How Inside Sales Wins with "Insider Insights"

Flipping your outbound script using behavioral data and verified deal information

This white paper is based on insight and analysis of over 250 companies using Priority Engine™ intent data for inside sales, including 15 in-depth interviews with highly successful inside sales managers.

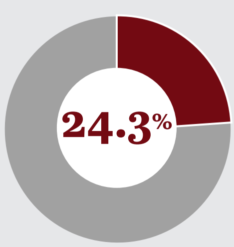
You're well aware that inside sales has become a critical component of B2B sales. Yet, according to TechTarget research, many inside sales teams are being held back by outdated methods that can easily fail in three crucial areas:

- **Completely missing opportunities at accounts that are truly interested in your solutions:** To hit volume-based KPIs, many inside sales teams cycle through long call lists without special attention to accounts that are entering a buy cycle.
- **"Worst practices" that cause you to ignore members of the buying team:** "Efficiency" mindsets can incentivize reps to focus on single personas or individuals. Many teams are still ignoring the fact that buying teams consist of multiple stakeholders, any one of which can be your way into a deal.
- **Under-leveraging better sources of insight:** Too many call scripts and email templates are still over-weighted on product features. New sources of insight can tell you a lot about real customer needs and pain points—then it's on you to change call prep and messaging.

Making inroads with insider information

Our research has uncovered key differences that distinguish the best inside sales organizations from the rest. Our key area of focus is how the winners are leveraging new sources of information. We interviewed inside sales leaders at 15 enterprise tech companies to find out exactly how better data is giving their teams a winning edge. What clearly jumped out was the difference in how the best teams had modified their legacy methods to take advantage of **account activity**, **buying teams**, and newly-available **selling hooks**. These teams are creating much more productive conversations, and they're setting more quality appointments. It all starts with three fundamentals:

It's time to change your approach



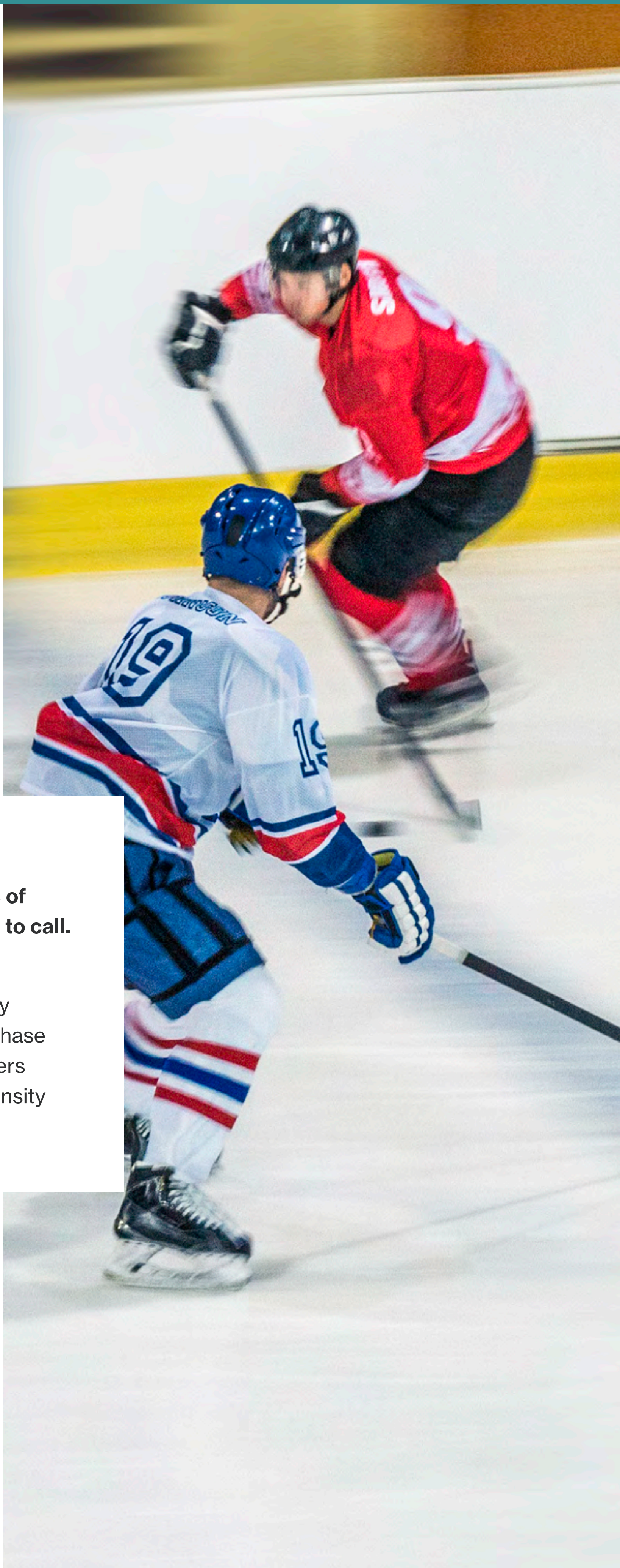
Only 24.3% of salespeople exceeded their quota in 2017.
—MarcWayshak.com

