SalesChoice

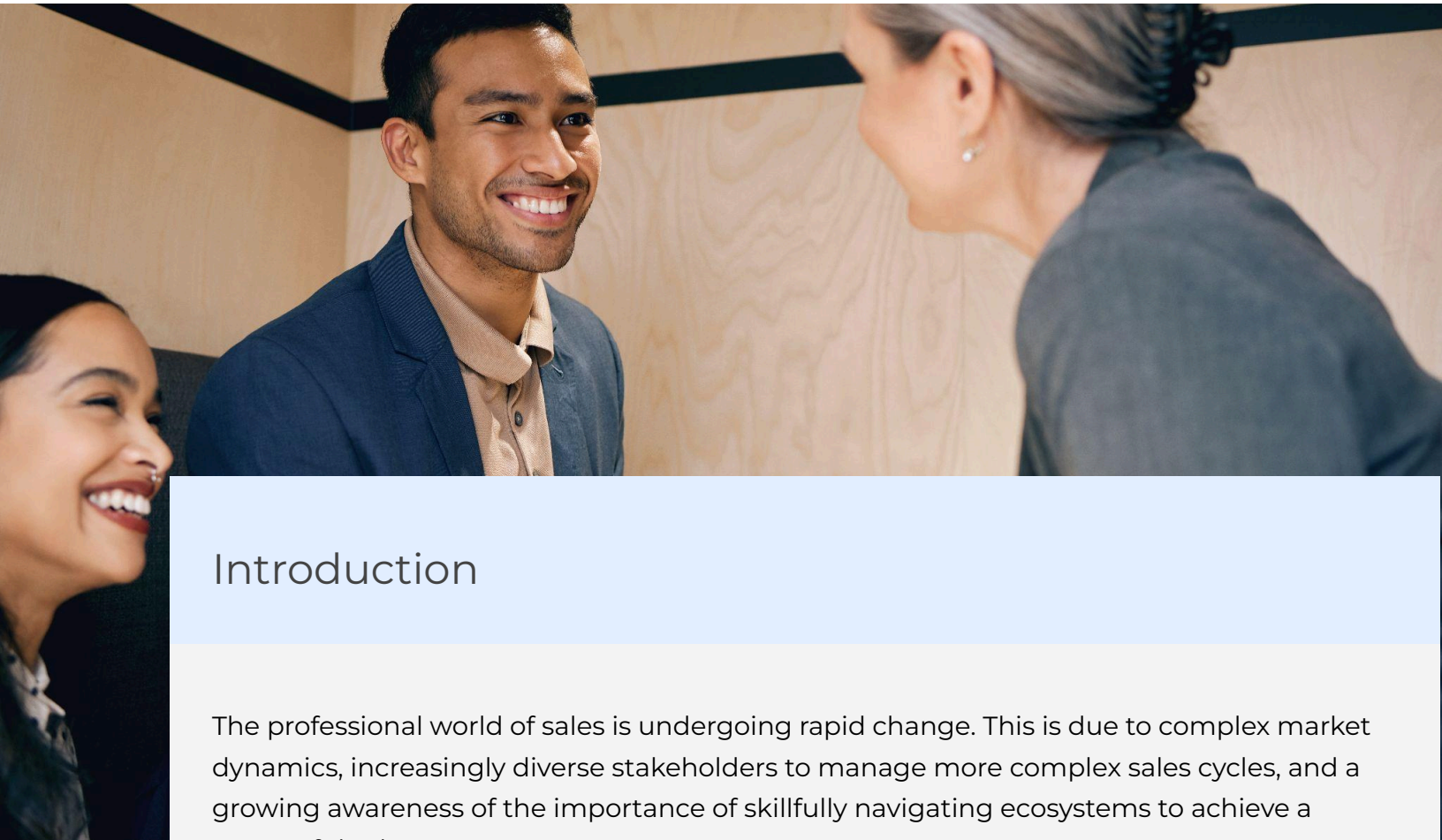# The Modern Sales Professional

IN THE INTELLIGENCE ERA

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Introduction

The professional world of sales is undergoing rapid change. This is due to complex market dynamics, increasingly diverse stakeholders to manage more complex sales cycles, and a growing awareness of the importance of skillfully navigating ecosystems to achieve a successful sales outcome.

