

Gartner for Sales

CSO Update

**The new B2B buying journey and its
implication for sales**

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Gartner®

An inescapable evolution

If I were to sum up the single biggest challenge we hear most often from today's chief sales officers (CSOs), it would be this:

“How do we sell our complex solutions to increasingly demanding customers in order to meet rising organizational growth goals?”

Essentially, it's the entire CSO job in a single question.

Of course, finding an answer isn't nearly as easy as articulating the question. But that doesn't stop many heads of sales from trying, exhorting their teams to, “Work harder!” or “Work smarter!” Or the sales classic, “You need to be hungrier!”

Still others will lean on worn chestnuts like, “You need to spend more time with customers!” or sales leaders' perennial favorite, “You have to deliver more value!” (which typically translates to, “Talk more about how great our stuff is!”).

The problem with these rapid-fire responses to underperformance, however, is they each represent a **different-in-degree selling solution** for what Gartner research repeatedly demonstrates to be a **different-in-kind buying reality**. As business-to-business (B2B) buying behavior rapidly changes, traditional sales approaches — no matter how well executed — will dramatically underachieve.

This rising tension between old-world selling and new-world buying naturally leaves CSOs asking really tough questions about data, analytics, strategy, role specialization and deal qualifications as they seek to adapt their sales organizations to today's very different commercial landscape. For CSOs to deliver on constantly rising growth goals, however, they can't simply get better and better at skills that matter less and less.



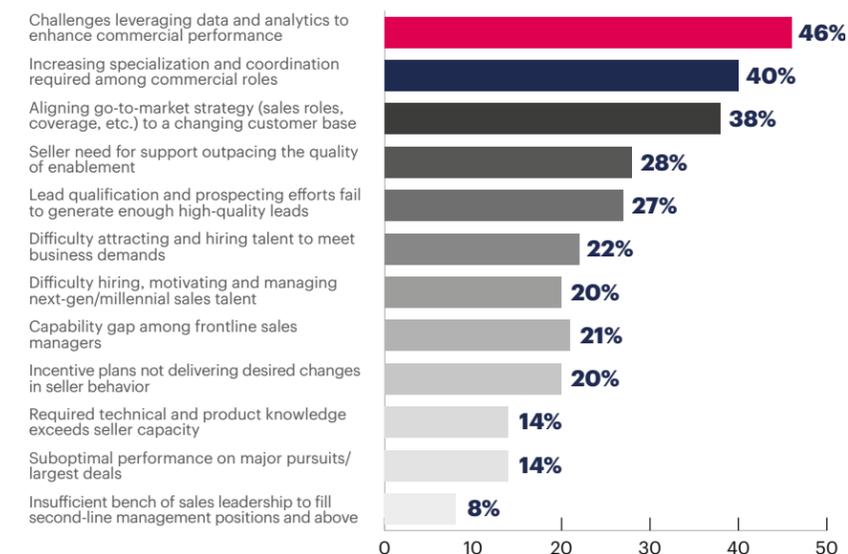
For CSOs to deliver on constantly rising growth goals, they can't simply get better and better at skills that matter less and less.

This is exactly where **Gartner** comes in. We study how the world of B2B buying and selling is changing, and what exactly those changes mean — both strategically and tactically — for sales leaders and their teams.

To get caught up and positioned for what's next, join us on the journey of adapting to this inescapable evolution.

Top of mind for today's CSOs

Compared to three years ago, where are you looking for additional help from Gartner?



n = 59 CSOs
Source: Gartner

The impact of high-quality information abundance

We've examined the impact of information abundance on B2B selling for several years — often captured by customers' ability to significantly delay in-person sales interactions as a result.

As suppliers' content marketing strategies continue to evolve, however, today's customers have access not only to more information, but to more *high-quality* information than ever before. As a result, customers find themselves less empowered than actually *overwhelmed* simply by the need to prioritize and deconflict all of those competing perspectives.

Gartner research shows that the sales reps most likely to win in this world are far less focused on demonstrating personal expertise by dumping yet even more information into customer interactions, and far more focused on helping customers sort through information already available — acting as a kind of "information connector" to provide the frameworks and tools customers desperately need to efficiently organize and align their thinking.

The reason this new information curation role matters so much stems from its direct impact on driving purchase ease, an outcome that customers will reward with bigger, higher-value deals accompanied by far less purchase regret.

