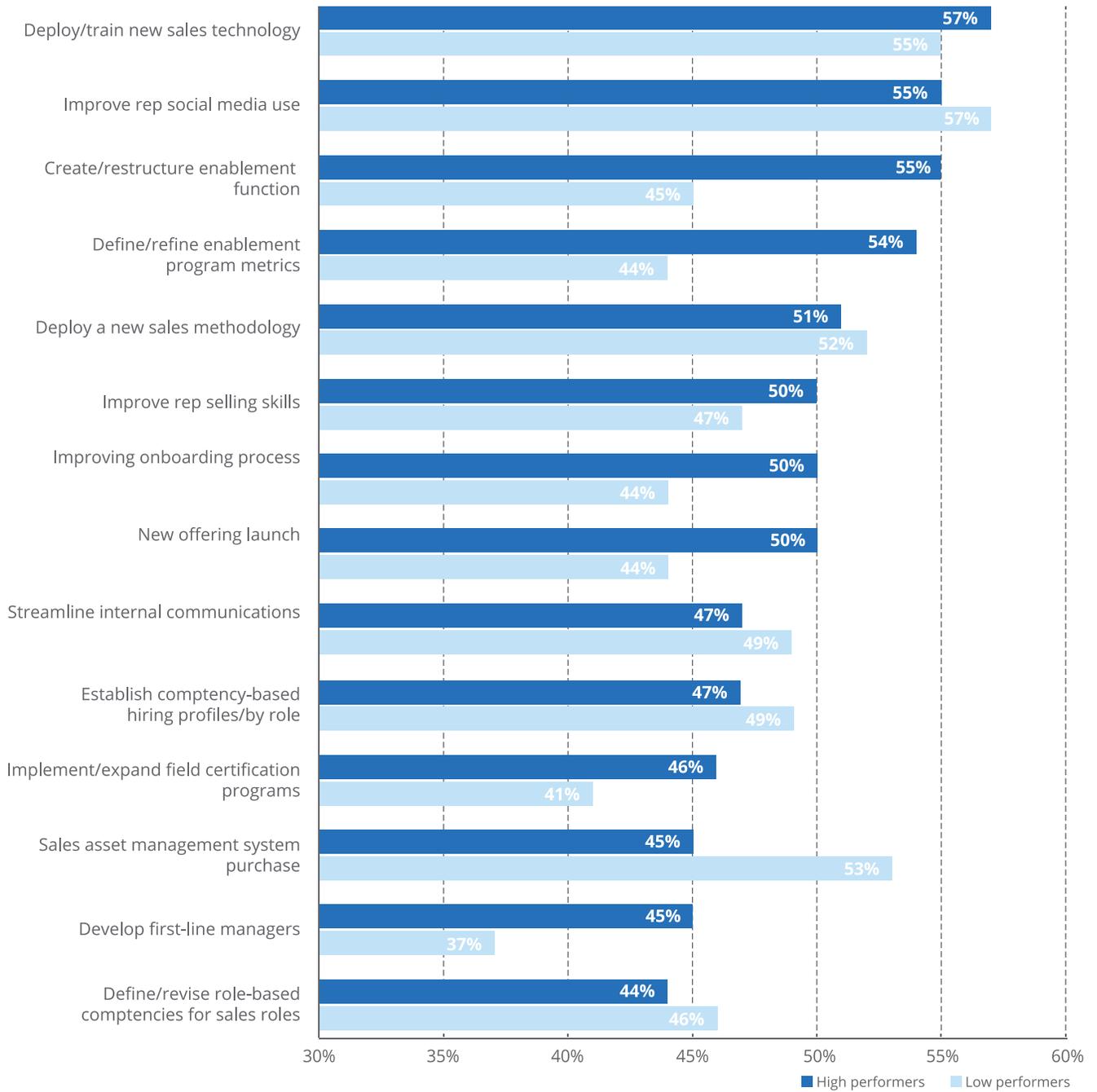
How Is Sales Enablement Budgeted For?

Sales enablement budget growth is widespread, with 74 percent of organizations indicating planned growth in enablement spend during the next 12 months. The segment of organizations with reduced or no planned enablement investment in the same timeframe is only 5 percent.