To get to the next level, inside sales leaders need to enable reps to prioritize active accounts and provide systems to personalize their outreach at scale.

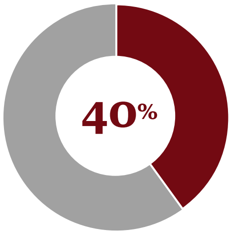
1. Prioritizing active accounts

Sales legend Ken Krogue has stated that as little as 36% of rep time is spent actually selling. The single most productive change we saw winning teams adopting is to re-prioritize accounts in order of their buying signals. While basic coverage of assigned lists is useful, focused coverage on accounts demonstrating buying behaviors is much more powerful.

In addition to 1st-party signals passed through lead-management systems, new 3rd-party sources of behavioral data reveal exactly who is entering a buy-cycle. Furthermore, the best providers can rank accounts for you based on this behavior. Top-performing teams can now easily move into a more productive approach, leaving low-productivity cold-calling to others.



Less time wasting, more selling



Sales reps can spend up to 40% of their time looking for somebody to call.
—Inside Sales.com

This wasted time can be massively reduced with sources of real purchase intent which reveal the active buyers researching your solutions, priority-ranked by the intensity of buying signals.

2. Targeting the right people

Without the right data sources, too many teams remain stuck between a rock and a hard place with little way out: They receive huge lists of names, qualified with nothing better than demographic and firmographic fit information. The best they can do is to reach out to everybody a little, or to prioritize based on some tribal persona-based approach. New data sources—in particular, real purchase intent insights—guide top-performing teams beyond account activities to identify the exact people doing buying research. Counter to persona-based approaches, our research shows that using these real people is the most successful way to penetrate the buying team.

But having the correct individuals alone is not enough. If a rep can't reach a particular person, winning teams have learned not to give up on the account. While long-standing research from Gartner/CEB has shown that on average there are at least 6 members in a typical buying group, too many teams still haven't modified their approach to properly activate around this.

Direct access to the active buyers and key influencers is important for at least two reasons:

- Very different from classical lead gen, it's now understood that when more members of a target account are engaged in buying behaviors—consumption of highly relevant purchase decision-support content—a deal is likely to be developing and the account should be prioritized.
- The availability of multiple active prospects means there are multiple entry points into these live deals. There is no longer a good reason to abandon an account without having engaged it.

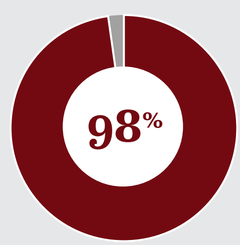
Those teams still locked into traditional lead-gen approaches remain prone to discounting additional valuable information. They may even feel pressure to ignore it altogether. SiriusDecisions calls this "second-lead syndrome." Instead of focusing their attention on truly active accounts, they may reflexively disposition valuable signals without realizing what they've missed.