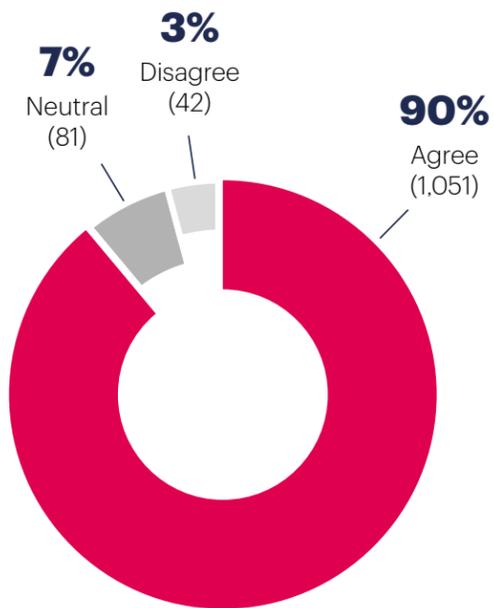
In fact, providing customers with information specifically designed to help them advance their purchase has the single biggest impact on driving deal quality that we've ever documented in all of our research.

Change in likelihood of high-value, low-regret deal



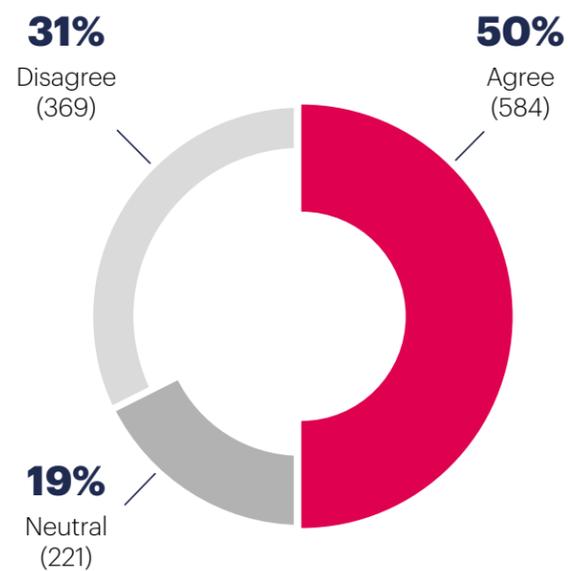
n = 135
Source: Gartner

"The information we encountered as part of this purchase decision was generally of high quality."



n = 1,174
Source: Gartner Sales 2019 B2B Buyer Survey

"The amount of trustworthy information we encountered as part of this purchase was overwhelming."



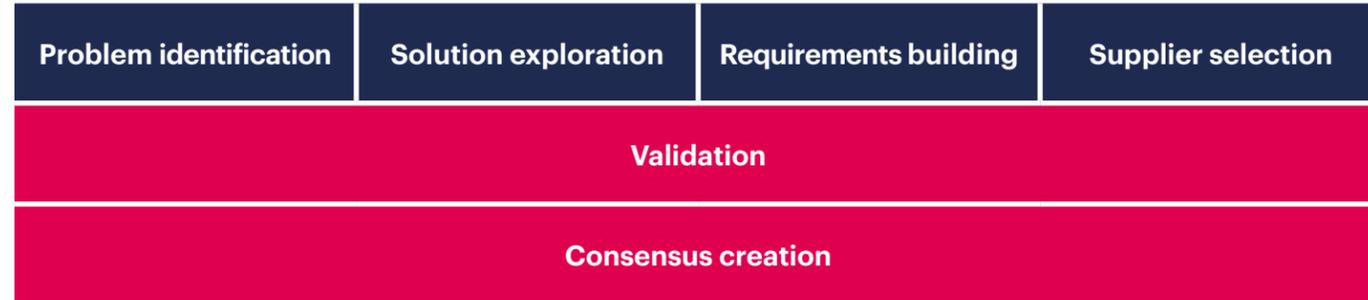
n = 1,174
Source: Gartner Sales 2019 B2B Buyer Survey



B2B buying isn't linear

To understand how to best help customers advance through a complex purchase, Gartner research identified six B2B buying “jobs” that customers must complete to their satisfaction in order to successfully finalize an actual purchase.

