



Trends in Partner Selling

Learn how sales teams use technology and enablement to help partners grow revenue.



Foreword



If you're aiming for growth and customer success at scale, think of partners as the rocket fuel that propels you forward. Nine in 10 sales leaders we surveyed said they're using partners, and 84% say partnerships make a bigger impact than they did a year ago.

But this widespread adoption only tells part of the story. Yes, partners are at the forefront, but they're at a crossroads, too. The role, the motion, and the technology have changed.

Take alliance managers, for instance. Before, they were often thought of as matchmakers. They made introductions on request, set the plan, and moved on to the next thing. Today, alliance managers are at the very center of business growth, whether they're scaling with AI or using data to set priorities for investment and sales enablement.

Now is the right moment – with a focus on partners and a renaissance around AI – to take a second look at what you're doing in your partner business. It's time to give your partners what they need to support your customers, while also opening up more of their day to do valuable things.

This report shares how sales pros are doing it. Dive in to discover the trends and tactics that can help you reimagine partner selling. You'll learn how to combine AI, technology, and investment to shore up the value that an empowered partner can bring.

Ryan Nunez

Ryan Nunez

Vice President, Partner Alliances, Salesforce



What You'll Find in This Report

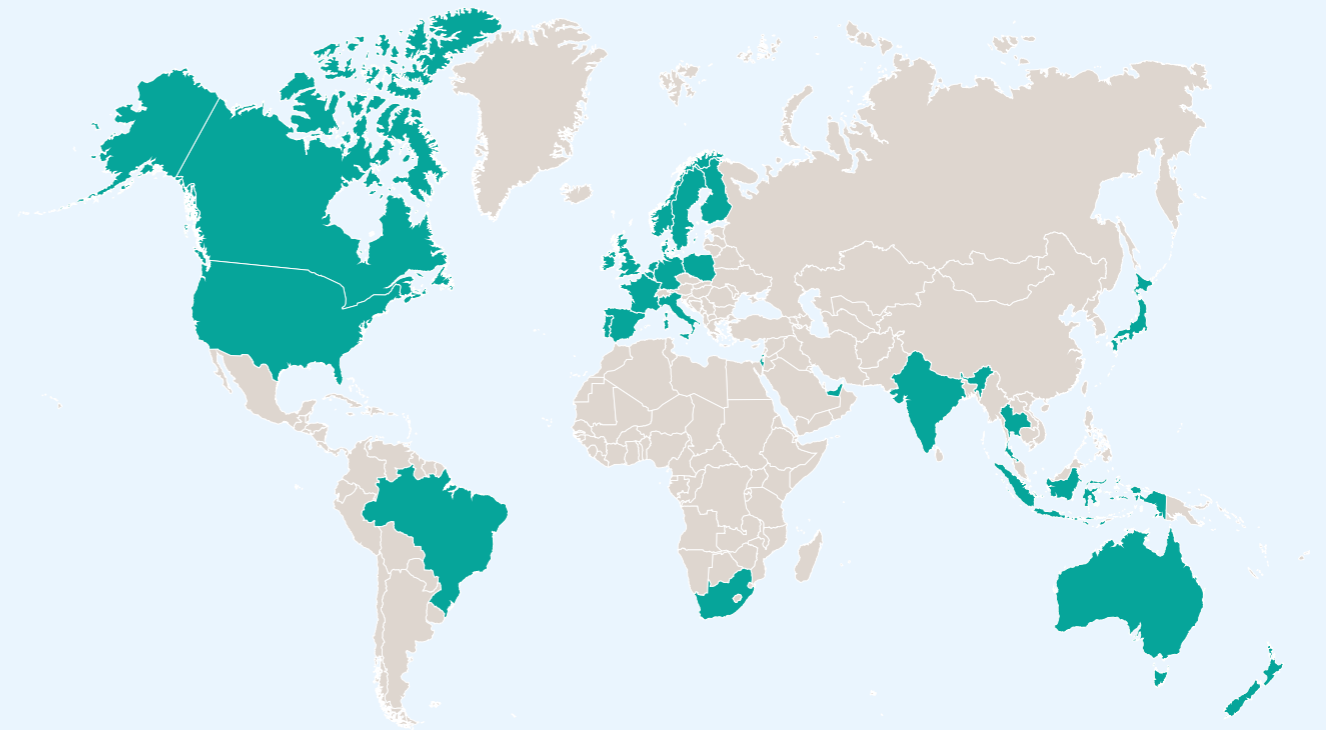
Salesforce Research provides data-driven insights to help businesses understand trends that are important to them.