3. Penetrating active accounts

Our research shows that behavioral data-driven teams shape their outreach very differently from those who remain lead or cold-calling based. When you get a lead, it's far too easy to fall into a pattern of believing the prospect knows you and wants your product. Likewise, in cold-calling, many teams fall into the rut of leading with "I think you need what I have to sell." According to Inc.'s Geoffrey James, product-centered pitches are nothing more

Freeze out cold calling

98% of cold calls don't result in an appointment. —Leap Job



Cold-calling is extremely inefficient and unproductive. But with sources of behavioral data available that reveal which accounts are ready to buy, you don't have to cold-call. Reps who used project intelligence and closely referenced the details of a prospect's purchase environment improved their appointment rates by up to 19x.

than an attempt to "force customers to mentally map to what you're selling." That's work that they're just not going to do, especially when they're not in a buying motion! The way out of this, according to James, is to "do your research" up-front. This is where leaders are really leveraging real purchase intent data to their advantage.

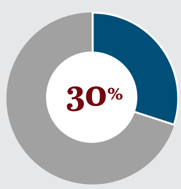
When a rep can open a conversation in terms of an active prospect's known pain points and interests, it changes the equation completely. Insights—such as the account's specific purchase drivers—allow reps to discuss their company's learnings from similar clients and then incorporate what they know about this particular account's issues and feature preferences into calls and emails. This makes messaging uniquely personalized. It creates meaningful value for the prospect. This is specifically the type of knowledge exchange that nearly three-quarters of buyers expressly desire from vendors doing outreach.

4 key data categories to leverage in outreach whenever possible

- **The installed environment:** When you have good install information, you can speak intelligently to similar reference cases, to additional advantages your solution can offer when used in parallel, and so on.
- **Known solution requirements:** With the best data sources, you can obtain very *specific* information about workloads and particular use cases that matter to the prospect more than others. You can use this to focus your pitch around what the buyer already cares about.
- **Specific buying criteria:** Each buyer has somewhat different priorities. The more you can learn about this specific case without having to ask, the more naturally you can align your value propositions to known buyer concerns.
- **Current competitive shortlist:** The best purchase intent data sources can even uncover competitive preferences at the account. This advanced intel provides the best teams with the ammunition they need to position a solution in its best light and to de-position effectively when required.

While a single call will rarely involve all four of these information categories—especially in the penetration phase—with proper enablement, reps can be ready to use each of them as hooks. Training should teach how to land with one and expand to others over the course of a discussion or several interactions.

The best reps use better data and intelligence



Top-performing reps use data and intelligence tools 30% more than average performers. —SalesLoft and TOPO

To incentivize reps to spend more time gathering intelligence, consider adjusting volume-based KPIs.

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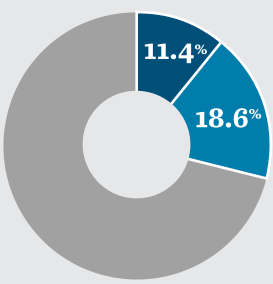
Purchase intent data in practice—Implementing the new, improved approach

In an ideal world, once you found a source of better 3rd-party data, reps would automatically incorporate it into their workflows. They'd immediately start personalizing their pitches and setting more, better appointments. In the real world, there's a lot getting in the way of this.

Purchase intent data helps more reps hit quota



Companies using purchase intent report 11.4% higher quota attainment that those not using purchase intent. This lift is second only to the use of sales cadence technology, which improves quota attainment by 18.6%.
—Inside Sales.com

Once you have a sales cadence technology in place, your next investment should be a provider of purchase intent to fuel that sales cadence technology.