Research Brief

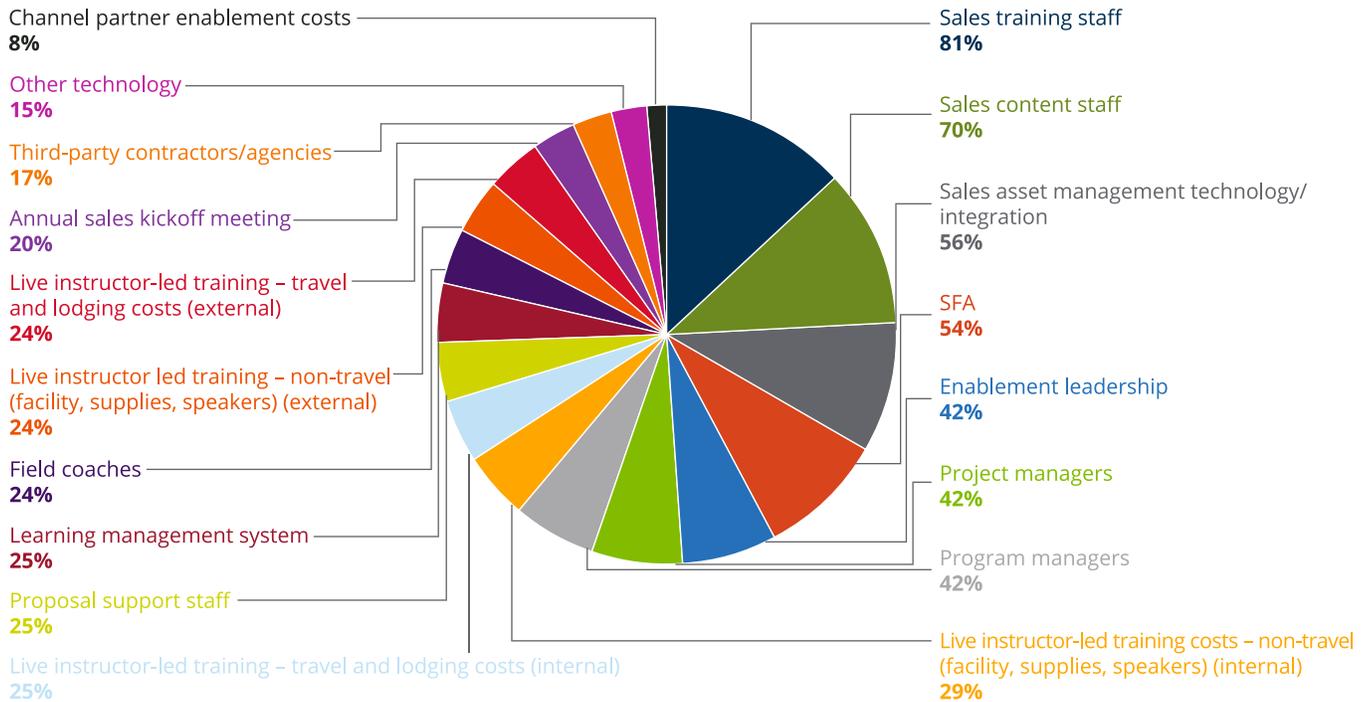
Sales Enablement: Top Priorities



© SiriusDecisions Inc. All rights reserved.

Research Brief

Sales Enablement Budget Components: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Spend in Each Category



© SiriusDecisions Inc. All rights reserved.

While 28 percent of all respondents employ seven or more full-time enablement staff, the rate rises to 43 percent among high performers, indicating the tangible enterprise value of sales enablement human capital investment.

Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated that their organizations are including sales asset management solutions in their enablement budgets (slightly higher than the percentage who cited sales force automation technology, which is usually managed by sales operations), a finding that reflects the recent and rapid ascension of this technology category as a driver of sales effectiveness and efficiency gains (see the Core Strategy Report “Sales Asset Management: Best Practices for Increasing Sales Productivity”).

How Is Sales Enablement Measured?

The majority of organizations reported using sales enablement metrics encompassing activities, feedback and outcomes. While low performers are slightly more inclined to focus on