This report examines trends in partner selling, using a subset of data from the sixth edition of the "State of Sales" report.

The "State of Sales" report surveyed 5,500 sales professionals worldwide, in a double-anonymous survey conducted from March 8 through April 18, 2024. For further survey demographics, see page 13.



Salesforce Research provides data-driven insights to help businesses transform how they drive customer success. Browse all reports at salesforce.com/research.



5,500 sales professionals surveyed worldwide



Contents

Executive Summary 02

Chapter 1 | Partner Selling Goes Mainstream 05

Chapter 2 | Partners Face Barriers to Growth 06

Chapter 3 | Technology Is Central to Partners' Success 07

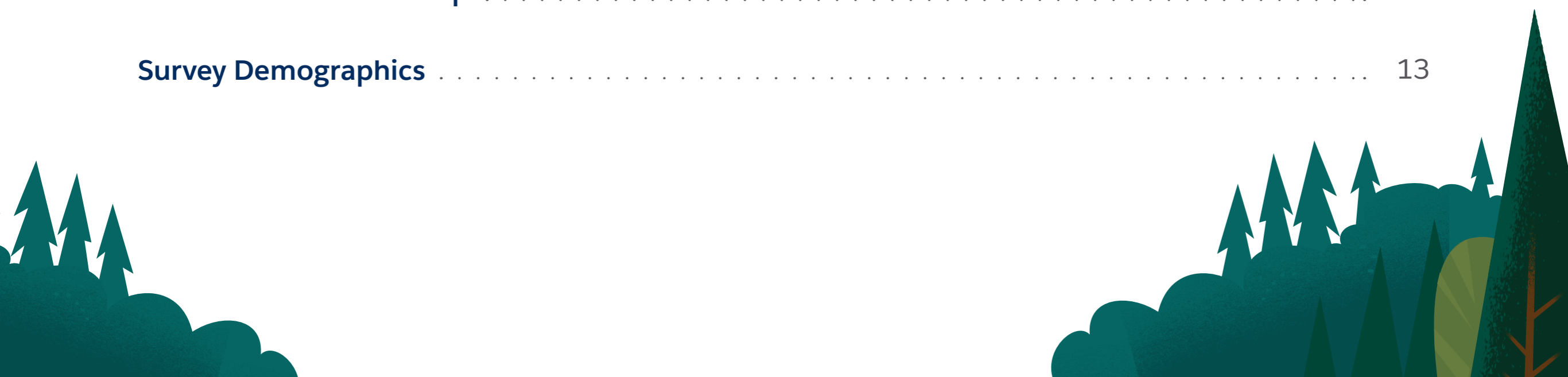
Chapter 4 | Most Partners Use AI and Experience the Gains 08

Chapter 5 | Partner Enablement Emerges as Area of Focus 09

Chapter 6 | AI Gives Partner Enablement a Boost 10

How Salesforce Can Help 12

Survey Demographics 13



01

Partner Selling Goes Mainstream

About 9 in 10 sales teams use partners currently, and among those who don't, over half plan to in the next year.

There are many ways that sales teams add partner selling to their business models – whether it's by using distributors to sell consumer goods, resellers to sell new features, or brokers to add services.

