Sales Intelligence: Preparing for Smarter Selling

February 2010

Peter Ostrow
Executive Summary

Top-performing sales organizations are meeting the challenges of identifying the most likely buyers of their products and services through the deployment of sales intelligence solutions that introduce a wide variety of data streams to their front-line staff. By empowering their sellers with better information about their prospect companies, markets and individuals, these firms are able to maximize their chances of hitting quota, and at the same time create efficiencies within the sales operations environment.

Best-in-Class Performance

In December 2009 and January 2010, Aberdeen surveyed 528 end-user organizations to learn about their sales intelligence deployments. Aberdeen used the following three key performance criteria to distinguish the sales teams within Best-in-Class companies:

- An average 52% of sales representatives are currently achieving quota, as compared to a 26% average among Laggard companies
- 9% year-over-year reduction in time sales reps spend searching for relevant company/contact information, as compared to a 5% increase in time among Laggard companies
- An average 5% year-over-year reduction in the sales cycle time, as compared to a 7% increase in sales cycle time among Laggard companies

Competitive Maturity Assessment

Survey results show that the firms enjoying Best-in-Class performance share several common characteristics, including:

- 73% have earned senior management-level buy-in and formal support for the use of third-party information sources
- 68% deploy a sales-focused, centralized repository of account, contact and sales opportunity information
- 60% integrate sales intelligence content into their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system

Required Actions

In addition to the specific recommendations in Chapter Three of this report, to achieve Best-in-Class performance, companies must:

- Integrate and filter external content so the right data - and only qualified leads - are introduced to sales practitioners
- Adopt as much "push" automation of sales intelligence for their team as possible, as opposed to relying on ad hoc or manual individual searches for content

“This sales team benefits from having real-time information on customers and prospects, as well as a link in their CRM record to company information, news articles, corporate hierarchy, competitors and, generally, an entire ‘big picture’ of the prospect before they even make their call.”

~ Debbie Thompson, Executive Product Marketer and CRM Manager, FARO Technologies
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary ....................................................................................................... 2  
Best-in-Class Performance ..................................................................................... 2  
Competitive Maturity Assessment ....................................................................... 2  
Required Actions ...................................................................................................... 2  
Chapter One: Benchmarking the Best-in-Class .................................................... 3  
  Business Context of Sales Intelligence ............................................................... 5  
  The Maturity Class Framework ........................................................................... 6  
  Best-in-Class Business Landscape ....................................................................... 7  
  The Best-in-Class PACE Model .......................................................................... 10  
  Best-in-Class Strategies ....................................................................................... 10  
Chapter Two: Benchmarking Requirements for Success ....................................... 13  
  Competitive Assessment ....................................................................................... 13  
  Capabilities and Enablers ...................................................................................... 14  
Chapter Three: Required Actions ......................................................................... 20  
  Laggard Steps to Success ...................................................................................... 20  
  Industry Average Steps to Success ....................................................................... 20  
  Best-in-Class Steps to Success ............................................................................ 21  
Appendix A: Research Methodology ..................................................................... 23  
Appendix B: Related Aberdeen Research .............................................................. 25

## Figures

- Figure 1: Types of Intelligence Deployed by Sales Teams ................................... 4  
- Figure 2: Business Pressures Driving the Use of Sales Intelligence ............... 5  
- Figure 3: Most Frequent Delivery Models for Sales Intelligence .................... 8  
- Figure 4: Sales Intelligence Delivered as "Push" or "Pull" ............................... 9  
- Figure 5: Best-in-Class Strategic Actions in Response to Pressures .............. 11  
- Figure 6: Current Performance Metrics by Best-in-Class ............................... 14  
- Figure 7: Additional Sales Technologies Deployed by the Best-in-Class ....... 16  
- Figure 8: Sales Intelligence CRM Integration by Best-in-Class ..................... 17  
- Figure 9: CRM Spending Intentions in 2010 by Best-in-Class ....................... 18  
- Figure 10: Ability to Sell Intelligently ................................................................. 22

## Tables

- Table 1: Most Frequent Users of Sales Intelligence .............................................. 6  
- Table 2: Top Performers Earn Best-in-Class Status ......................................... 7  
- Table 3: The Best-in-Class PACE Framework .................................................. 10  
- Table 4: The Competitive Framework ................................................................. 13  
- Table 5: The PACE Framework Key ................................................................. 24  
- Table 6: The Competitive Framework Key ......................................................... 24  
- Table 7: The Relationship Between PACE and the Competitive Framework ... 24
Chapter One: Benchmarking the Best-in-Class

As companies continue their search for the elusive “360-degree view” of their prospective clients, harvesting all the scattered information from social networking (free) and other content providers (paid) about these prospects can potentially be beneficial for the purposes of deploying more finely targeted sales and marketing campaigns. In fact, recent Aberdeen research published in December, 2009 *Inside Sales Enablement: “Let Them Drink Coffee!”* found that users of sales intelligence achieve 56% better lead conversion rates than non-users. By augmenting records in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or Sales Force Automation (SFA) system with this content, companies are building more complete profiles of their current customers and prospects through the information that is readily available on the internet. Indeed, the most commonly cited data types reported by the 92% of respondents currently deploying sales intelligence solutions, and detailed in Figure 1, do not represent proprietary information.