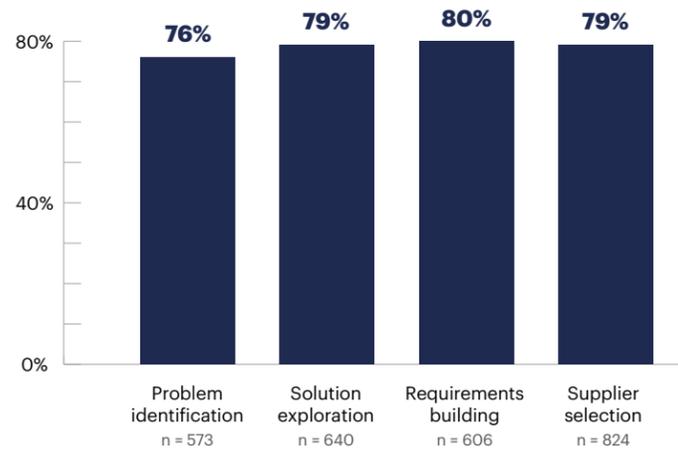
B2B buying jobs



Source: Gartner

However, our customer surveys also tell us that B2B buying doesn't play out in any kind of predictable, linear order. Instead, customers engage in what we might call “looping” across a typical B2B purchase, revisiting each of those six buying jobs at least once.