With partnerships in place, a business can grow revenue with less upfront investment. For example, sales teams can carry out new strategies without adding headcount, whether that means expanding into a new region, targeting a new market, or simply scaling efficiently.

84% of sales pros say partner selling has a bigger impact on revenue than a year ago.

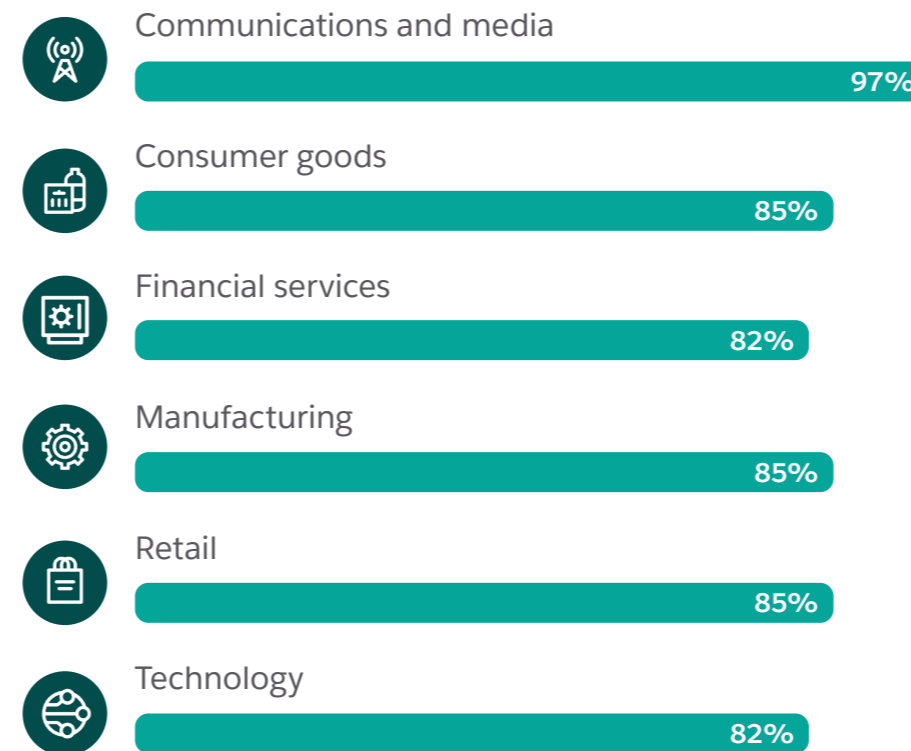
Nearly Every Company Uses Partnerships

Sales Teams That Use Partner Selling



Base: People leaders

Partner Selling Adoption Rate by Industry



Base: Sales leaders and sales ops pros



Komal Shah

Head of Global Channel Operations, Atlassian

“The rise of partners comes with a shift. We’re moving away from a world where partners merely deliver products, and toward a world where partners create solutions, helping customers reach their goals.”

02

Partners Face Barriers to Growth

Sales leaders can set partners up for success by addressing the challenges they face.

Partners say marketplace competition, from both new entrants and existing challengers, is increasingly a headache. They also report higher customer expectations – for lower costs, deeper understanding, and greater value.

At the same time, partner reps say their sales cycles are getting longer, as buyers apply more scrutiny to every deal. Seventy-eight percent of business buyers say their company is more careful about spending than it used to be.*