Figure 1: Types of Intelligence Deployed by Sales Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Intelligence</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents, n = 528</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic ‘business card’ information - name, title, address, phone, email)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company hierarchy - executives, org chart, divisions</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic company information - location, financial, headcount, industry</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive intelligence - products, leadership changes, significant news</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ideal prospects” segmented contacts by geography, business model, revenue</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger events - relevant competitors’ announcements</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Every day on my iPhone, I receive a single email or ‘gazette’ with links to increasingly all the stories I need to see that could generate a discussion at the morning sales meeting. It saves an awful lot of manual work.”

~ Tristan Rogers, CEO, Concrete Media

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010
Sales Intelligence Defined
For the purposes of this research, the phrase “sales intelligence” refers to any information used to educate and enable the sales force and enrich the sales pipeline. This includes news on industry trends, consumer generated content, list/database providers, analyst reports, prospecting tools, competitive/market intelligence, and lead augmentation solutions.

Business Context of Sales Intelligence
Various online sources, such as social networking sites, financial reports, industry news articles and blogs often contain information concerning a particular company or contact that is valuable to sales professionals and, perhaps as important, is generally free of charge.

The challenge that businesses face is being able to glean this information without spending extraordinary amounts of time and effort in locating and storing it, so that the data is accessible to the right selling team member at the right time. In order to discover the appropriate contact within a company, or supplement an incomplete profile entry that currently exists in a CRM solution, an increasing number of companies are arming their sales staff with online business directories and customer information aggregators for the purpose of discerning the quickest and most beneficial path to the decision-makers they seek to engage. By providing sales representatives with this necessary ammunition, companies can hope to positively affect these team members’ ability to effectively map their own products or services to their prospects’ business challenges with a customized message or offer.

Figure 2: Business Pressures Driving the Use of Sales Intelligence

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010
This response correlates directly to the most frequently cited business pressures reported by survey respondents (Figure 2), which predominantly focus attention on the difficulty that sales professionals face in, simply put, knowing enough about their selling targets.

Indeed, when asked, "In your plan to improve the effectiveness of your sales force, how important is the use of sales intelligence obtained from external sources?" Fully, 86% of Aberdeen's survey respondents indicated that such solutions were either a medium- or high-priority essential. Moreover, 51% of top-performing organizations represented in this data set indicated sales intelligence as a high-priority deployment. An overview of job functions that actively utilize sales intelligence tools is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Most Frequent Users of Sales Intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Percent Using Sales Intelligence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Management</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Research</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Intelligence</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service and Support</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

While the traditional utilization by sales and marketing staff are predictably high, it should be noted that a number of other elements within end-user organizations use sales intelligence in double-digit quantities, and some, such as executive management and operations, are not consistently involved in market- or customer-facing activities. In fact, research collected in the fourth quarter of calendar 2009 from more than 1,200 survey respondents for The Aberdeen Business Review reveals high-growth companies supporting customers with CRM 20% more often than no-growth companies, validating the importance of this overall family of technology solutions. Indeed the leading goal reported by all organizations for 2010 is "organic revenue growth," which suggests a strong focus on servicing and nurturing existing accounts as well as landing new business; both scenarios are well-suited to the use of sales intelligence.

The Maturity Class Framework
Aberdeen used three key performance criteria among responding organizations that deploy sales intelligence, to distinguish the Best-in-Class from Industry Average and Laggard organizations:
• Year-over-year change in time sales reps spend searching for relevant company/contact information
• Year-over-year change in the average duration of the sales cycle
• Current percentage of sales representatives achieving quota

Table 2: Top Performers Earn Best-in-Class Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Maturity Class</th>
<th>Mean Class Performance (Year-over-Year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Best-in-Class:** Top 20% of aggregate performance scorers | • 52% of sales reps currently achieve annual quota  
• 9% average annual decrease in the time spent by sales reps searching for relevant company/contact information; 52% have shown improvement  
• 5% average annual improvement in (reduction of) the sales cycle; 41% have shown improvement |
| **Industry Average:** Middle 50% of aggregate performance scorers | • 44% of sales reps currently achieve annual quota  
• 1% average annual decrease in the time spent by sales reps searching for relevant company/contact information; 18% have shown improvement  
• 2% average annual worsening of (increase in) the sales cycle; 13% have shown improvement |
| **Laggard:** Bottom 30% of aggregate performance scorers | • 26% of sales reps currently achieve annual quota  
• 5% average annual worsening of (increase in) the time spent by sales reps searching for relevant company/contact information; 3% have shown improvement  
• 7% average annual worsening of (increase in) the sales cycle; 7% have shown improvement |

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

Among the 528 total survey respondents in the research, 92% (486 companies) utilize externally-provided sales intelligence content to support these sales efforts. These users saw an average of 46% of their sales reps currently achieving quota, compared to only 26% for companies not deploying sales intelligence solutions.