It is no longer enough to target who we think is the primary buyer profile, as every customer account – big or small – has influencers in our communities.

Reach and depth counts!

Often the biggest deals are due to community-trusted relationships but there are now shifts in how business used to be conducted, where increasingly more decisions are being made in Microsoft or Zoom collaboration rooms. It's not as easy to meet customers in person and travel budgets since COVID remains constrained, as we have learned we can still easily sell without an in-person meeting. But, do we have the same successful outcomes without face-to-face connections? The jury is still out on this as we navigate a hybrid customer-buyer experience.

The answer likely lies in knowing your customer's buying preferences better and listening to their interaction preference. Listen to their drum beat, but stand out and make each moment count! Some customers prefer face-to-face, while others enjoy working in more hybrid environments.

What is different is that sales professionals have to do far more homework, which genuinely requires more patience in gathering more intelligence to be ready for the face-off. A sales professional simply cannot show up to a customer visit unprepared. At the same time, over-preparing can work against a sales professional. Learning how to balance the conversation dynamics is a key relationship development factor that I learned at Xerox where we were coached to spend 70% of the time listening and 30% of the time talking.

A big sales trap that many of us easily fall into, as we push our agenda versus being guided by the voice of the customer. In today's digitally savvy world, the new skills required for sales success are increasingly analytical and data-gathering skills. Learning how to take advantage of new AI analytical tools for customer advantage is the new normal. Whether these AI tools are automated tools for lead generation, opportunity scoring, sales forecasting, or relationship intelligence, the customer experience journey is increasingly leveraging AI in all customer interactions. Data is now a growth force and without quality data as a corporate priority, businesses will be left behind as the AI industry is moving like a tsunami covering every operating process and data set. Staying above the waves is not easy and leadership has never been so important in the world of AI everywhere.

No longer can sales professionals keep any customer knowledge to themselves and face a bright career future. Transparency is a new leadership skill to challenge old sales paradigms. Hoarding knowledge is not the trust-building behavior of a modern sales professional. Collaboration leadership foundations are imperative given the speed of knowledge flows coming from all directions all at once. Organizations investing in advanced AI content and search toolkits to manage the knowledge explosion of unstructured data will leap forward as these organizations are confidently using GenAI for major productivity improvements.

Fueling these powerful digital ways of working are innovations like cloud computing and mobile and internet technologies. Collectively, these new capabilities have made our

customers are far more knowledgeable about the products that we sell, and as a result, they can gather intelligence easily on what others think about us before we even arrive to have the conversation with the customer. Salespeople may now find their first interaction with customers is at a different and later stage of the sales cycle, where customers are far more educated on their options. With increased access to knowledge and the changing role of technology in sales, the role of the B2B salesperson has become more complicated and requires salespeople to work with more information than ever before.

Second, growing customer demands have increased product complexity and the requirement for customized solutions of various goods and services to solve customer problems. To operate successfully in this environment, B2B salespeople must act as a quarterback, initiating action and coordinating the firm's talent to develop bespoke solutions to a customer's unique needs.

Salespeople must leverage both customer and technical knowledge, collaborating with internal experts and, at times, external partners who must deliver part of the solution in this new interconnected sales ecosystem. Whereas in the past, a salesperson could thrive just by moving large numbers of standardized products into the hands of customers, they must now co-create unique and increasingly more innovative solutions for each customer.

It seems likely then that the selling skills sought by hiring firms may differ somewhat from those identified two decades ago such as effective listening and follow-up skills, dressing for success, etc. It's not that these skills are not important, it's just there are more skills to learn and become competent in.

We now live in a time where data literacy and analytical skills to develop and sell complex solutions are increasingly critical. Being able to break down complex problems into meaningful execution needs to solve customers' business problems and bring the customers new solutions that are relevant to them is imperative.

The world has moved rapidly ahead, yet sales professionals have not necessarily kept the leadership pace in developing the new modernized sales profile. Based on SalesChoice's global research, these are the top skills for B2B Sales professionals to master to be ready to help their customers grow and advance in an increasingly smarter world, but also for sales leaders to remain relevant.