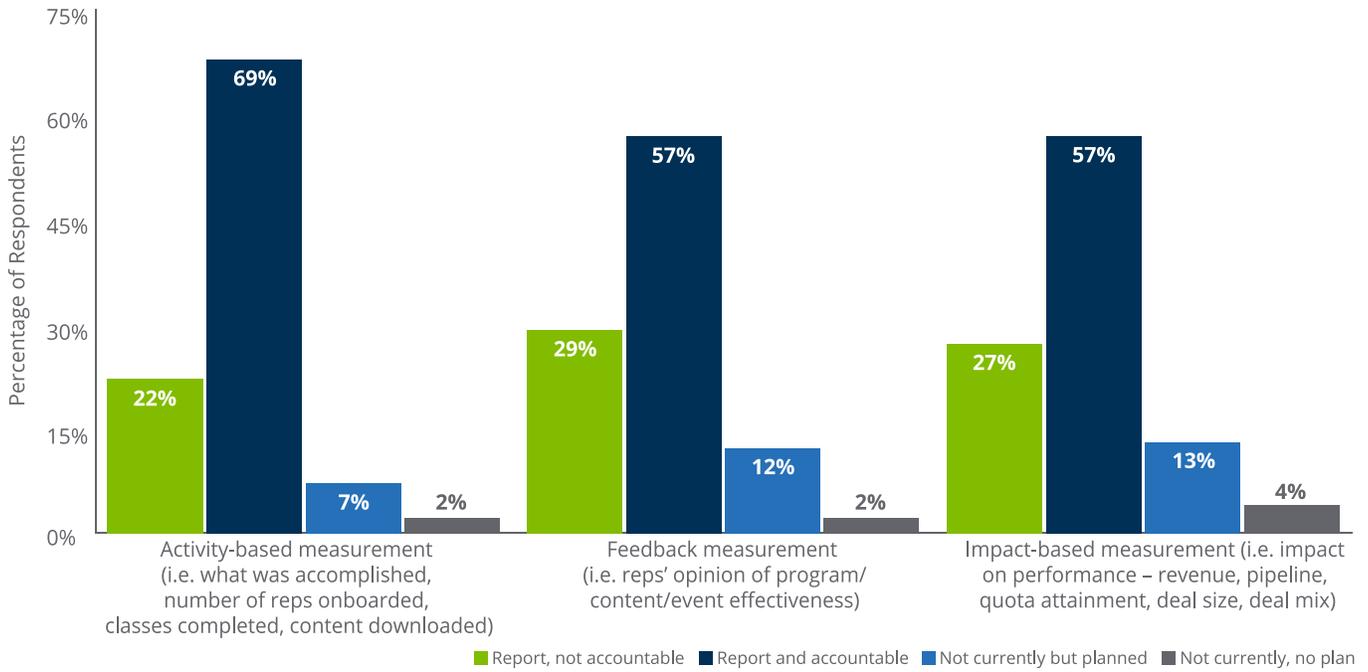
activities rather than feedback or results, there is no distinct opposite pattern among high performers. This indicates that combining these three types of metrics into sales enablement dashboards and responsibilities is a wise path toward supporting the sales team.

With regard to talent acquisition support, the most frequently reported metrics were cost to hire, time to hire and six-month turnover. This data reflects an awareness among enablement leaders of the importance of understanding and managing the spend necessary to attract top talent, the time it takes to fill open roles, and early indicators around long-term rep lifetime value.

For onboarding purposes, the metrics used by the largest number of respondents indicate that enablement considers reps fully productive when they achieve an initial revenue threshold, followed by closing a first deal, field certification and achieving critical mass around pipeline volume. Among

Research Brief

Sales Enablement Measurements



© SiriusDecisions Inc. All rights reserved.

high performers, however, “after achieving 100 percent of full quota” is the second most popular milestone, trailing only “managers decide for themselves.”

The most frequently used metrics to judge enablement's success around sales asset management include content views, downloads and modifications, which provide valuable insight into how much engagement is being driven among sales reps (who consume learning-oriented empowerment content) and buyers (who consume external, activation content). But when it comes to the reporting metrics that display enablement's organizational contributions, the focus shifts to leading indicators around how content utilization correlates with the progress of specific opportunities in the SFA system. This finding reinforces the importance of enablement's interlock with sales leaders and operations team members in efforts to drive rep and manager-level skills, knowledge and process abilities toward revenue-centric outcomes.

The Sirius Decision

Over the last few years, the value of the sales enablement function continues to increase, as shown by SiriusDecisions data collected in 2012, 2015 and 2017. Independent enablement organizations existed in 61 percent of organizations five years ago; today's 66 percent rate is an all-time high. Likewise, budgetary growth has always been strong – with 60 percent and 53 percent of companies indicating annual increases in the past – but it now stands at 74 percent of firms, which is the highest proportion ever seen. The reporting structure behind sales enablement reveals a significant shift into the sales organization and a downward trend in marketing ownership of the function: 32 percent of enablement teams answered to marketing in 2012, 24 percent in 2015, and only 10 percent today, reflecting the need for tight alignment and interlock between sales and sales enablement. All of these trends reflect enablement's status as a valuable and thriving component of modern sales enterprises.

This content is copyrighted by SiriusDecisions, Inc. and cannot be reproduced or shared without prior expressed written permission from SiriusDecisions, Inc.

SiriusDecisions helps business-to-business companies worldwide improve sales, marketing and product effectiveness. Management teams make more informed business decisions through access to our industry analysts, best practice research, benchmark data, peer networks, events and continuous learning courses. SiriusDecisions is based in Wilton, CT with offices in London, Montreal, San Francisco and Waltham, MA.

SiriusDecisions 

187 Danbury Road, Wilton, CT 06897
203.665.4000 fax 203.563.9260
siriusdecisions.com