**Best-in-Class Business Landscape**

Before addressing the strategic actions taken by Best-in-Class enterprises around their sales intelligence deployments, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of how the data is provided to end-users.

The daily life of most information workers, including the kind of enterprise sales professionals who most often populate Aberdeen sales effectiveness survey audiences, naturally focuses a great deal of attention on time management. In other words, “How can I find more relevant suspects, filter out the less desirable targets, successfully penetrate the right prospects, make my pitch and eventually win business…as quickly as possible?” To this end, sales-
oriented technologies have for years been developed, promoted and deployed to quota-carriers with promises of efficiency. Yet, as Figure 3 details, the most frequently-used delivery models for sales intelligence are limited to remarkably traditional, if not predictable, applications: email, search engines, CRM/SFA tools, and spreadsheets. Paid access to secure information sources, a natural fit for sales intelligence product marketing, logs in at only 30% of all users, in fifth place in terms of end-user popularity.

While this data may initially imply a limited role for sales intelligence applications in aggressive pursuit of individual or team quotas, it is important to note that very few contemporary sales technologies are introduced to end-users as a stand-alone application. In fact, most of the solutions offered in the sales intelligence arena are deliberately integrated with the traditional "comfort zone" applications represented by Figure 3. Furthermore, the Best-in-Class survey respondents place more emphasis than Industry Average and Laggard firms on an automated integration with the CRM/SFA deployment (covered in Chapter Two), and also on the less-used third-party technology.

Figure 3: Most Frequent Delivery Models for Sales Intelligence

![Figure 3: Most Frequent Delivery Models for Sales Intelligence](image)

These differentials, in fact, are supported by the trends defined in Figure 4, which explores the extent to which organizations "push" or "pull" their sales intelligence. The traditional methodology of "pull" refers to the activities of individual sales reps, or perhaps their sales operations, inside sales or external telemarketing support system, that represent a manual, self-administered effort to find information for themselves, most commonly on...
the internet. Among all survey respondents, 55% of companies tend to rely predominantly on a manual or "pull" approach to obtain sales intelligence about their target market. Only 18% of end-users, however, focus their energies on "push" technologies, which provide automated and company-administered paths for the delivery of relevant company, target and market data to sales practitioners.

Again, the aggregate survey data initially seems to imply that "push" approaches are not popular, but closer analysis of the data in Figure 4 reveals trends that differentiate the Best-in-Class from other companies. While all companies currently trend away from the apparent efficiencies to be gained by "push" methodologies, the top-performing organizations far out-pace the Laggards in their use of automated sales intelligence deliverables. In fact, Aberdeen's research reveals that 55% of Best-in-Class organizations indicate that at least one-half of their sales intelligence data is pushed to the sales organization. Moreover, the bottom performers in the Laggard maturity class are 39% more likely than the Best-in-Class to rely almost completely on manual processes. The takeaway here is that "push" technologies represent a trend associated with better sales results, particularly around the fact that "push"-oriented sales teams see 13% more sales reps achieving annual quota than "pull" traditionalists, and have also improved their year-over-year sales cycle performance by an 80% margin over the latter group, as well. This organizational capability will be further explored in Chapter Two.

Figure 4: Sales Intelligence Delivered as "Push" or "Pull"

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010
The Best-in-Class PACE Model

Using sales intelligence to achieve corporate goals requires a combination of strategic actions, organizational capabilities, and enabling technologies and services that can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 3: The Best-in-Class PACE Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pressures</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>Enablers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Inability to identify the most likely buyers of our product or service</td>
<td>• Identify high-value prospects by analyzing and segmenting our current customer database</td>
<td>• Sales-focused, centralized repository of account, contact and sales opportunity information</td>
<td>• Customer relationship management (CRM) or Sales force automation (SFA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase the quality of leads in the sales pipeline</td>
<td>• Process for tracking prospect engagement (email click-throughs, website visits, etc.)</td>
<td>• Lead management solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify high-value prospects through trigger events such as new product announcements, office openings, mergers and acquisitions, or executive appointments</td>
<td>• Process for unifying information on current customers, gathered through multiple and disparate 'customer touch points' within our organization</td>
<td>• Sales analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formal and documented methodology for gathering sales intelligence from external sources</td>
<td>• Campaign management solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sales milestones include criteria based on the use and analysis of sales intelligence data (i.e. an executive pre-sales meeting cannot be booked unless a prospect org chart is in place)</td>
<td>• Trigger alerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Free internet resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Email marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Dashboards (and other visualization tools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Web site visitor tracking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge management solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Data quality solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

Best-in-Class Strategies

The most popular strategies among Best-in-Class organizations to improve sales performance via the use of sales intelligence follow a number of themes, but an underlying concern focuses on two key issues: depth of knowledge and timing (Figure 5). The following is an analysis of leading action items that these top-performing end-users are deploying, including relevant context from additional Aberdeen research findings.
Lead quality, especially in contrast to lead quantity, has been frequently validated by Aberdeen research as a Best-in-Class requirement, most recently in *B2B TeleServices: The 2009 Buyer’s Guide* (November, 2009). In this study, the nature of desired sales appointments by external providers was dramatically different between the maturity classes: the Best-in-Class were nearly three times as likely as Laggards to demand sales intelligence with scheduled appointments or conference calls, and Laggards were more than five times as likely than the top performers to settle for leads unsupported by data regarding the target company, individual or market. The fact that top-performing users of sales intelligence decreased their reps’ search time by 9% on a year-over-year basis, compared to a 5% increase among Laggards, speaks further to the importance of maximizing the time spent by "closers" by providing them with polished intelligence.

