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Creating a Productivity Platform to Improve Sales for High-tech Companies

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Abstract: Sales results usually are the favored scorecard for analyzing any high-tech supplier's business success, but improving sales figures is harder than ever in rapidly changing business conditions. Hardware and software selling cycles are getting longer and more complex, despite the popularity of e-commerce and other forms of channel disintermediation. High-tech sales organizations need better links to teammates, as well as to data and processes essential to the selling process. That puts a premium on identifying and using tools that form the basis of a productivity platform to help sales teams close more business faster and more efficiently.

As Selling Cycles Stretch and Become More Complex, Sales Teams Need a Productivity Platform

Selling cycles for computer hardware, components, software-as-a-service, and semiconductors have always been lengthier and more complex than in many other industries, especially as multi-tiered distribution became the standard for selling, fulfillment, and support. Even as selling technology goods became more efficient due to the collapse of sales channels into a more direct model, technology firms still struggled with a complex sales process marked by the increased involvement of new sales influencers in both technology and business circles.

Many other factors have combined to add more complexity and urgency to the high-tech sales cycle. One obvious factor is the dramatic slowdown in global demand for many technology products in the 2022-2023 timeframe that resulted in layoffs and tighter budgets. Additionally, the proliferation of tools and applications across the enterprise for sales, service, marketing, and support created more complexity and spurred the need for even more collaboration across teams.

Traditional manual processes need to become more automated, especially as high-tech sales organizations struggle to fill key positions to support every aspect of the sales process.

Of course, some traditional obstacles to the sales process still remain, such as challenges in getting actual face time with all members of an organization's buying committee and improving the customer experience for buyers of high-tech products. High-tech companies also are challenged in their selling efforts by the increased need to ensure that their products integrate into non-IT systems, such as process control, robotics, SCADA, public safety, third-party logistics, and more.

Finally, the fragmented nature of responsibility and authority for different aspects of high-tech sales makes it difficult for organizations to achieve the tight alignment and collaboration among finance, legal, marketing, fulfillment, service/support, and compliance teams. Of course, this also must be done at a time when customers have become far more particular in their preferred relationships with sellers, requiring a "trusted advisor" instead of a traditional selling partner.

Of course, getting all of this done requires resources—but as mentioned earlier, hiring more personnel involved in sales and related functions isn't the solution. Instead, organizations need to turn to automated solutions and

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processes to help them become more efficient. Research from TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group points out the pressing need for organizations to automate traditionally routine tasks and CRM management (see Figure 1).¹ This is essential in order to help high-tech suppliers focus their tightening resources on higher-value sales process activities. This level of automation also is key to improving cross-department collaboration and team selling.

Figure 1. Desired Outcomes and Improvements of Sales, CRM, and Lead Management



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Clearly, first-generation collaboration solutions ("Collaboration 1.0") are no longer sufficient to overcome these challenges. The new reality is that organizations need to transition away from legacy sales "effectiveness" processes (selling more, regardless of how long it takes or how much must be invested) and fixate instead on sales "efficiency," where high-tech companies can drive sales with less friction, faster, and more profitably.

To do this, it's clear that new tools are necessary to achieve a quantum leap in sales process efficiency. It is essential that organizations commit to the transition from Collaboration 1.0 to a true productivity platform that connects conversation, automation, and data into a single framework.

¹ Source: Enterprise Strategy Complete Survey Results, *Customer Experience Trends*, to be published.

Slack Helps Sales Teams Accelerate Processes and Work Together More Efficiently

Improving sales process efficiency has been aided substantially through the communications capabilities of a market-leading solution like Slack. Today's breakneck pace of the high-technology industry has prompted Slack to take its capabilities even further, by combining automation, knowledge, and connection in a single platform. For the high-technology industry looking to maximize every single sales resource, Slack delivers the benefits of a multifaceted, agile, extensible, and secure productivity platform.

As a true productivity platform for sales organizations, Slack helps high-tech companies wade through complex and interdependent sales processes to close deals quickly, improve productivity, and build longer-term, more satisfying relationships with customers. Slack is an efficient, highly leverageable productivity platform because it enables three key capabilities:

- Accelerate work with workflow automation, which doesn't require programming skills to maximize capabilities. Additionally, it brings in pre-built, no-code integrations to further speed the collaborative sales process.
- Search and share insights from any source, so they are instantly available in sales workflows.
- Connect and engage with anyone involved in the sales process, including outside customers or partners, using flexible tools that promote the real-time decision-making essential to productivity.

