

# What's Happening in Inside Sales in 2020

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As we settle into the deepest part of winter and even temperate climates are feeling a drop in the mercury, let's heat things up with a look into what we can expect in inside sales in 2020 and beyond.

First, expect companies to continue to embrace the role of inside sales. As the traditional sales force of field reps contracts, inside sales hires are growing at a rate of around 15% annually. We're also seeing greater hybridization as more field reps are spending almost half of their time selling remotely. Inside sales continues to prove to be a cost-effective and more easily scalable resource.

But from our perspective, the biggest change may not actually be a change at all, but rather a maturing of the market. A lot of trends are coming together to create a better environment for buyers and sellers working together remotely.

Specifically, technology continues to enrich remote selling, which, in turn, makes the customer experience more fulfilling and the vendor experience easier. In fact, technology and data-driven insight into customer needs may finally be bringing John Naisbitt's Megatrends vision for high tech, high touch into reality.

Let's briefly explore some areas that support the maturation of inside sales and high-tech, high-touch sales: technology, experience, data and integration.

### **Technology Supports Remote Selling**

It's fair to say that technology is taking the remoteness out of remote selling as it optimizes every aspect of the buyer's journey and the seller's outreach.

For buyers, faster Internet speeds allow for enriched content that they use to research products and services. Based on the buyer's demographics, firmographics and phase in the buying process, companies can easily tailor a rich library of whitepapers, case studies, videos and podcasts to specific buyer needs. Buyers see the right information, at the right time.

Video conferencing turns a phone call into a meeting that can bring together decision makers—even if they are spread out across the country or around the world.

Real-time product demonstrations and remote screen sharing enables buyers to interact with digital products online while discussing them with the inside sales rep. As augmented and virtual reality become more mainstream, reps will be able to demo an even wider range of products. Imagine taking a virtual walk through new office space or seeing a new suite of furniture shown virtually in your existing office.

As newer tools like click-to-call instantly put buyers in touch with reps, companies will rely increasingly on their force of well trained, highly professional inside sales reps to answer questions and shepherd buyer relationships through to close the sale.

From an inside sales rep's perspective, customer relationship management (CRM)

systems remain their most essential tool. CRM enables sales teams to collaborate, managers to stay on top of business and customer-facing employees in other departments to share one prospect/customer record. Mobile and cloud-based CRM are making customer data available from anywhere.

Most explosive, however, are the advances in artificial intelligence. While not poised to replace inside sales reps, AI can take on most repetitive tasks and routine administrative chores. Within the next two years, AI adoption is expected to grow more than 150% and boost sales productivity, especially in the areas of prospecting and outbound sales.

AI can provide inside sales with greater insight into a prospect's propensity and readiness to buy and even recommend the optimal time to make a phone call.

### **The High-Touch Experience**

Expanding and heightening the buying experience is no longer just talk. Technology is enabling companies to walk the walk. Take chatbots. These automated communication platforms employ natural language processing, semantic parsing and AI-based automatic planning. They are available 24/7 to answer buying questions, quickly resolve problems, provide assistance in emergencies and even find human help when necessary. This is a critical advancement as Millennials and Gen X move into executive and decision-making positions. These younger generations expect a high-touch experience that accommodates their preferences for on-demand collaboration.

And not only meetings and sales calls but conferences and tradeshows are becoming virtual events. As development and delivery costs decline, companies can support more specialized activities, and buyers enjoy even more highly specialized information being delivered to them.

But it's not all one-sided. Inside sales reps, too, are enjoying a better experience. The same technology that brings decision-makers in many locations together makes it easier for reps to keep the buying process moving forward. With one call, they can address the group, answer everyone's questions in one call and resolve many points of disagreement.

### **It's a Data-Driven World**

Customer data remains the coin of the realm. And better tools for managing and analyzing vast amounts of data to provide sales with greater knowledge about their customers and prospects. Sophisticated data insight is more than a competitive advantage. It's the most highly valued currency within sales departments.

Data-driven insight is helping inside sales better segment markets and target prospective customers with highly tailored solutions that speak directly to key issues, needs and pain points.

An initial conversation that once might have been a fishing expedition, in 2020 is an informed discussion of problems, solutions and next steps. Inside sales reps are equipped to engage customers better and close more sales than ever.

And it doesn't stop with the initial sale. With data-driven insight, inside sales reps can maintain and tailor the experience, ensure continuing satisfaction and build deeper relationships with every customer. This becomes critical to the bottom line as companies focus on customer retention and lifetime value. It also enables reps to drill more deeply into companies and turn an individual buyer relationship into a focus on buying groups throughout the organization.

Of course, with customer and prospect data comes responsibility. Expect ongoing efforts to protect data and comply with consumer consent laws, such as GDPR and California Consumer Privacy Act.

### **Better Integration Makes Everything Work**

In any field or industry, once advancements reach a critical mass and start to overwhelm the user, something needs to be done to make it more manageable. Finally, after years of seeing the technology stack grow increasingly unwieldy and big data explode to the point where many companies could effectively use only a small percentage of the data at hand, we're seeing advancements in integration.

Better integration of tools, platforms and data will continue to support the growing role of inside sales. And the remote sales experience will feel as natural and basic as the face-to-face meeting did in the 20th century...and probably better.

Using dashboards, advanced integration tools and sophisticated data management, an all-in-one customer data platform will give inside sales a more unified profile of each customer and prospect. In the hands of a skilled and highly professional inside

sales rep, each customer's experience becomes more unique, more useful and more rewarding.

In 2020, inside sales is more important than ever. Its cost-effectiveness and scalability were early benefits. Today, as the technology, data management and improved integration deliver an enhanced experience to buyer and seller alike, remote sales may actually surpass the traditional face-to-face sales call.

**For help meeting your sales goals, call us at +1 813-320-0500 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA), or contact us online.**

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