**Timing is everything.** By identifying high-value prospects through trigger events such as new product announcements, office openings, mergers/acquisitions, or executive appointments, winning sales organizations understand the value of communicating with their prospects or customers in the current, relevant context of their targets’ business climate. Much as Aberdeen research for *Sales Intelligence: The Secret to Sales Nirvana* (January, 2009) showed that Best-in-Class companies were 45% more likely than
Laggards to deploy triggered alerts, the opportunity for sellers to know “when the time is ripe” for a customized message, or unique product offer, allows them to gain ground on their competitors who are not supported by such real-time knowledge.

In the next chapter, we will see what the top performers are doing to achieve these gains.

---

**Case Study - Staples**

Consider the case of leading office-supply retailer Staples, whose nearly 1000 sales representatives use an integrated instance of Salesforce.com and Hoover’s in support of both existing and new business efforts. According to Kimberly Cournoyer, System Administrator for both products, there are several sales functions that depend on the technology. First, to maintain and grow corporate accounts, sales representatives need to gain a better understanding of their customer. “They use the family tree-feature to reach new or undiscovered locations, franchises or offices associated with customer headquarters,” Cournoyer explains, to expand, up-sell and cross-sell Staples’ account penetration and achieve sales goals. “These individuals sometimes are provided by their corporate buyers with lists,” she continues, “but this sales intelligence is a better way to make sure they’re covering all their bases” and, in some instance, adhere to the preferences of headquarters decision-makers.

New business development, another sales function at Staples, grows their business through net-new account acquisition. Reps and their managers will use the build-a-list function in Hoover’s to determine the best sales prospects according to their own personal criteria. Plus, Cournoyer explains, “we integrate the tool into Salesforce.com, so that search results can be automatically imported into the CRM as a lead or contact record.” In addition, there are certain industry vertical-focused sales reps who rely on the integrated CRM/sales intelligence system to more rapidly identify just those targets that fit into their niche “sweet spots.” As a result, Cournoyer says, sales teams are able to function efficiently and successfully around better identifying exactly with whom they should be communicating in all markets.

"Sales intelligence is a better way to make sure our reps are covering all their bases."

~ Kimberly Cournoyer, CRM and Sales Intelligence System Administrator, Staples
Chapter Two:
Benchmarking Requirements for Success

The selection of sales intelligence solutions and their integration within the daily lifecycle of selling play a crucial role in the ability to turn these strategies into profit. Below is an analysis of how top performers distinguish themselves from other companies through the implementation of capabilities and enablers that support excellence in deploying sales intelligence.

Competitive Assessment

Aberdeen Group analyzed the aggregated metrics of surveyed companies to determine whether their performance ranked as Best-in-Class, Industry Average, or Laggard. In addition to having common performance levels, each class also shared characteristics in five key categories: (1) process (the approaches they take to execute daily operations); (2) organization (corporate focus and collaboration among stakeholders); (3) knowledge management (contextualizing data and exposing it to key stakeholders); (4) technology (the selection of the appropriate tools and the effective deployment of those tools); and (5) performance management (the ability of the organization to measure its results to improve its business). These characteristics (identified in Table 4) serve as a guideline for best practices, and correlate directly with Best-in-Class performance across the key metrics.

Table 4: The Competitive Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Best-in-Class</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Laggards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process for tracking prospect engagement (email click-throughs, website visits, etc.)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process for unifying information on current customers, gathered through multiple and disparate 'customer touch points' within our organization</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior management fully supports the use of third-party information sources</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to integrate third-party content into existing CRM/SFA solution</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74% Customer relationship management (CRM) or Sales force automation (SFA)</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% Dashboards and other visualization tools</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66% Lead management solution</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% Campaign management tool</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43% Trigger alerts</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43% Third-party information aggregation</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% Data integration</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33% Data quality solution</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sales milestones include criteria based on the use and analysis of sales intelligence data (i.e. an executive pre-sales meeting cannot be booked unless a prospect org chart is in place)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Best-in-Class</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Laggards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined metrics for measuring the impact that third-party information sources has on sales productivity</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

**Capabilities and Enablers**

Based on the findings of the Competitive Framework and interviews with end users, Aberdeen’s analysis of the Best-in-Class, whose current performance averages are shown in Figure 6, demonstrates that a highly identifiable set of corporate capabilities and enablers can lead to measurable business success through the deployment sales intelligence-oriented methodologies and technologies.