Modernized Sales Professional Leader Profile

- Strong leadership skills: ability to motivate, inspire, and coach the sales team
- Excellent communication skills to effectively communicate sales strategies and goals
- Strong collaboration and team-building skills with key stakeholders (internally and externally)
- Strong relationship-building skills and closing techniques to demonstrate empathy and understanding.
- Adaptability and resilience to navigate a more complex, rapidly changing world
- Results and outcome orientation, with a strong agile approach to, "getting the right job done in the right way at the right time."
- Analytical mindset to interpret data and make data-driven decisions. Leads by fact-based orientation vs "generalizations."
- Ability to forecast sales accurately and value data as a "precious resource"
- Understands sales strategies and compliance requirements to manage risk
- Usage of AI toolkits for diverse sales processes.
- Use of generative AI and skills in prompting techniques
- Talent management full cycle leadership (attract, develop, retain)
- Values innovation and continuous improvement
- Engaged in community leadership and values sustainability
- Balances work and life and values mental health and well-being.
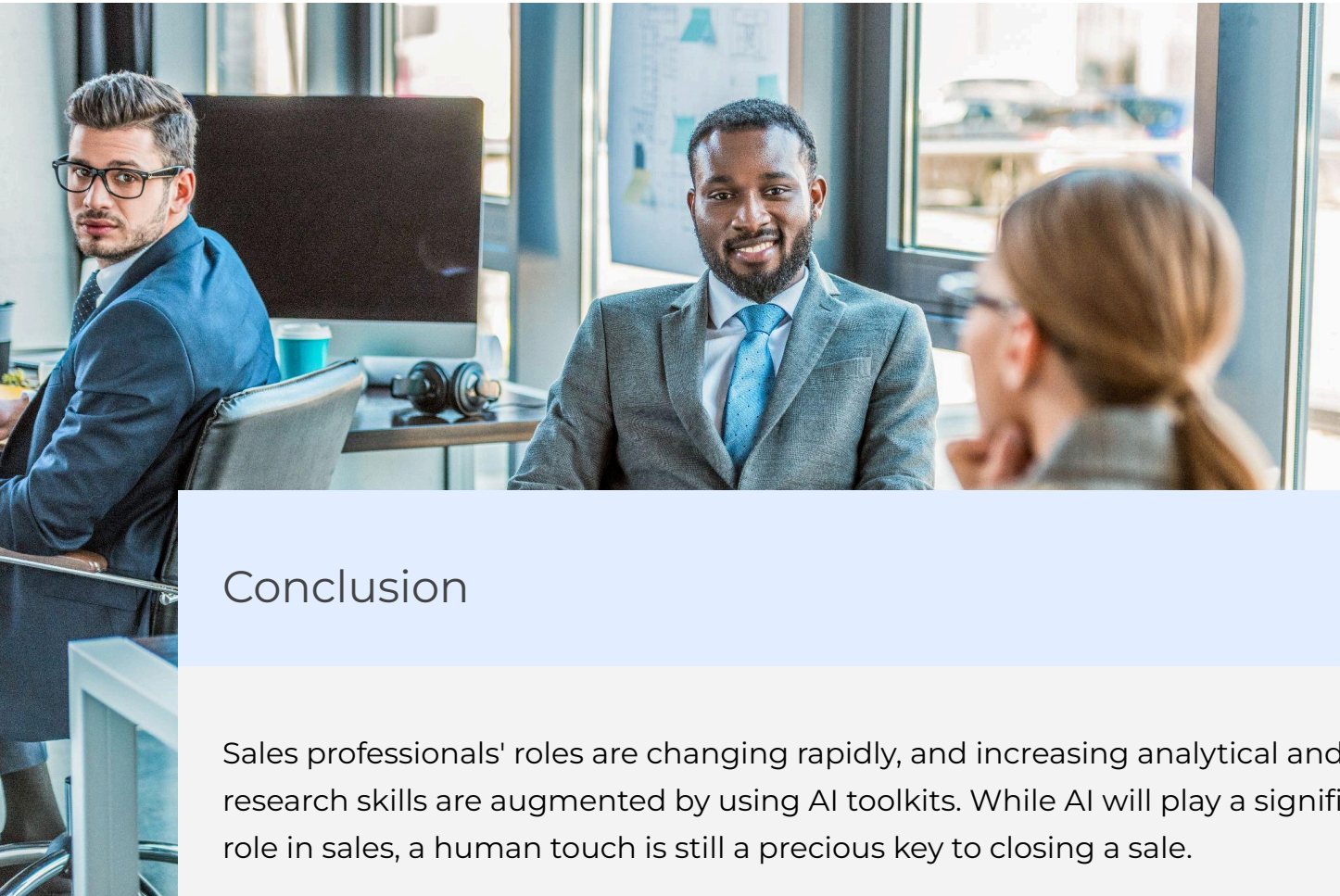
Conclusion