Introducing the new data source

Before you organize a team-wide demo of how to use intent data to break into new accounts and accelerate deals, consider running a pilot with a select set of "champion" reps. Once they've demonstrated the link between personalized outreach and higher appointment rates and pipeline conversion, it will be easier to sell the data source and new methods to a wider team.

Strongly consider modified KPIs

Traditional, **volume-based KPIs** (number of dials, emails, LinkedIn touches) actually prevent reps from doing research and personalizing outreach. Worse still, there's a danger that reps might give up on "unresponsive" prospects, even though they are known to be actively researching solutions like yours. To be able to properly pursue active accounts at all, you must allow your reps to do so by modifying the rules they operate under.

By evolving towards more **outcome-based KPIs** (meetings set, meetings kept, qualified ops created, and closed-won business) in increments, you can assess the effectiveness of your change management as you go.

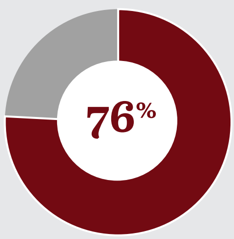
You can start this quite conservatively. Simply lowering the daily volume threshold may incentivize reps to absorb more information and use it to customize their outreach. For example, after introducing real purchase intent data to his team, one inside sales manager we spoke with then cut their daily call requirements in half. With little additional guidance, 50% of the reps continued to pursue the old call quota. **The other 50% of reps made fewer, more personalized calls and actually achieved higher appointment and show (meetings kept) rates.**

Modify email and call-script templates

As described above, real purchase intent data puts reps in position to create real hooks on their own—in implementation, our research shows that for many teams it's not that easy. It's actually pretty unusual for many of today's teams to use such insider information correctly. No prospect wants to hear "I know you are buying this" or "my data tells me exactly what you care about." No matter their accuracy, calls and emails must appear *natural* to the recipient. Prospects should be left thinking "wow, that's useful" and not "how the hell do you know that?"

Improve open rates with better insight

76% of sales emails are not opened. —TOPO



Personalization is critical to breaking through the inbox noise. The best sources of real intent data allow reps to personalize outreach by including particular account's issues and feature preferences into emails.

Our findings show that the best practice is to enable reps with email and call-script templates that contain small areas for them to customize based on the specific account's recent activity, purchase criteria, vendor interests, and pain-points. This way, you retain control of the overall tone of the interaction while delivering a significantly better level of relevant personalization.

Do reps need to be good writers?

"I don't think turning reps into writers is the most productive approach. For those roles, writing will probably never be a tier-1 priority trait or skill. A better approach is to **properly enable your front line.** With **intent data, templates,** and **basic coaching,** inside sales managers can empower reps to create effective, relevantly personalized emails at scale."

—Garrett Mann,
Director of Corporate Communications,
TechTarget

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Active prospects and confirmed projects are not “leads”

Remember that no matter how hot they are, **active prospects** exhibiting real purchase intent signals are different from the “leads” we all grew up with. They have not knowingly expressed an interest in what you want to sell. What you know is that they are actively indicating purchase intent. And because you have the data about their interests, you are in a position to engage them much more effectively. Our research shows that the teams that make the effort to engage properly are blowing away the numbers they used to get from relying on a combination of leads and cold-calling. The difference is that they are using better information to implement better, more customer-centric outreach. When you communicate relevant, valuable information to a prospect who is in a buyer’s journey, they engage and become receptive to hearing more from you.

As a uniquely rich purchase intent insight-based resource, **confirmed projects**—available from TechTarget as Qualified Sales Opportunities™—deserve a level of care well beyond old-school volume-based practices. Unlike a mere lead, these Qualified Sales Opportunities reports tell you a deal is really happening.

If you’re not on the shortlist for a confirmed deal, that means one of two things.

a) **They haven’t heard of you.**

b) **They have heard of you but don’t like you.**

In scenario (a), you have a real opportunity to present your product in light of their purchase criteria and fight for a spot on the shortlist.

In scenario (b), you can address the buyer’s concerns regarding your brand or product features, and reposition yourself according to their confirmed purchase criteria.