**Figure 6: Current Performance Metrics by Best-in-Class**

![Figure 6: Current Performance Metrics by Best-in-Class](image)

“*We’re now bringing far greater relevance to the sales force, by directing them to leads that are more high-value*

~ Don Gushurst, Director of Global Lead Generation, Molex

**Process**

Sixty-one percent (61%) of Best-in-Class companies report to Aberdeen that their sales effectiveness strategy includes a process for tracking how their prospect or customer engages with them. Traditionally this can be accomplished with web analytics or other technology tools that monitor the opening or click-throughs of email marketing messages, as well as of web site visits and behavior. In the context of sales intelligence, this process, which is deployed 33% more often by these top performers when compared to Laggards, is a crucial tool in understanding how a sales target is reacting
to the seller’s messaging; this better empowers the sales practitioner to customize their message and timing around the newly understood behaviors of the prospect.

An additional process deployed by the Best-in-Class, 64% more frequently than Laggards, focuses on achieving a "360-degree view of the customer." By unifying an organization’s understanding of its customer through a consolidation of its disparate views - for instance, different databases in marketing, sales, customer service or accounting functions - top-performing companies are better able to retain, up-sell and cross-sell within those accounts. Upcoming Aberdeen research to be published in March, 2010 will further explore this Best-in-Class process.

**Organization**

In addition to an organizational emphasis on executive buy-in for the deployment of sales intelligence tools, Best-in-Class companies emphasize structural elements within their companies that support strong sales performance by dedicating operational resources toward the management of these technologies and the relationships with the solution providers. At a frequency that leads Laggards by a 65% margin, these top performers recognize that individuals schooled in the disciplines of sales operations, internal help desk support or perhaps information technology, can provide a valuable service to sales representatives and management alike by streamlining the "push" of relevant market or account data to the selling team.

Dedicating operational resources, such as help desk or sales operations team members, to the use of third-party information providers, is an additional organizational attribute that Best-in-Class companies deploy, 65% more frequently than Laggards. While smaller organizations may not have the luxury of doing so, more substantial companies such as Staples, the $23B office supply provider, see great value in supporting their sales team with this kind of operational resource. Staples, in fact, deploys a full-time equivalent solely tasked with managing the CRM and sales intelligence feed for its nearly 1000 business-to-business sales staff.

**Knowledge Management**

With CRM tools now representing a near-universal technology among selling organizations of all maturity classes (90% of all respondents), the value of integrating this application with sales intelligence content from third-party providers represents a crucial capability that the Best-in-Class deploy by a significant margin over Laggards (41% versus 17%). It is easy to understand how companies are better equipped to meet sales quotas when the CRM record of a contact or organization includes not only internally-generated information about a target, but relevant data about the individuals, company or market in which the selling conversation needs to take place. More detail on how CRM integration and spending trends are represented in this research appear in the "Aberdeen Insight" below.

Considering the close relationship that sales and marketing functions frequently experience, the management of knowledge shared by both teams
is an additional capability in which the Best-in-Class prevail. By a 14% margin over Laggards, 57% of top-performing sales teams deploy a centralized repository of marketing and product information, which is accessible to the sales organization. While a "separate church and state" can be maintained from the standpoint of these teams' disparate duties, the companies demonstrating more sales productivity within Aberdeen's research recognize the need to make these materials, and the embedded corporate knowledge they convey, available to the sales team on the front lines.

**Technology**

The many technologies adopted to support sales intelligence by the Best-in-Class represent a consistent theme among the best-performing sales organizations: they simply gather more information about their accounts, and enable their sales professionals with more ammunition to get the job done successfully while operating from a more knowledge-filled selling stance. While the list in Table 4 is extensive, the enablers with the largest disparities of use between the Best-in-Class and Laggards include dashboards allowing reps or managers to visually identify high-probability selling opportunities, and knowledge management solutions, which provide selling teams with a "tribal knowledge" functionality that allows for the collection and sharing of both internal best practices as well as external intelligence sources and account-specific data.

In addition to the technology enablers deployed specifically in support of sales intelligence utilization, Figure 7 details other sales-related technologies used by survey respondents, showing both Best-in-Class trends as well as a validation that, in sales effectiveness, there is no single "silver bullet" technology enabler that leads to success, but rather a blend of various tools.

**Figure 7: Additional Sales Technologies Deployed by the Best-in-Class**

![Figure 7: Additional Sales Technologies Deployed by the Best-in-Class](image_url)
Performance Management

Twice as many Best-in-Class companies than Laggards believe, evidently, that "not only can you lead a horse to water, but you can also make him drink." This reversal of the old aphorism is appropriate in the environment of sales technology, because while sales professionals are traditionally not early adopters, the research proves that a little management muscle can go a long way to empower team members with better tools that lead to better results - even if by force, as evidenced by the 115% delta between the Best-in-Class and Laggards in associating formal, tracked and reported selling milestones with the use of sales intelligence. Moreover, Aberdeen research for The Carrot or the Stick? Competing Strategies for Sales Effectiveness (July, 2009) found that the Best-in-Class were 1.6 times more likely than Laggards to incorporate sales intelligence into their CRM or SFA instance (a "carrot"), whereas attempting to motivate CRM adoption by withholding compensation (the "stick") resulted in decreased sales performance around quota achievement, lead conversion and bid-to-win metrics.