Sales professionals' roles are changing rapidly, and increasing analytical and research skills are augmented by using AI toolkits. While AI will play a significant role in sales, a human touch is still a precious key to closing a sale.

Based on our discussions with sales leaders and sales professionals, the majority of them still agree that setting up a face-to-face meeting is still the most effective strategy for selling to new customers and building relationships.

Although it is more difficult to see customers face to face, as more business is conducted virtually, sellers that make the extra effort, especially on qualified opportunities can bring that extra human touch to connect with customers.

Balancing the analytical know-how with the relationship-centric approach is what will help shore up more wins and growth.

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SaskTel's heritage has been serving and connecting its customers since 1908. Customers' needs have evolved and as such the tools and skills required to service our customers must evolve as well. As technologies change so must our approach to sales. Sales roles now involve considerably more analytical and sales leadership skills than the social encounters and contract-signing roles of previous decades. Delivering the outcomes demanded by tomorrow's clients requires constant sales skill evolution and an enhanced level of communication and understanding of how multiple services and products can produce a desired outcome. We must continue to evolve our skills and capabilities to keep up with our customer's expectations.

– David Ekstrand, Vice President of Business Sales and Solutions, SaskTel

About Dr. Cindy Gordon

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Dr. Cindy Gordon ICD.D. is the CEO & Founder of SalesChoice Inc. an AI company, focused on Human Advantage.

She is well recognized globally as a digital transformation leader bridging new ways of working, using the most advanced forms of AI and leading technology innovations. She has held senior executive or partnership roles at Accenture, XDLI, a venture capital fund, Xerox, Citicorp, and Nortel Networks. She has been an active angel in commercializing companies like Eloqua, sold for $1.2B and is currently advising leading AI companies like Emotional Cloud, and Kaji, to name a few.

Cindy is equally active in the Not for Profit sector and is a former National Chair for CATA for Women in Technology and Co-Chair of Smarter Cities. She currently sits on AI Advisory boards: the AI Forum, The Forbes Business and Technology Board - The Arizona State University Campus, and The USA Artificial Institute (USAII). Dr. Gordon is the recipient of numerous awards, most recently the Digital CEO Innovator of the Year Award (Bonhill Award), and also the Governor's General Award for Innovation and Community Leadership.

She is recognized by Onalytica as one of the top global AI thought leaders and is also a Forbes AI thought leader, with a regular column. She also teaches AI Strategy, AI Business Transformation, AI Ethics and Law at USAII and George Brown College. She is also the author of 14 books, with a recent publication, the AI Dilemma. She is currently working on a new book, The Awakening: Building Responsible AI Organizations. She is very concerned about the challenges in AI Methods, which do not ensure diversity, equity and inclusion in AI models and methods. She is also a certified board director with her ICD.D designation to help address the governance gaps in AI. Academically, she has a doctorate in complexity sciences, leveraging technology methods and integrative organizational design strategies to accelerate growth from the University of Toronto.

About SalesChoice

SalesChoice is a SaaS and Data Sciences company with a vision to enable human advantage using Trusted AI Methods to accelerate organizational growth. Its InsightEngine™ is an Award-winning AI platform that brings B2B sales and employee productivity apps to organizations. While SalesInsights™ helps B2B sales teams to end revenue uncertainty and sales inefficiencies to increase top-line revenue, MoodInsights™ is both an add-on and a standalone solution that helps organizations to reduce costs by tackling employee or customer churn, operational and safety risks and workforce wellbeing. Including diversity and inclusiveness insights by mining story narratives. The company also offers AI enablement advisory and strategy solutioning across diverse AI use cases to achieve its overall vision of Ending Revenue Uncertainty for Human Advantage, using Trusted and Responsible AI practices.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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