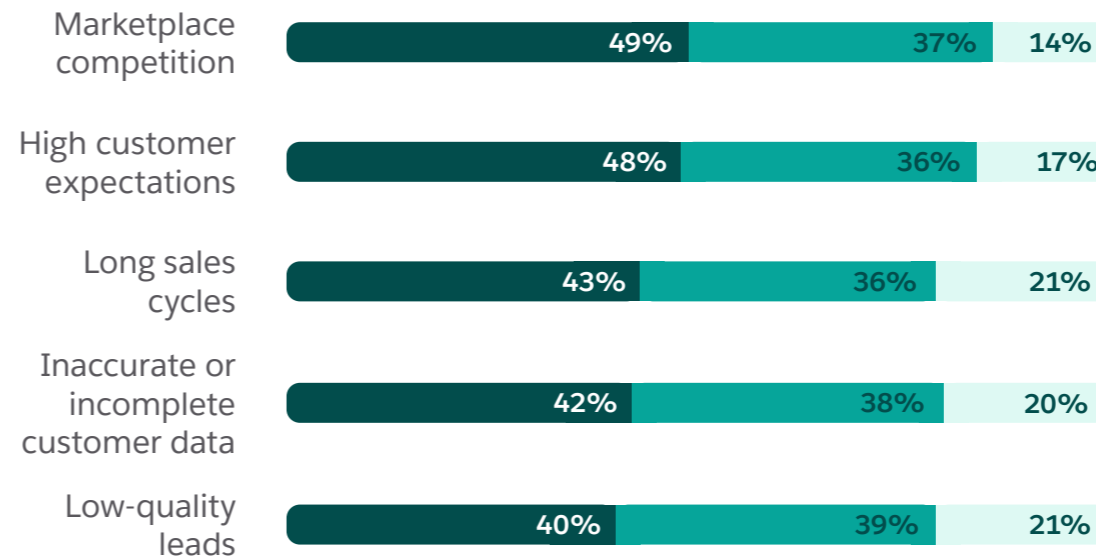
For many partner reps, these pressures may create a feeling that the walls are closing in. Some report they don't have the information they need to succeed: 42% say inaccurate or incomplete data is more of a challenge, and 40% say the same about low-quality leads.

73% of partners don't expect to hit their revenue targets this year.

*Salesforce State of the Connected Customer, 2023

Competition and Customer Expectations Apply Pressure

Extent of Challenges Compared to a Year Ago



● More of a challenge ● No change ● Less of a challenge

Base: Partner reps



Peter Strohkorb

Founder & CEO, Peter Strohkorb Sales Advisory

“Increased competition is a sign of the times as every vendor wants to grow their revenues. That means partners need to lift their game to stand out. Pro tip: Stop selling products and start selling outcomes.”

03

Technology Is Central to Partners' Success

About 9 in 10 sales teams use dedicated technology to manage partner selling, turning to tools like partner relationship management software to set up partners for success.

Many sales pros say these tools make a large impact on the return on investment (ROI) of their partner sales. This is understandable: Technology can help partners consolidate customer data, automate sales activities, and provide key insights that help them take smarter action – from onboarding to closing and servicing deals.

But sales leaders paint a slightly rosier picture of their technology, compared to partner sellers: 87% of sales leaders say they provide an engaging partner experience, and 85% say their partner technology is easy to use. On both counts, only 77% of partners agree.

Still, partner selling technology proves critical to partner reps' success.

73% of teams see major or moderate ROI impact from partner selling technology.*

*Base: Sales leaders and sales sales ops professionals with partner sales

Partner Selling Tools Are Effective but Need Refinement

Sales Teams That Use Dedicated Technology to Manage Partners



77% of partner reps agree



77% of partner reps agree



04

Most Partners Use AI and Experience the Gains

Eighty-one percent of sales teams have fully implemented or are experimenting with AI, and most partners feel comfortable using it.

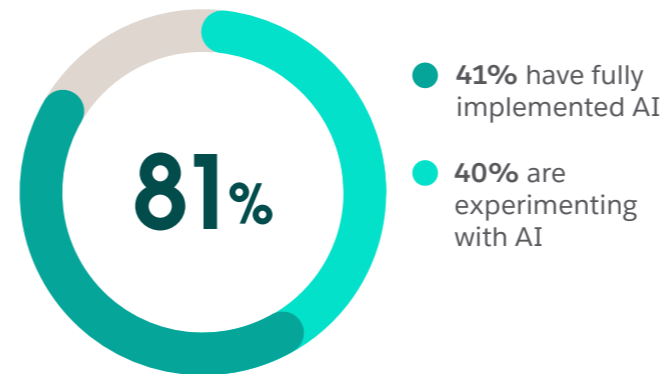
Partners say the top area AI improves is their understanding of the competition. There are many applications of this, including the research of market trends and competitors.