Proportion of buying groups revisiting given buying tasks at least once



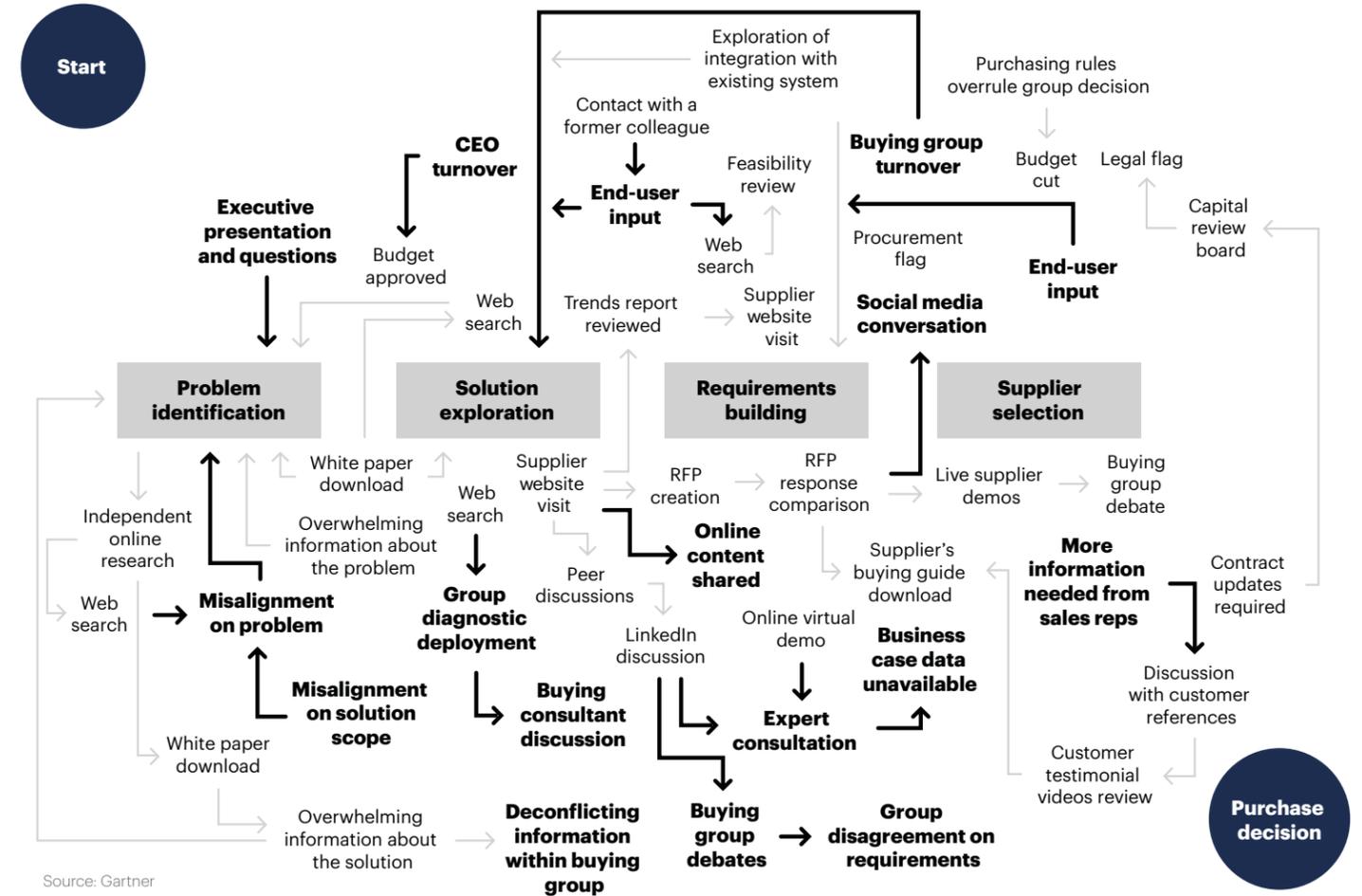
Source: Gartner

The B2B buying journey

Buying jobs don't happen sequentially but more or less simultaneously. And if we were to map out a real B2B buying journey, it would look a lot less like a step-by-step linear process and lot more like a big bowl of spaghetti.

Every one of these moments is a potential driver of looping, revisiting or re-evaluation. As a result, customers are trapped repeating each job over and over until all six are locked in simultaneously.

In that respect, B2B buying is far less about progressing through a funnel and far more about completing a diverse set of tasks. And the actual purchase decision doesn't happen until all six tasks are considered complete at the same time.



Source: Gartner

When we adopt a jobs perspective, we're able to better appreciate what individual sellers are up against selling into this complex buying reality every single day — if for no other reason than the simple impossibility of actually being present in all these places at exactly the right time, for all the deals they're doing. This is especially true when the vast majority of this activity happens “over the horizon” and behind closed doors.

If our ultimate goal as a supplier organization is to help each and every customer successfully land in an actual purchase decision, then CSOs will have to figure out how to **materially simplify** B2B buying in a world where individual intervention is insufficient on its own.

Three implications of today's B2B buying behavior

1.

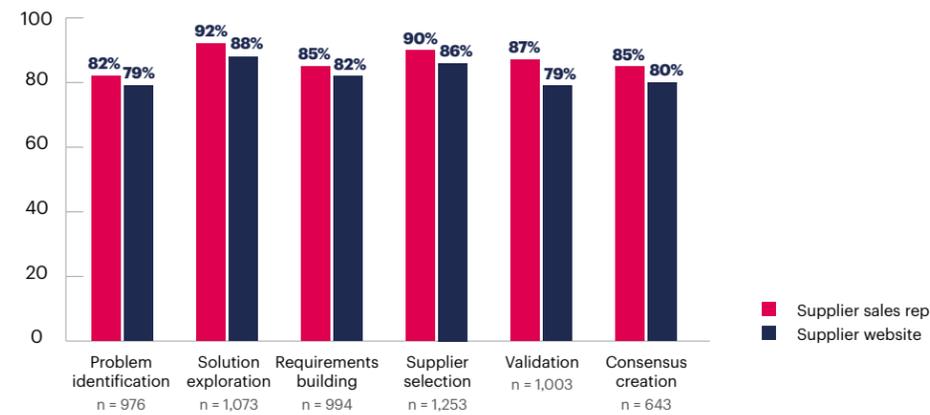
Your reps are a channel to customers, not *the* channel

When we examined whether some jobs are better supported through an in-person sales interaction and others through online channels, we found that customers demonstrated no particular preference for one channel over another when completing any of the six buying jobs. Instead, they are largely **channel-agnostic** when seeking the information they need to get a job done.

As a result, sales reps are no longer *the* channel to customers, but simply *a* channel, and **alignment across in-person and digital channels** is crucial for supporting customers in the way they actually buy.

Helping B2B buyers buy isn't a sales problem, it's an **information** problem. And CSOs looking to drive growth will solve first for information quality rather than individual skill.

Proportion of buyers who used sales reps vs. website to complete a job



Source: Gartner

2.

Your pipeline is lying to you

Most sales organizations organize activity around a linear pipeline, seeking to move opportunities from one stage to the next in a logical, linear order.

For customers, however, purchase progress is far better defined in terms of **job completion** rather than **stage progression**.

As a result, while pipeline reviews might indicate a preponderance of opportunities stuck in sales Stage 5, for example, there is no way of knowing through a linear, supplier-centric sales funnel where exactly customers are truly struggling to make progress in any given deal.