Furthermore, closing the loop on the use of sales intelligence, by measuring its impact on overall sales productivity, yields a 57% differential between the Best-in-Class and Laggards. The old phrase, "you can't manage what you can't measure" applies not only to people, but also to the enabling technologies used, particularly by sales organizations demonstrating a superior ability to achieve sales success, to support their efforts.

Aberdeen Insights — CRM Integration of Sales Intelligence

Integrating sales intelligence with a selling team’s CRM or SFA deployment has been revealed above as a Best-in-Class knowledge management capability (41% of the Best-in-Class versus 23% of all other companies), so it follows that top-performing organizations embrace the practice.

Figure 8: Sales Intelligence CRM Integration by Best-in-Class

"Sales intelligence tools should be implemented with the buy-in of the sales force, and not as a top down decision."

~ Daniel Wells, VP Business Development, EBG Group, LLC
As seen in Figure 8, though, while these end-users do out-pace non-integrators by a two-to-one margin, Best-in-Class companies are more frequently using a manual process, such as individual imports or data entry of externally-sourced content into the CRM.

It remains to be seen whether this balance will change over time, but the overall trend clearly aligns sales effectiveness with some sort of integration, as Laggards are 94% more likely than the Best-in-Class to not even consider the option.

This prediction is borne out by survey responses regarding future spending patterns on CRM, shown in Figure 9 as a very healthy market for 2010, in which budget increases are the norm, especially among the Best-in-Class, and decreases, while four times more likely among Laggards than top performers, are all represented by single-digit rates.

It should be noted that future Best-in-Class CRM budget dollars are most likely focused on Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) deployments, as 59% of top performers, versus 35% of Laggards, anticipate spending additional budget on hosted CRM technologies. On-premise CRM deployment projects will be favored by Laggards at a 45% rate, nearly twice the 23% reported by the Best-in-Class, and thus do not represent as likely a path to success in the context of using sales intelligence to achieve smarter selling.
## Case Study - Molex

Consider the case of Molex, a leading supplier of connectors and interconnect components. According to Don Gushurst, Director of Global Lead Generation, Molex had long purchased intelligence feeds on behalf of regional sales teams, but in the context of a July, 2009 re-launch of its global lead generation process, the needs of the sales organization were greater than what the current products were providing. Using an aggregation service that combines real-time updates on companies, executives and news content, Gushurst says that, “we're now bringing far greater relevance to the sales force by directing them to leads that are more high-value.” Molex determines approximate annual spending on its product area by using better prospect data, and Gushurst works directly with sales management to continuously refine the territories and assignments of the team.

In addition to targeting companies more accurately, Gushurst says, “we have better tools to identify both complete demographics about accounts, and we also use the news feeds to extract information that helps with the initial qualification process handled by Inside Sales.” Hence the field sales or “closer” teams at Molex are now presented with a greater percentage of well-vetted leads, creating overall efficiency within the company’s marketing/sales ecosystem. As a result, Gushurst is planning to roll out the product globally, with full expectations of a bigger, more qualified pipeline for Molex.
Chapter Three:
Required Actions

Whether a company is trying to move its performance in sales intelligence from Laggard to Industry Average, or Industry Average to Best-in-Class, the following actions will help spur the necessary performance improvements:

Laggard Steps to Success

- **Focus your efforts on aggregating** sales intelligence from a third-party source, which Best-in-Class companies do 59% more frequently than Laggards. With the opportunity to improve revenue by 70% simply by moving up the maturity class framework to Industry Average performance levels, end-users have ample support in this research report to build a business case for the investment. While a finely-tuned CRM system can be internally maintained and data cleaned with elbow grease, the opportunity cost of not leveraging the tools and expertise of data collection and management specialists can be high. These services and technologies will clean and supplement your prospecting database with fresh information and should expand your pipeline with automated functionality that no human activity can match, and few internal IT departments are willing to build.

- **Use sales intelligence as a carrot** to attract sales practitioners toward more aggressive use of the CRM deployment. While universal CRM adoption is unlikely in any sales team, the research proves Louis Pasteur correct when he wrote that, "chance favors the prepared mind," which in more modern terms might translate into "knowledge is power." And on a practical level simply means empowering your team with better prospect data in the context of the tool you want them to use. The opposite of a "carrot" approach, enforcing CRM use by linking it with compensation payments, is supported by Laggards at a staggering 133% higher frequency than by the Best-in-Class…so it’s best you don’t go there.

- **Get executive buy-in for a sales intelligence initiative.** Why are Best-in-Class companies 49% more likely than Laggard respondents to obtain senior management support for using third-party information sources? Because they know that "you get what you pay for," and without C-level agreement that data quality matters, the inevitable budget wars or office politics may consign them to poor sales results if the top-down organizational support is not firmly in place.