The other top areas of improvement include stages across the sales process – for example, prioritizing leads, understanding customers, and personalizing communications.

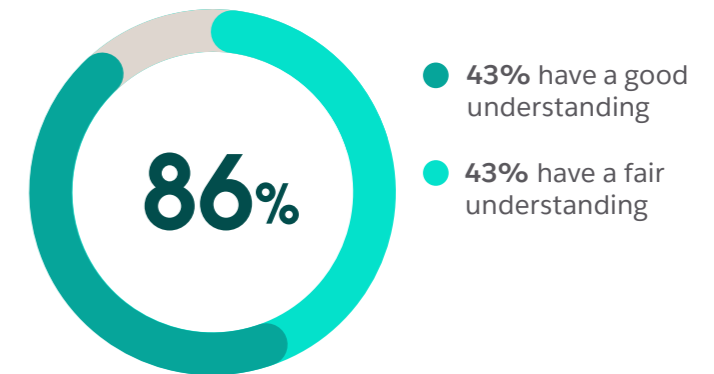
This wide range of activities suggests that sales teams are providing their partners with “surround sound” AI, increasing productivity throughout the sales cycle.

Partners Confidently Use AI

AI Adoption Among Sales Teams with Partners



Partner Reps Who Say They Understand How to Use AI



Top 5 Benefits of AI for Partners

- 1 Understanding of the competition
- 2 Prioritization of leads
- 3 Visibility into sales rep activity
- 4 Sales forecasting accuracy
- 5 Prospect / customer communication

Base: Partner reps with AI



Lori Richardson
CEO, Score More Sales

“A great way for partners to start with AI? Use tools that summarize buyer information before discovery calls, then guide you as you build the relationship.”



05

Partner Enablement Emerges as Area of Focus

Sales leaders say enablement is a key driver for partner success: Nearly 3 in 4 sales leaders who use partners say training materials and human-led training make a major or moderate impact on partner sales ROI.

Performance and sales strategy reviews are the top two enablement resources that sales teams offer to partners. But other enablement resources lag. Fewer than a third of partners say they use win-loss reviews and roleplay sessions, possibly because of the data and time needed to provide them.

Partners say they're most satisfied with product-specific training, support materials, and personalized training – all activities that help them better communicate value to their prospects.

Enablement is the top growth tactic for organizations that use partner sales.*

*Base: Sales leaders

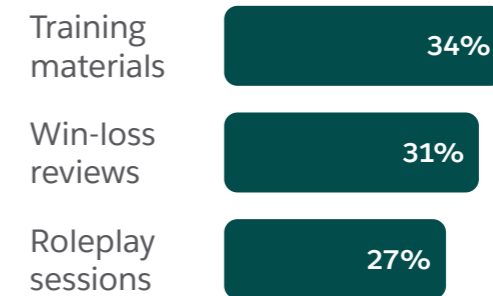
Performance and Strategy Reviews Top the List of Training Activities

Sales Enablement Resources Offered to Partner Reps

Top 3



Bottom 3



Base: Partner reps

Top 5 Enablement Resources by Partner Rep Satisfaction

- 1 Product-specific training
- 2 Support materials
- 3 Personalized training
- 4 Maintenance of training
- 5 One-on-one coaching



06

AI Gives Partner Enablement a Boost

With AI and enablement top of mind, sales leaders are combining both to deliver wins for partners, helping them to improve existing tactics and add new tactics to the list.

