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What you need to know about sales AI

A guide for sales operations

Sales teams are the most expensive department within a company. Businesses pay millions of dollars every year in operational costs, yet much of that money is wasted on vastly inefficient processes.

Most of a sales rep's time (64%) is spent doing on work unrelated to selling, and much of that time (25%) is consumed by administrative tasks (Salesforce). What can help? Deploying artificial intelligence (AI) to eliminate the inefficiencies and increase your team's productivity.

It's time for sales operations to level-up their optimization skills and implement AI for sales process automation.

46%

Forrester reports that 46% of companies say marketing and sales are the areas where they are most investing in AI systems.

Sales op's role in AI implementation
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Sales is a likely starting point for many executives to begin adopting AI due to the large cost of this team. And when company leadership wants AI for the sales organization, sales operations is called in to deliver on that initiative.

Before AI became a factor, sales operations attempted to fix inefficient processes with "productivity tools." However, these tools tend to do the opposite by adding more steps to the sales process. It's like applying a band aid to a broken leg; major process problems call for long-term solutions.

AI and automation is the future-proof solution to fixing broken sales processes and ramping up sales productivity long term. Sales process automation is must-have for operation optimizers.

Understanding AI and automation
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Artificial Intelligence (AI):
Machines that learn from data and can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. These include tasks like visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making and language translations.

Artificial intelligence
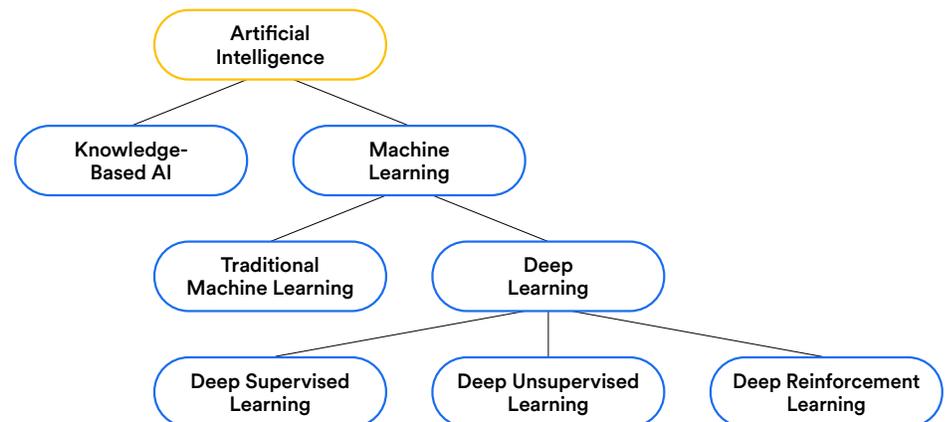
AI has been around for a while, the first being knowledge-based AI. These are machines with decision-trees made up of "if-this-then-that" rules which dictate which outcome the AI can generate. Recently, there's been major developments in machine learning (ML), which are systems built with specific algorithms to solve specific problems.

The most recent breakthroughs come from deep learning. Deep learning models have neural networks that mimic the human brain in the way that they are interconnected and can fire between neurons. These give deep learning systems enough storage and

computing capabilities to run large networks that can be layered on top of each other, enabling them to improve as they're given more data.

These developments have given way to advancements in several areas such as natural language processing (NLP), which is the ability for a computer to understand, interpret and manipulate human language. Developments like these make it so AI can perform complex tasks that could previously only be done by a human.

Robotic process automation (RPA)

Robotic Process Automation (RPA):
A software in which a technical-user must define a static manual process into a sequence of recorded actions and replayed to automate that same process; typically performed on a graphical user interface (GUI).

Another side of business automation that may be less familiar to sales operations; robotic process automation.

RPA can be applied to various manual tasks to increase the efficiency and accuracy in which they are performed. Some use cases include: screen scraping data collection, document generation, process mapping and other basic workflows.

While there are tasks where RPA can be advantageous, it is limited in its abilities. RPA alone is not intelligent and performs an action repeatedly without being able to consider nuances or exceptions. There is no room for error with RPA as it can only perform automations within its predefined process.

RPA + AI = Intelligent process automation (IPA)

Intelligent Process Automation (IPA):
Combines artificial intelligence, robotic process automation and mass amounts of data to automate complex tasks and perform more adaptable workflows.

When you add AI to RPA however, the possibilities for optimization are endless. This powerful combination is called intelligent process automation.

Intelligent process automation represents the next generation of RPA, beyond automating simple, repetitive click work. It's technology that is finally intelligent enough to assist in performing complex human tasks.

It frees employees from their mundane computer tasks by handing off the robotic processes to the robots, allowing the human workforce to focus on tasks that drive value for their organization. cases include: natural language recognition, predictive analytics, payroll processing, claims processing, underwriting and membership renewals.

This frees up each worker to be more productive. For a doctor, this means spending more time with patients. For a banker or insurance provider, this would be able to better consult customers. And for sales, this means selling more. With intelligent automation, people spend more time on the tasks they were meant to do.