Industry Average Steps to Success

- **Know your customer.** Best-in-Class companies are 59% more likely than the Industry Average to unify the selling organization’s disparate silos of data around the customer they would like to up-
sell or cross-sell. This means investing in a process to bring together different databases owned by marketing, sales, accounting or legal departments. Sales intelligence data and the methodologies with which it is gathered are better supported in this kind of environment, because any market-facing team member is more likely to have an accurate and consistent view into the customer's profile such as expiration of service contracts or corporate changes that merit new revenue opportunities. Additionally, this process can help guard against overlapping or inconsistent sales activity that could confuse or frustrate a customer or prospect. Further research into this area will be published in March, 2010, in a benchmark focused on Providing a 360˚ View of the Customer: Better Service - Higher Sales.

- **Push intelligence to your sales team** rather than waiting for them to fetch it. With only 43% of average performers engaged in some form of automated push, they are 28% less likely than the Best-in-Class to recognize the value of empowering sales staff with customer, prospect and market intelligence that essentially "appears before their eyes" when the related CRM or SFA record is opened. With a 20% revenue increase that can be achieved by moving from Industry Average to Best-in-Class, this should provide ample incentive to adopt this methodology.

- **Measure, manage and improve sales productivity** by aggressively tracking the impact of sales intelligence investments on revenue, quota attainment and sales team effectiveness. Industry Average companies are 50% less likely than the Best-in-Class in doing so, and are missing the opportunity to build an ongoing case for senior management to embrace contemporary sales-oriented technologies.

**Best-in-Class Steps to Success**

- **Clean house** by cleaning your data. Even though the cost-per-unit of marketing and sales messaging has dropped dramatically with the advent of email marketing and auto-dialer tools, companies are missing out on opportunities by allowing their sales intelligence to age. Whether you track the job changes of key executives, update your understanding of corporate organizational charts due to merger-and-acquisition activity, or understand how new product releases by your accounts impact their potential spend, only a third of Best-in-Class companies currently realize the potential of staying ahead of the competition by simply owning more up-to-date information about their sales targets.

- **Automate the integration of sales intelligence into the CRM.** While out-pacing other companies in overall integration, Best-in-Class organizations are still doing so manually more often than not. The results of integration have been proven by the research, but an investment in an automated solution can drive
down the cost of having human capital expend energy on data entry and mindless cut-and-paste activity. Be sure, however, that any automated solution allows sales management or sales operations/administration personnel to flexibly provide data to different selling teams (by product, geography or expertise) with customized levels of data flow and data type.

**Aberdeen Insights — Summary**

Why would any sales team head into the field with one hand tied behind its back? Ultimately, supporting a strong sales organization by incorporating tools such as sales intelligence will, according to the research data, result in the kind of easily-measured performance results in Figure 6 above. Still, as most successful sales leaders know, building a better team that consistently meets or beats quota requires the growth and maturation of the team’s players themselves.

As Figure 10 details, the self-reported strengths (on a scale of performance where 1 = "extremely poor" and 5 = "extremely well") of the Best-in-Class, Industry Average and Laggard survey respondents validate the high-level performance of the elite sales teams among this group, who not only adopt the capabilities and enablers referenced in Chapter Two, but successfully grow the expertise and "tribal knowledge" of their sales team at large. When this can be accomplished, the bottom-line results of the company as a whole improve, and the "sales intelligence" of the team members themselves will increase and contribute to the long-term health, and wealth of knowledge, within the enterprise.

![Figure 10: Ability to Sell Intelligently](image-url)
Appendix A:
Research Methodology

Between December 2009 and January 2010, Aberdeen examined the use, the experiences, and the intentions of 528 enterprises using sales intelligence in a diverse set of sales environments.

Aberdeen supplemented this online survey effort with interviews with select survey respondents, gathering additional information on sales intelligence strategies, experiences, and results.

Responding enterprises included the following:

- **Job title**: The research sample included respondents with the following job titles: CEO / President (34%), EVP / SVP / VP (17%), Director (15%), Manager (18%), Consultant (5%) and other (11%).

- **Department / function**: The research sample included respondents from the following departments or functions: sales and business development (58%), marketing (16%), corporate management (12%), operations (4%) and other (10%).

- **Industry**: The research sample included respondents exclusively from software (19%), IT consulting and services (18%), market research (7%), media/public relations (7%), financial services (5%), computer equipment/hardware/peripherals (4%), and other (34%).

- **Geography**: The majority of respondents (75%) were from the Americas. Remaining respondents were from the EMEA region (14%) and Asia-Pacific (11%).

- **Company size**: 5% of respondents were from large enterprises (annual revenues above US $1 billion); 28% were from midsize enterprises (annual revenues between $50 million and $1 billion); and 67% of respondents were from small businesses (annual revenues of $50 million or less).

- **Headcount**: 6% of respondents were from large enterprises (headcount greater than 1,000 employees); 17% were from midsize enterprises (headcount between 100 and 999 employees); and 77% of respondents were from small businesses (headcount between 1 and 99 employees).