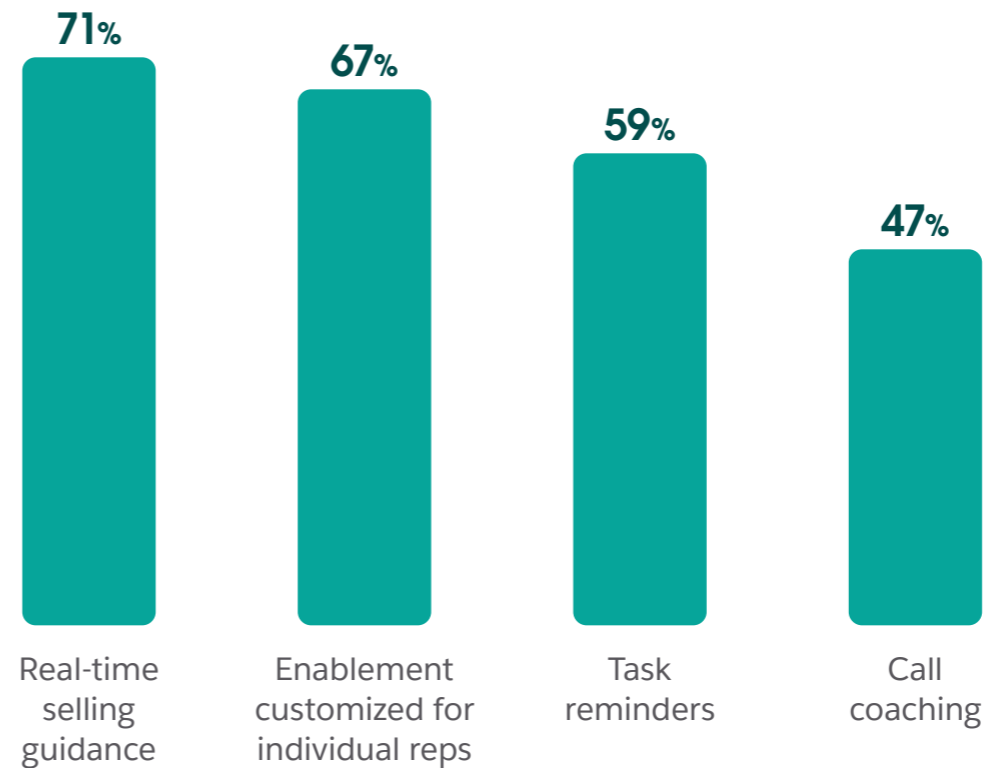
For example, among sales teams that have AI and use partners, nearly three in four use AI to provide real-time selling guidance, where AI monitors customer and pipeline data and recommends actions that partners can take next.

More than half of sales teams who work with partners also use this AI for customized training – for example, by creating personalized close plans for deals in flight.

Sales teams are also delivering AI that improves the age-old training tactic of call coaching. Now, instead of taking the manual time to listen in on reps' sales calls, partners can use AI to flag key moments and recommend next steps.

Partners Benefit from AI-Powered Enablement

Training Activities Where AI Is Used



Base: Sales ops professionals at companies using AI



Cherilynn Castleman

Managing Partner and Sales Coach, CGI

“With AI, partners are better equipped to close more deals on their own, without needing outside support. It's incredible to see – AI is enabling partners to thrive.”

What's Driving Partner Success? An Industry View

Sales leaders and sales ops pros say these tactics make the biggest impact on partner sales ROI.

