State of Work Report '23
Sales trends
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Introduction

The world of work has undergone a seismic shift over the past few years. In 2019, when we last reported on the State of Work, the biggest challenge sales teams faced was misalignment. Fast-forward to today, and the picture is vastly different: a pandemic disrupted the way we work and an economic downturn is forcing everyone to improve performance with fewer resources.

Sales teams in particular are feeling the squeeze. In the face of these macroeconomic headwinds, customers are tightening their belts and scrutinizing every expense, putting even more pressure on the companies that sell to them.

In our latest State of Work report, we set out to examine how sales teams can drive productivity in today’s turbulent environment. Our findings revealed that most sales teams are missing out on crucial opportunities to embrace more progressive, efficient ways of working. They’re not leveraging the potential of automation and artificial intelligence to transform their work, and it’s time for that to change.
Methodology

Slack, a Salesforce company, conducted this global survey in partnership with the research firm Qualtrics between February 24 and March 21, 2023. The total sample size of sales professionals was 2,216 desk workers and executives across a range of industries in the following countries: United States, Australia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, India, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. The groups surveyed included office-based workers, remote workers, and workers adopting a hybrid model. The survey did not target Slack employees or customers.

In this report, we refer to the following respondent groups:

**Executives and leaders**: Presidents, partners, C-suite

**Managers**: People managers, ranging from team leads to VP-level leads

**Desk workers**: Independent contributors

The survey questions were designed to capture a wide range of data, including the challenges sales teams face, their productivity metrics, their use of automation and AI, and their views on employee experiences and wellness.
Sales leaders need to rethink productivity metrics

The sales industry is notorious for equating productivity and performance with numbers. But which are the right numbers to focus on? Sales leaders and workers find themselves at odds over how to measure productivity.

According to the survey, 26% of sales executives primarily rely on visibility metrics such as hours spent in the office or online, the number of emails sent and lines of code written. However, 27% of sales workers express a desire to be measured based on the achievement of team KPIs and goals.

This discrepancy in measurement preferences has led to an increase in performative work, a phenomenon where sales workers spend an average of 31% of their time appearing productive without necessarily contributing to their team or company goals. The result? More burnout and less actual productivity.

Pressure to appear constantly available also adds to this issue. A staggering 55% of sales workers feel pressure to respond to messages quickly, even if they’re sent after standard working hours. Similarly, 46% of sales workers feel the need to regularly demonstrate their productivity to colleagues and managers.

Determining the right mix of inputs and outputs is one of the biggest obstacles many organizations face when it comes to properly measuring the productivity that’s so essential to navigating choppy economic waters.
Anyone can game a single metric, so you must consider a blend of leading and lagging indicators. The lagging indicator is what happened. It’s ‘reading the news,’ and if you look at it in isolation, it’s not very helpful—whereas leading indicators give you a proactive look at the speed and progress the company is making.

Prashanth Chandrasekar
CEO, Stack Overflow

Sales leaders need to rethink their approach to productivity metrics. A more balanced and holistic view of productivity, one that takes into account both inputs (like hours worked) and outputs (like goals achieved), could be the key to fostering a more productive and less stressful work environment.
Sales organizations stand to benefit the most from automation and AI

In the modern sales landscape, many daily tasks are repetitive and transactional. These tasks, while necessary, can consume a significant portion of a salesperson’s time that could be better spent nurturing customer relationships or executing strategic initiatives. This is where automation and AI come into play.

Only 36% of sales workers are currently utilizing automated processes, the lowest of all teams within an organization. However, for those who have embraced automation, the benefits are clear: 84% of these workers report that automation has had a positive effect on their productivity.

On average, sales workers who leverage automated processes save an impressive 3.4 hours per week.

That’s nearly a half-day’s work that can be repurposed toward more strategic tasks, or as we like to put it, enough time saved to start your weekend early on Friday!
The benefits of automation extend beyond just time savings. A majority (63%) of sales workers say the greatest advantage of automation is its ability to help them achieve more in less time with fewer resources. This increased efficiency is crucial when many organizations are facing budget constraints and pressure to perform.

Meanwhile, only 21% of sales workers are currently utilizing AI in their work, the lowest of all teams within an organization. AI has the potential to further transform the sales industry, offering advantages such as predictive analysis, lead identification and personalized customer interactions. By integrating AI into their workflows, sales teams can not only improve their efficiency but also enhance their customers’ experiences.

Close deals faster with Slack and Sales Cloud

Sales teams are under increased pressure to drive more revenue while still meeting high customer expectations. The challenge is sales teams are often bogged down with unrelated tasks like getting approvals, finding internal experts and switching between apps. Salesforce’s State of Sales report shows that sales reps now spend more than 70% of their time on non-selling tasks.

This is where automation and integrations come in. Slack Sales Elevate, a new solution built on our next-generation platform, brings real-time CRM data, powered by Sales Cloud, directly into Slack. It gives sales teams quick access to the right people, teams and data, empowering them to focus on the work that matters most: helping customers and closing deals.
## Most common sales processes that get automated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alerts (e.g. from third-party integrations to your main workspace)</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending messages to colleagues</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work orders and requests</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service (e.g. answers to frequently asked questions)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expense approvals</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File sharing and storage</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for time off</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onboarding (e.g. automating access to certain tools and documents to new hires)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique automations to make core tasks easier (e.g. automating simple tasks that are tedious or repetitive specific to my job)</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*BASE: SALES DESK WORKERS*
Drive sales productivity by improving employee experiences

Our survey also found that productivity and wellness are not mutually exclusive. Job satisfaction, engagement and mental wellness are top factors that contribute to productivity. Employees must be well to deliver results.