These are deals that are yours to win or lose. With the insider information you now have with Qualified Sales Opportunities, you’re in a position to at least have a real chance. This is a highly competitive situation and, our research shows, it’s often not appropriate to expect an average rep to adjust easily to the environment. Rather, we found the best teams allocate confirmed projects to a smaller group of more elite players. If reps cannot reach the confirmed insider, they still have access to other active prospects within the account with robust sources of intent data.

Caution: Before giving great insight to your reps...

No matter how good a data source, if it doesn’t fit in easily to reps’ workflows, it won’t be adopted. It’s amazing how common this kind of failure really is! Our research shows that while some teams can accept additional clicks or screens, most shy away from them. Wherever possible, it’s best to stick to already familiar actions and keep physical additions to a minimum.

TechTarget’s **Priority Engine** purchase intent solution integrates directly into everyday Salesforce.com views so reps can quickly and easily leverage insights specific to accounts and individuals from within their normal prep and outreach processes.

Better inside sales outcomes with integrated insight

As long as they can deliver pipeline effectively, inside sales teams will continue to be a crucial component for medium-to-high-value industries like B2B tech. But if you have growing numbers of reps aggressively calling into your TAM, then so will your competitors. For many companies, effectiveness has already begun to decline and they are struggling to adjust. The answer lies in a better enablement foundation, one capable of delivering more meaningful, more differentiating outreach.

To differentiate your outreach, boost your appointment rates, and defeat your competition, your team needs to do things differently—from the first words of an email or call all the way to close and beyond. New sources of real purchase intent insight are making relevant personalization possible within your inside sales organization, as long as your team is prepared to use them wisely.

In addition to integrating account-level insight into rep workflows, to encourage the team behaviors now proving to fuel better business outcomes, inside sales leaders should ensure the provisioning of more flexible and customizable email and call-script templates and strongly consider giving more weight to results-based KPIs.

To learn more about how behavioral intent data, including confirmed project insights, can set up inside sales teams for a productivity sea-change, watch this webinar about aligning and enabling your SDRs for better B2B marketing and sales.

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Additional resources for inside sales leaders

Real purchase intent is the foundation necessary for massive inside sales productivity improvements. It drives efficiency by prioritizing accounts and contacts. It drives effectiveness by providing all the key leverage points necessary for better conversion via email and phone. Once you've got the foundation in place, every improvement you make on top of it will work better. Here are 7 additional resources we recommend as you work to build the best inside sales practice ever!

Effectiveness and efficiency

- **What Salesforce Has Learned About Sales Development**—Salesforce
  This article gives guidance on structuring your inside sales team, finding and molding new talent, and giving reps the tools they need to succeed.
- **The Truth Behind Successful Sales Cadences**—InsideSales.com
  This research paper identifies best practice principles that should be utilized to maximize a rep's ability to successfully contact and qualify their prospects.
- **Best Practices of Top Performing Sales Reps**—SalesLoft and TOPO
  This research report looks at how sales reps prioritize their time, what tools they use, and which behaviors distinguish top performers from average performers.
- **The Essential Guide to Revenue Efficiency** —Outreach
  Use this guide to learn how to boost revenue efficiency, increase sales, and retain and expand accounts to scale your business.

Tools and tactics

- **The Sales Leader's Guide to Email Subject Lines That Get Replies**—Outreach
  Download this useful guide for actionable tips and example subject lines.
- **The Ultimate Video Book: Selling with Video**—Vidyard
  This video-book makes a compelling case for why sales team should be using video to stand out, personalize outreach, and close more deals.
- **How to Write Emails B2B Tech Buyers Actually Want to Read**—TechTarget
  Based on millions of emails sent over 20 years to tech buyers, this article offers five email best practices to help vendors craft emails that will drive higher response.

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About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

TechTarget has offices in Boston, London, Munich, Paris, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney.

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