---

**Study Focus**

Responding executives, primarily in sales management roles, completed an online survey that included questions designed to determine the following:

- The degree to which sales intelligence is deployed in their organization and the impact it has on achieving their business goals

- The structure, effectiveness and satisfaction with existing sales intelligence implementations

- Current and planned use of sales intelligence to achieve desired changes in revenue, quota, deal size, sales cycle and sales rep efficiency

- The benefits, if any, that have been derived from sales intelligence initiatives

The study aimed to identify emerging best practices for sales intelligence usage, and to provide a framework by which readers could assess their own management capabilities.
Table 5: The PACE Framework Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen applies a methodology to benchmark research that evaluates the business pressures, actions, capabilities, and enablers (PACE) that indicate corporate behavior in specific business processes. These terms are defined as follows:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressures</strong> — external forces that impact an organization’s market position, competitiveness, or business operations (e.g., economic, political and regulatory, technology, changing customer preferences, competitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actions</strong> — the strategic approaches that an organization takes in response to industry pressures (e.g., align the corporate business model to leverage industry opportunities, such as product / service strategy, target markets, financial strategy, go-to-market, and sales strategy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capabilities</strong> — the business process competencies required to execute corporate strategy (e.g., skilled people, brand, market positioning, viable products / services, ecosystem partners, financing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enablers</strong> — the key functionality of technology solutions required to support the organization’s enabling business practices (e.g., development platform, applications, network connectivity, user interface, training and support, partner interfaces, data cleansing, and management)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

Table 6: The Competitive Framework Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Aberdeen Competitive Framework defines enterprises as falling into one of the following three levels of practices and performance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best-in-Class (20%)</strong> — Practices that are the best currently being employed and are significantly superior to the Industry Average, and result in the top industry performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Average (50%)</strong> — Practices that represent the average or norm, and result in average industry performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laggards (30%)</strong> — Practices that are significantly behind the average of the industry, and result in below average performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following categories:
| **Process** — What is the scope of process standardization? What is the efficiency and effectiveness of this process? |
| **Organization** — How is your company currently organized to manage and optimize this particular process? |
| **Knowledge** — What visibility do you have into key data and intelligence required to manage this process? |
| **Technology** — What level of automation have you used to support this process? How is this automation integrated and aligned? |
| **Performance** — What do you measure? How frequently? What’s your actual performance? |

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010

Table 7: The Relationship Between PACE and the Competitive Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PACE and the Competitive Framework – How They Interact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen research indicates that companies that identify the most influential pressures and take the most transformational and effective actions are most likely to achieve superior performance. The level of competitive performance that a company achieves is strongly determined by the PACE choices that they make and how well they execute those decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aberdeen Group, February 2010
Appendix B: Related Aberdeen Research

Related Aberdeen research that forms a companion or reference to this report includes:

- **Sales Training: Translating Tribal Selling Knowledge Into Bottom-Line Productivity,** September 2009
- **Sales Training: Embedding Best Practices into Tribal Selling Knowledge;** July 2009
- **Sales Training: Instructor-Led Options for Best-in-Class Performance;** September 2009
- **The Carrot or the Stick? Competing Strategies for Sales Effectiveness** (July, 2009)
- **Sales Intelligence: The Secret to Sales Nirvana;** January, 2009
- **Sales Effectiveness: Pathways to Productivity;** September, 2008
- **Sales Analytics: Hitting the Forecast Bulls-Eye;** July, 2008
- **Sales 2.0: Social Media for Knowledge Management and Sales Collaboration;** September, 2008
- **Users of Sales and Marketing Solutions Display a Significant Lack of KPI Awareness;** August, 2008

Information on these and any other Aberdeen publications can be found at [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com).

**Author:** Peter Ostrow, Research Director, Sales Effectiveness  
(peter.ostrow@aberdeen.com)

Since 1988, Aberdeen's research has been helping corporations worldwide become Best-in-Class. Having benchmarked the performance of more than 644,000 companies, Aberdeen is uniquely positioned to provide organizations with the facts that matter — the facts that enable companies to get ahead and drive results. That's why our research is relied on by more than 2.2 million readers in over 40 countries, 90% of the Fortune 1,000, and 93% of the Technology 500.

As a Harte-Hanks Company, Aberdeen plays a key role of putting content in context for the global direct and targeted marketing company. Aberdeen’s analytical and independent view of the "customer optimization" process of Harte-Hanks (Information – Opportunity – Insight – Engagement – Interaction) extends the client value and accentuates the strategic role Harte-Hanks brings to the market. For additional information, visit Aberdeen [http://www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com) or call (617) 723-7890, or to learn more about Harte-Hanks, call (800) 456-9748 or go to [http://www.harte-hanks.com](http://www.harte-hanks.com).

This document is the result of primary research performed by Aberdeen Group. Aberdeen Group's methodologies provide for objective fact-based research and represent the best analysis available at the time of publication. Unless otherwise noted, the entire contents of this publication are copyrighted by Aberdeen Group, Inc. and may not be reproduced, distributed, archived, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written consent by Aberdeen Group, Inc. (071309b)