

Sales Enablement Software Buying Guide

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Evaluating sales enablement software? This buying guide has all you need to know.

We have explained what sales enablement software is, why it is becoming popular and how it can benefit organizations. Given its growing popularity and many benefits, it's a safe bet more organizations are considering a purchase. So here we offer some advice, including overviews of some notable solutions and tips on evaluating and implementing sales enablement software.

Short List of Sales Enablement Software

Hundreds of products fall in the sales enablement software category, as mentioned in our earlier article. Here are four offerings that give an idea of the different types of solutions that are available.

Accent Technologies

Accent Technologies provides a comprehensive sales enablement platform that includes sales content management, guided selling, training, coaching, skills development libraries and analytics.

"We use hundreds of variables for each buyer and opportunity to drive prioritization and recommendations, surface risk areas, and uncover coaching and training options," said Pete McChrystal, CEO of Accent Technologies. "We also assist reps with opportunity scoring, next step recommendations, sales plays and playbooks."

Allego

Allego is a sales learning platform that is said to transform sales enablement and training through the use of short videos. With its mobile-first platform, organizations can create and curate content to better train and collaborate with sales teams.

"Teams can rapidly implement a variety of sales enablement and training applications to improve organizational performance and productivity, including competitive intelligence sharing, training and certification, sales skills practice, role play, coaching, rapid on-boarding and assessment of new hires and analytics to measure engagement with content, to optimize organizational learning and collaboration," said Mark Magnacca, Allego's president and co-founder.

Datahug

Datahug emphasizes its sales forecasting and pipeline management capabilities.

"We bridge the gap between accurate forecasting and improving actual sales execution by using the data points that predict the forecast to measure and improve the behavior of salespeople," said Ray Smith, CEO of Datahug.

Insite Software

Insite Software stresses user-friendly design and out-of-the-box integration with enterprise applications, including CRM. It is said to empower manufacturers and distributors to transform the way they sell to match the needs of today's business-to-business (B2B) buyers.

"We help B2B organizations grow revenues across online and physical sales channels -- and reduce their cost-to-serve -- via a hybrid channel strategy that optimizes digital commerce and turbocharges the productivity of account-based sales and service reps," said Michael Evens, senior product manager, Insite Software. "We support digital content delivery to any device, provide real-time visibility into the sales process, and raise the consistency in the information and data presented."

Other Sales Enablement Software Possibilities

Further sales enablement software possibilities include:

SAVO	KnowledgeTree	prolifiq
SAP Cloud for Sales Software	Qvidian	bigtincan
Qvidian Sales Execution Platform	Seismic	Live Hive
Calliduscloud	ShowPad	mediafly
Pitcher	Skura	Octiv
Brainshark	Salesforce	veelo
HighSpot	ClearSlide	

Evaluating Sales Enablement Software: Where to Start

Evaluating sales enablement software? First, assess your existing sales content repositories. Because sales enablement typically ties in heavily with content management systems (CMSes), Steven Wright, an analyst at Forrester Research, advised users to check out their existing sales and marketing content before looking at sales enablement vendors. He also recommends looking beyond traditional sales and marketing databases to encompass a larger view of buyer behavior across the customer lifecycle.

On the reporting side, Wright said to verify that software includes out-of-the-box reports on usage and engagement and mapping to CRM data on sales stage, win/loss status and revenue. Integration, obviously, is a vital ingredient.

“The more the solution can integrate seamlessly with CRM and reduce the need to access one more application, the better it can support seller efficiency by reducing the time required to navigate to and from one more app,” said Wright. “Data on behavior and integration, usage and customer information (internal and external) must be easily imported and exported between solutions to support analytics at all levels.”

Next, determine if you need a full-featured sales enablement suite or a more focused tool or tools. Sometimes a document or content management solution is all that is really needed, said Craig Borowski, researcher for Software Advice, a site that offers reviews and comparisons of CRM software products. Beware of one-size-fits-all products, unless you are certain they'll cover the actual needs of sales staff.

In some cases, industry-specific sales enablement tools may be a good fit, he said. This can help eliminate many candidates that either do not play in your field or have little or no experience in it.

Other Sales Enablement Software Questions to Consider

There are some other questions to consider when evaluating sales enablement software. Among them:

- What business problems are we trying to solve with sales enablement?
- Which members of the sales team will be the primary users of sales enablement software?
- What are the biggest challenges they face in their day-to-day work?
- What are our goals for the sales enablement program, and what will success look like?
- Where in the process would it be most powerful to incorporate data from back-end systems (such as CRM or ERP) to help our sales reps and customers make faster, better business decisions?
- How do sales reps most easily learn, absorb and retain information?

To find out which tools will make frontline sales staff more effective, be sure to survey them directly, Borowski said. Learn what their biggest challenges are (in terms of process efficiency and close rates) and ask vendors how their products address those specific challenges.

“The most common mistake occurs when the solution is selected by staff that aren’t even in the sales department, or when outside staff prioritize non-sales-related aspects to come up with an application short list,” he said. “For example, IT staff might prioritize integrations or deployment factors, the executive suite might prioritize cost or contract terms. While important, these factors shouldn’t be given priority over the core reason for the purchase: to enable sales staff to work more efficiently and more effectively.”

For specific tools, ask:

- How good is reporting?
- Does it have CRM and CMS (content management system) integration?
- When/where can the platform be accessed, and how easy is it to access? Does it require an Internet connection? Is it mobile?
- How long will it take to implement this product?

Vet the Vendors

As with any software purchase, it is always prudent to talk to existing customers, get a realistic estimate of how long the solution will take to implement, assess the amount of training required, find independent reviews and see if potential suppliers have experience in your industry.

“Reach out to your peers to find out what similar companies are using and how they have aligned their sales enablement strategies,” said Datahug’s Smith. “The challenges you are seeing have probably been encountered and solved before.”

Avoiding Sales Enablement Software Mistakes

Many buyers have too narrow a concept of sales enablement, believes Insite Software’s Evens. Some of those intending to implement sales enablement software consider only how it will impact higher level workflows rather than how it will impact the day-to-day workflows of sales people, he said.

Another way in which organizations sometimes go wrong is providing enablement tools that lack mobile accessibility. This is a sure way to see an implementation project fail.

“Sales enablement must reach sales people on the devices that are with them most often, like tablets and smartphones,” said Evens.

Look at content management capabilities, Evens recommends. Do not choose sales enablement software that allows only a handful of people to create and curate content, as this often leaves content outdated and not well used. Instead, organizations should look at technologies that are simple to use and allow users to easily create content.

“Don’t treat sales enablement as just a tool; it includes tools, processes, even training, and it should be viewed as a vehicle to deliver efficiency and time savings,” said Evens. “It needs to be integrated within the overall enterprise, and with other enterprise applications, always with an eye toward how it will positively impact the workflow of the sales end user.”

Trying to change too much, too fast is another big mistake. A phased approach works best, generating quick business wins to gain momentum and get people excited. But the bottom line is that the seller’s experience must be the priority, not pretty pictures to be viewed in the board room or an application that lets a sales manager grow lazy.

“The fewer the interfaces and applications sellers need to use the better,” said Wright. “This includes integrating with CRM, working seamlessly with email and keeping sellers engaged with new content, updates and success stories.”

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