According to our survey, a striking 83% of sales workers say that feeling happy and engaged with their organization would enhance their productivity. Similarly, 34% of sales workers say that maintaining motivation was their primary challenge to productivity.

Other notable barriers include spending too much time in meetings and email (30%), and 42% believe that their meetings could be eliminated without causing any adverse problems. This suggests that there are opportunities to improve meeting efficacy by encouraging asynchronous work and being more thoughtful before scheduling a meeting.
# Biggest barriers to productivity among sales workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty staying focused</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble staying motivated</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coordinating or communicating with colleagues at work</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending too much time in meetings and email</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching between multiple apps or tools to get the job done (e.g. G-Suite, Microsoft, Zoom, etc.)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive cost-cutting measures</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity over my priorities</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the information or context I need to move work forward</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Boosting wellness and job satisfaction in the workplace is not about piling on more perks, but rather about providing employees with more flexibility in when and how they work. A significant number of desk workers (41%) report feeling more productive when they’re able to work during the hours they choose. More than half say that the most effective way employers can improve their productivity is by allowing flexible work schedules.

Implementing flexible work schedules requires thoughtful planning—some activities might be more productive in person. For instance, 45% of sales employees say they feel more productive brainstorming in the office versus remotely, and 40% feel more productive making group decisions in the office compared with when they’re working remotely. Furthermore, 46% of employees feel a stronger sense of community in the office, and 39% find short conversations easier to have in the office compared with remote settings.

On the other hand, workers say tasks such as deep focus work (38%), meetings (25%), and shallow work (20%) can be more productive in remote settings.

Interestingly, 74% of employees report that they’re more productive when their immediate team is in the office at the same time. To enhance the employee experience, companies should consider experimenting with concepts like anchor days, hybrid work models, designated meeting-free days and asynchronous work processes.
Top ways sales leaders can support productivity

- No-meaning days: 17%
- Requiring employees to be in the office every day or most days when possible: 12%
- Flexible work schedules: 54%
- Flexible location: 35%
- Tracking activity metrics (e.g. time spent at work, emails sent, etc.): 16%
- Empowering us to automate work processes with low- or no-code tools: 13%
- Employee resource groups (e.g. women’s employee resource group): 9%
- Encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work: 28%
- Providing unique workplace benefits (e.g. lunch, snacks, games, etc.): 33%
- Making improvements to the workplace (e.g. more meeting rooms, quiet areas, etc.): 32%

Base: Sales Desk Workers
The takeaway

It’s clear that the traditional approach to sales productivity isn’t working as well as it could. By rethinking productivity metrics, embracing automation and AI, and focusing on improving employee experiences, sales organizations can unlock new levels of performance.

The future of sales productivity lies in three key areas:

- **Sales leaders need to shift their focus to a blend of inputs and outputs.** This means paying attention to the resources and efforts that go into making a sale, in addition to the final result. It’s about viewing the process holistically and recognizing the value each step brings to the overall outcome.

- **Keeping up with technology isn’t optional.** Sales leaders should adopt automated workflows and start exploring ways to utilize generative AI now. Automation can streamline processes, reduce errors and free up valuable time for sales teams to focus on more strategic tasks. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence offers exciting possibilities for predictive analytics, personalized customer interactions and more.

- **Creativity is key when it comes to balancing flexible work schedules with in-person work.** In the modern workplace, employees value flexibility highly. Certain tasks are more productive in an office setting, while others are best done remotely.

Ultimately, the key to driving sales productivity lies in being open to change and willing to adapt. The potential benefits in terms of increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall business performance are too significant to ignore.
Slack can help

As a sales leader, you don’t have to navigate the future alone. Slack for Sales is a powerful productivity platform that can help you unlock the full potential of your sales teams in three key ways:

- **Automate admin to focus on selling.** Simplify and automate low-level admin tasks with no-code workflows or quick custom apps. Give reps more time to sell and deliver to customers by scaling common sales processes like approvals, and integrate your favorite sales tools to cut down time on context switching.

- **Close more deals as a team.** Close more deals faster by bringing reps and cross-functional partners together in one central place: Slack channels. Supercharge Slack with Sales Cloud and integrate your favorite sales tools to centralize your most critical processes.

- **Connect with customers to win.** Grow your accounts and maximize customer loyalty by bringing reps closer to customers in Slack Connect channels, where teams can build stronger, more direct relationships, act on expansion opportunities in real time and deliver customer value faster.

Learn more about Slack for Sales or contact our sales team for more information.
About Slack

Slack is on a mission to make people’s working lives simpler, more pleasant and more productive. It is the productivity platform for customer companies that improves performance by empowering everyone with no-code automation, making search and knowledge sharing seamless, and keeping teams connected and engaged as they move work forward together. As part of Salesforce, Slack is deeply integrated into the Salesforce Customer 360, supercharging productivity across sales, service and marketing teams. To learn more and get started with Slack for free, visit slack.com or connect with us @SlackHQ.

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