

# How AI Fits Into the Future of Inside Sales

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Sales has been slow to adopt artificial intelligence (AI). The argument, of course, is that sales is a people game. And that's true, but with inside sales proving the efficiency and effectiveness of virtual sales and automation, maybe it's time to dig a little deeper into AI.

After all, some maintain that you can either adopt, adapt and thrive or fall by the wayside.

As to the state of AI in inside sales:

- In 2019, Gartner expected that 30% of B2B companies would integrate AI into at least one of their sales processes within a year.

- A 2016 McKinsey piece for the Harvard Business Review reported that pioneers integrating AI into the sales process were already increasing their leads by more than 50%. Also, they are cutting call time and costs by as much as 70% and 60%, respectively.
- And if you're wondering whether your customers will embrace AI, then consider what Salesforce's State of Service Based on chatbot use, nearly two-thirds of consumers appear willing to accept AI as a way to improve customer engagement.

Chances are, if you use any automation or sophisticated sales tools, you're already using AI within your inside sales operations. But let's dig a little deeper to understand the role AI can (and will) play in inside sales so you can best prepare for the future.

### **Three Ways AI Helps Sales**

The best way to understand where AI functionality is being applied and where it's going in the future is to break it into general categories based on the benefits. And there are three distinct ways that AI can help inside sales:

1. **Administrative and automation applications** that help boost productivity.
2. **Big data processing and pattern matching** help managers understand the nature of markets and customers, including who buys and when.
3. **Advanced analytics** assist reps in being more proactive in their selling.

While AI uses logic and sophisticated algorithms to mimic human thinking, it's simply technology that relies on machine learning and the ability to process large data sets quickly. It's not a replacement for the human inside sales rep.

Properly used, however, it can turn your reps into super sellers, especially as the pattern matching and advanced analytics become more powerful and refined.

Let's explore the ways AI can help in more detail.

### **Administrative and Automation Applications**

One of the biggest problems with CRM and traditional sales tools is that they can take reps away from selling. Anywhere from 14.8% to 22% of their time goes to

administrative tasks.

With AI-driven applications, reps can regain much of that time because:

- Chatbots provide the first line of communication with prospective customers and only escalate queries to reps when a question is too complex and the prospect requests human intervention.
- AI helps automate the chore of updating CRM. It can also send out routine follow-up emails, screen phone calls and alert reps to essential calls.
- AI can help in processing sales orders.
- AI is ideal for repetitive tasks, research, and cleaning, culling and appending lead contact information.
- AI delivers on the promise of high tech/high touch. With technology managing 85% of the customer engagement, reps spend more time with customers and prospects when they need personal attention.
- Finally, AI can proactively alert reps when a customer should be called or when an upsell or cross-selling opportunity may exist.

## **Big Data Processing and Pattern Matching**

With AI, sales departments finally have tools to take advantage of the mountains of big data companies have been collecting and storing. In particular, the ability to recognize patterns in volumes of data can give reps new insights into their customers and markets:

- **Optimize Pricing**

Not all pricing is one-size-fits-all. It's often discounted based on time-sensitive offers, customer loyalty, frequency, and efforts to land a big fish. AI can optimize pricing based on history, industry and other variables; it can also ensure that a rep stays within bounds and doesn't give away margin.

- **Scale Account-Based Marketing**

Account-based selling can now scale. Instead of tracking leads by individuals, AI makes it possible to track and process accounts, defining target segments and

markets both horizontally and vertically.

- **Improve Sales Forecasts**

AI algorithms can improve sales forecasting based on historical data, leads and opportunities in the pipeline, and market or economic data. AI helps managers stay on top of their department and individual reps who may need help, as well as provide more accurate quarterly updates to their bosses. Intelligent forecasting gives reps insights into their pipeline, helping them decide where to spend their time and effort.

- **Identify Best Practices**

AI can spot patterns in top reps' selling strategies or time management and report these as best practices. Similarly, AI spots patterns in buying cycles to help reps know who to call and when.

## **Advanced Analytics**

Until relatively recently, analytics have been reactive, telling reps what happened and why. But with AI, analytics are becoming increasingly proactive. And it's not merely predictive; AI analytics is prescriptive.

This area of AI for sales will only become more robust in the future. Inside sales reps can look forward to AI making them increasingly efficient and effective. With AI recommending the best action, reps become super sellers.

But more importantly, the recommendations are based on historical data, customer patterns, industry trends and more, so AI is not pushing the hard sell. Instead, AI enables them to anticipate a real need and be prepared and ahead of the curve. And that's a win-win.

Selling may be a people game. Surprisingly, in the future, AI may be able to make it even more human.

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