As humans waste less time, the benefits of using this technology pile up. Overall productivity improves and operating costs are reduced.

Applying intelligent sales process automation

There are two main ways to apply AI to the sales process: automation and augmentation.

Automation involves having an AI tool perform low-level, repetitive tasks automatically with little assistance from the sales rep. As previously mentioned, a sales rep's selling activities only make up for 36% of their total activities.

Tasks that could be automated include CRM data entry, prospecting and researching, scheduling meetings, drafting emails, etc.

According to McKinsey, about 40% of sales tasks can currently be automated, but estimates that by 2020, 85% of sales tasks could be automated. This would lead to a major boost in productivity for sales reps, which ultimately will lead to boosts in revenue for companies.

Augmented tools, on the other hand, are technologies designed to elevate human workers and aid them in working smarter. For sales, this means offering up recommendations or predictions based on historical data to empower reps with the insight to make smarter choices.

These tools are specifically designed to elevate human intelligence rather than mirror it. They keep humans in charge, but enhance their abilities. This allows for much greater change management.

Tasks that could be augmented include "next-step" engagement recommendations, prospecting, cross-and-up-sell suggestions, etc.

The best opportunities for augmentation are often tasks that could be performed more efficiently if reps had better insight and data. Let's use prospecting as an example:

50% of sales time is wasted on unproductive prospecting (The B2B Lead). When sales reps have an AI tool that suggests new accounts based on data, they waste less time searching for accounts and trying to sell to bad accounts.

IPA platforms typically employ both automation and augmentation, some with more features on one side than the other. It's important to find the proper use cases for your organization.

For more information on the potential use cases of sales AI and IPA platforms, visit automationhero.ai/usecases.

30%

Gartner predicts that by 2020, 30% of all B2B companies will employ AI to augment at least one of their primary sales processes.

Sales AI Glossary

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Here are the most common terms you need to know (and a few extras to put you ahead of the curve).

1. Algorithm:

In math and computer sciences, an algorithm is the process or equation that a machine goes through to solve a problem, complete a task or perform a certain computation.

2. Artificial intelligence (AI):

Machines that learn from data and can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. These include tasks like visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making and language translations.

3. Augmented intelligence:

Tools and technology designed to elevate human workers and aid them in working smarter. This is seen as a compliment to humans rather than a replacement. Often referred to as intelligence augmentation (IA).

4. Automation:

Having a machine or tool that can perform a function with minimal human involvement.

5. Autonomous business processes:

When a series of business tasks can all be fully automated with little human interaction or interference.

6. Business Process Automation (BPA):

Automation of business processes and workflows as a whole rather than one step or process with the goal of making the organization as efficient and productive as possible.

7. Chatbot:

A software designed to replicate human conversations.

8. Crowdsourcing:

A mechanism to motivate people to do something. In the context of AI, it's used to create data sets that are then used to train AI.

9. Deep learning:

A sector of machine learning that stacks neural networks on top of each other to achieve much higher accuracy than any other ML algorithm has before.

10. Information extraction:

When a machine mines for interesting pieces of data found in natural language text (for instance names, companies, telephone numbers, etc.).

11. Intent detection:

When a system uses NLP to predict the intention of a human message. This can be used to assist in getting the message to the right department or helping respond to the message.

12. Knowledge-based AI:

Humans assemble a handcrafted set of rules that are used to make decision graphs. These graphs often take a very long time to manually create by subject matter experts.

13. Machine learning:

A sector of AI when a machine uses a specific algorithm to solve a certain problem or do a certain task. These tools learn by finding patterns in data sets that they can then use to create an outcome. This is also called data mining.

14. Natural language processing (NLP):

The ability for a computer to understand, interpret and manipulate human language. This is also called text mining.

15. Neural network:

Networks in a ML algorithm that simulate how the human brain works, where a network of firing neurons are connected to make decisions based on the input.

16. Predictive analytics:

When a machine can make predictions about the future using current and historical data.

17. Reinforcement learning:

Systems that learn based on a reward. They create outcomes and then are rewarded or punished. It is only told whether the outcome is correct or not. Once the correct output is achieved, it will optimize for maximum reward.

18. Robotic process automation (RPA):

Software that automates tasks and processes usually done by humans. This can be tasks like processing, manipulating data, and triggering responses. Essentially, this is software automating the existing tools in your tech stack.

19. Sales AI:

A tool that utilized artificial intelligence to improve the sales process. This can be in the form of automation in which a simple sales task is completed autonomously or through augmentation which assists in making predictions.

20. Sales automation:

Using technology to automate sales processes through static roles. For example, converting leads into the next stage in the CRM based on triggers that occur elsewhere like sending out certain documents through email.

21. Supervised learning:

Machine learning models that learn by comparing its own output to the "correct" output. If the system is incorrect, it adjusts the algorithm accordingly.

22. Unsupervised learning:

Machine learning models that are trained without receiving the correct "answer" to the problem they're solving, meaning they learn through a process of trial and error.