Slack's open, extensible platform is well suited for the highly customized requirements of very complex sales processes in industries such as high-tech product sales. It also comes with more than 2,600 ready-to-go partner applications, allowing an organization to bring all essential sales apps into a single place.

Slack is ideal for automating low value tasks, such as deal support requests, managerial approval for price exceptions, or automated alerts when a deal reaches a certain stage. This makes sales teams more efficient by giving them more time to sell, as well as more time to undertake activities that enhance the client relationship.

In addition, Slack facilitates the connections and integration of processes, data, and teams into a single, cohesive approach that shortens the selling cycle, keeps pipelines filled, and promotes engagement with key customer stakeholders.

Slack also promotes flexibility by supporting asynchronous work, a must-have for both sellers and buyers in today's business climate of working anywhere at any time. Shared, searchable, customized information can be accessed at any particular point in the selling process, optimizing the sales process for real-time decision making and approvals. Additionally, Slack enables fast, easy onboarding for new members of the sales team, resulting in fast time to productivity.

Slack's tight integration with Sales Cloud gives sales teams a richer, 360-degree view of all customer-related issues in order to streamline the sales process and close sales more efficiently. This integration helps bring deal context into workflows in order to drive faster and more efficient team selling. Sales teams reap substantial benefits by accessing and leveraging deep and broad customer data from Sales Cloud and Salesforce Customer 360 directly from Slack. This integration allows sales reps to view data in real-world context, enriching their team communications and deal collaborations, accessing information in one place. Updates made by customer data in Slack are automatically pushed back to Sales Cloud in real time.

As an agile, secure, and scalable platform, Slack helps sales teams become more efficient and productive, taking them beyond simple communication and collaboration to a streamlined sales process for improved productivity.

Key Use Cases for Slack in Sales Acceleration

In order to optimize sales process efficiency, improve profitability, and create a more nimble, opportunistic sales organization, high-tech product companies can use Slack in multiple ways to accelerate the sales process. These use cases include:

1. **Improving sales productivity and deal acceleration with automation.** By bringing together all data, people, tools, and processes into a single place for common access and collaboration, high-tech companies can shorten the time from initial contact to revenue recognition. This improved deal flow not only generates more sales per team member but can get sales teams and their support personnel back into a proactive sales posture. This results in greater profitability, improved customer relationships, and a more sustainable competitive position. Automating low-level tasks and even partly automating complex tasks like approvals helps keep the sales team focused on closing deals faster.
2. **Streamlining integration across all sales tools and applications.** The good news is that high-sales teams have more tools than ever at their disposal throughout the entire sales process, and those sales often require data from key back-office applications and resources, such as customer relationship management, document management, and contract administration. The bad news is that having all those additional applications available for the sales process only helps if they are tightly, securely integrated. One of the key advantages of Slack in sales environments is its native integration with Sales Cloud, a key asset for managing a high-tech organization's relationship with its clients over the lifetime of the sales process. With Sales Cloud and Slack, sales reps can bring rich customer data and business insights into their workflows in order to accelerate deals, improve pipeline accuracy, and centralize team selling.
3. **Fostering team selling across departments.** High-tech products and services can be complex and time consuming to sell, usually requiring input from multiple stakeholders. Email and legacy sales tools often are too slow and sap productivity, bogging down workflows and stretching out the approval process—often resulting in a degraded customer experience. This means account teams need a more efficient way to work seamlessly with finance, legal, customer success, compliance, fulfillment, and engineering teams. By linking disparate functions and stakeholders into one place—a channel—sales personnel can share and receive relevant information in real time in order to reduce redundancies and confusion and improve communications. The Slack/Sales Cloud integration is an important differentiator from other approaches to improve contextual information exchange for, with, and about customers.

Of course, there are a number of relevant use cases where using Slack as a sales process productivity platform pays both immediate and long-term dividends, such as pricing and contract term approvals; sales pipeline and fulfillment management; and onboarding of new reps, sales partners, and other sales-related personnel.

Conclusion

Technology industry sales teams need the help and support of all related functions—from sales operations and legal to marketing and fulfillment—to shorten the sales cycle and drive more profitable transactions. As the sales processes for cutting-edge technology products and services become more complex and lengthier, sales teams must go beyond simple collaboration to a multifaceted, tightly integrated set of digital processes.

Slack is a proven way to help sales organizations—especially in such complex and rapidly changing industries as high-tech—sell as a team more effectively *and efficiently*. It uses channels, tools, and integrations to bring automation, knowledge, and connection together on a single platform to drive sales team productivity and efficiency.

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