This misalignment between sales model design and underlying purchase reality easily leads to potentially costly misdiagnoses of both sales rep shortcomings and

 **Conflating job completion with sales progression leads CSOs to solve for sales problems they ultimately may not have and to easily overlook ones they actually do.**

best-bet interventions. Conflating job completion with sales progression leads CSOs to solve for sales problems they ultimately may not have and to easily overlook ones they actually do.



Source: Gartner

3.

You need to rewire sales and marketing

Most sales and marketing teams are organized in **serial** fashion: Marketing is charged with generating and nurturing demand early through digital channels before handing off the most qualified of opportunities to sales for in-person pursuit. First marketing, then sales. First digital, then in-person.

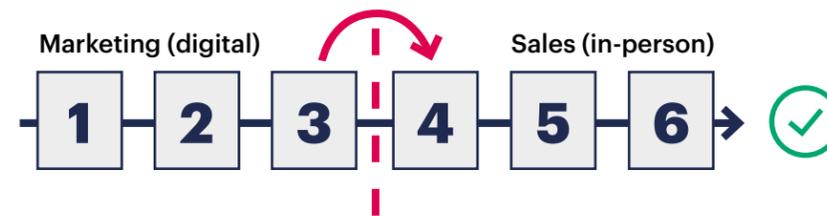
Gartner research clearly indicates, however, that customers don't buy in a linear fashion. Rather, they use both digital and in-person channels with near equal frequency to complete each of the six B2B buying jobs more or less simultaneously.

As a result, in today's world of B2B buying, **there is no handoff** from marketing to sales (or digital to in-person). It's a parallel process, not a serial one.

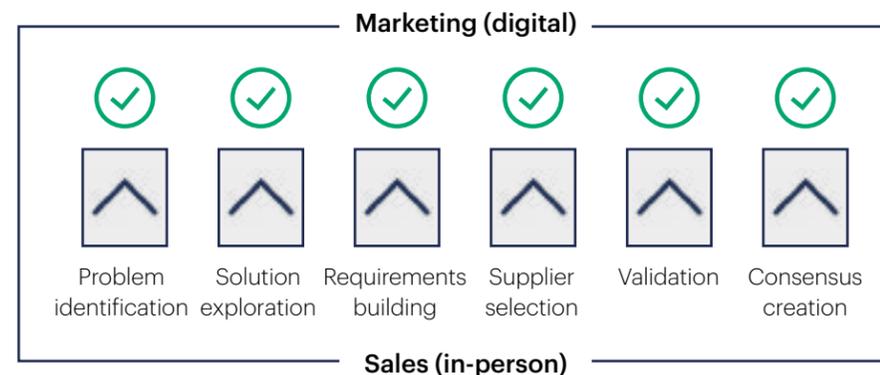
To win in this world, CSOs (and their marketing counterparts) must realign both organizational structure and functional activity to more closely map to actual buying behavior, creating a **parallel commercial organization** rather than a serial one.

At the very least, the best companies will ensure tight **alignment of information** across multiple channels to guarantee both consistency and maximum support for buying jobs.

The serial commercial organization



The parallel commercial organization



Source: Gartner

Get involved and get your answers

Benchmark your sales force

We've just launched our latest powerful survey to identify the specific rep behaviors most associated with deal success.

If there was one assessment to deploy to your reps, it would be this one. The assessment will specifically test seller behaviors/mindsets related to three areas:

- **Customer confidence:** Are your sellers able to provide customers with the information they need to confidently make purchase decisions?
- **Customer focus:** Do your sellers put the customers' success at the heart of their sales strategy?
- **Purchase ease:** Do your sellers make it easy for potential customers to make a purchase?

Every participating company receives a **customized benchmark report** giving you powerful insights into how your team stacks up.

Join us for a day of discussion

Exclusive CSO-only meetings

Join us for our signature CSO event, featuring Distinguished VP Brent Adamson leading the discussion and exploration of our latest findings and their implications for your organization.

Large Enterprise

5 June | Chicago, IL

Small and Medium Enterprise

4 June | Chicago, IL

Steer our research to your needs

We invite you to connect directly with our research team to direct our work through your perspectives, experience, questions and most pressing priorities.

For more information or to schedule a research interview, contact David Millstein:
david.millstein@gartner.com.

Additional sales executive retreats

Day-long executive retreats feature our latest research in a peer-based, expertly facilitated, discussion-driven format.

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9 May | Palo Alto, CA

16 May | London, U.K.

23 May | Chicago, IL

15 August | Sydney, Australia

11 September | Atlanta, GA

16 October | London, U.K.

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