Communications and Media

- 1 Human-led training
- 2 Oversight of partners
- 3 Training materials

Consumer Goods

- 1 Technology and tools
- 2 Partner incentives
- 3 Oversight of partners

Financial Services

- 1 Technology and tools
- 2 Oversight of partners
Data-sharing tools (*tie*)

Manufacturing

- 1 Partner incentives
- 2 Technology and tools
- 3 Oversight of partners

Retail

- 1 Oversight of partners
- 2 Partner incentives
- 3 Data-sharing tools

Technology

- 1 Human-led training
- 2 Partner incentives
- 3 Technology and tools
Training materials (*tie*)



How Salesforce Can Help

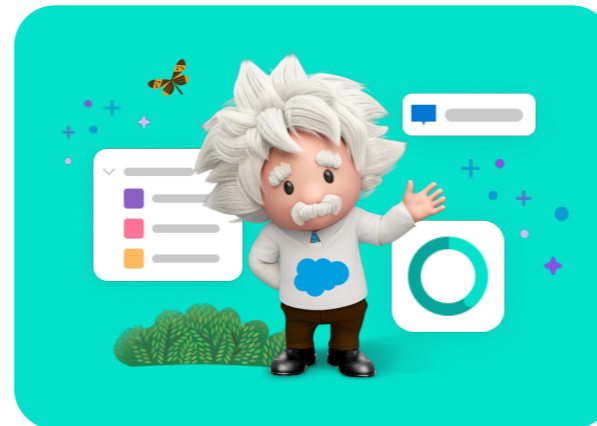
Enable everyone from resellers to brokers and beyond with complete, AI-powered partner relationship management software.



Get worksheets to develop your channel sales strategy

Getting started with partner selling? This workbook guides you through every step, from defining your vision to designing your portal.

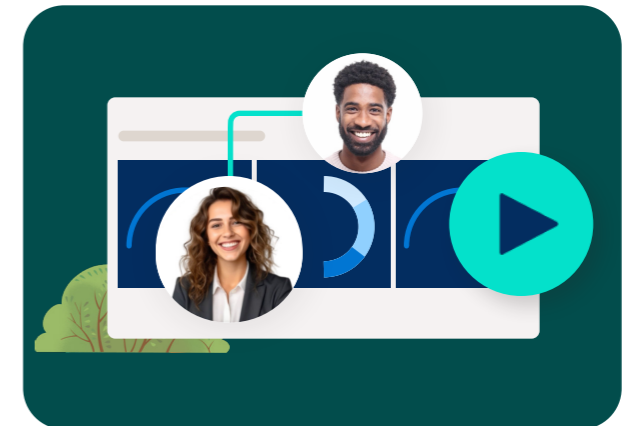
[Get the Workbook](#)



Put AI in the hands of your partners to fuel growth

Learn how to extend the AI power of Salesforce across your partner ecosystem and fuel growth – with Partner Relationship Management.

[Boost Partners with AI](#)



See Partner Relationship Management in action

See Partner Relationship Management in action. You'll discover how AI, technology, and enablement can help partners deliver growth on day one.

[Watch the Demo](#)

Survey Demographics

Country

Australia	4%
Belgium	2%
Brazil	5%
Canada	5%
Denmark	1%
Finland	1%
France	5%
Germany.....	5%
India	5%
Indonesia	4%
Ireland	2%
Israel	2%
Italy	4%
Japan	5%
Netherlands	3%
New Zealand	2%
Norway	<1%
Poland	2%
Portugal	2%
Singapore	2%
South Africa	4%
Spain	4%
Sweden	1%
Thailand	4%
United Arab Emirates	2%
United Kingdom	5%
United States	18%

Role Within Sales

Sales operations	26%
Sales support	15%
Sales manager or director	25%
Sales leadership / Head of sales	10%
Inside sales rep	7%
Outside sales rep	12%
Partner / channel sales rep	5%

Industry

Agriculture	3%
Architecture, engineering, and construction	4%
Automotive	8%
Communications	3%
Consumer goods	11%
Energy and utilities	4%
Financial services	8%
Healthcare	5%
Life sciences and biotechnology	3%
Manufacturing	14%
Media and entertainment	3%
Professional and business services	5%
Retail	16%
Supply chain and logistics	5%
Technology	5%
Travel and hospitality	4%
Other	1%

Company Size

SMB (21-100 employees)	30%
MM (101-3,500 employees)	50%
ENT (over 3,500 employees)	20%





The information provided in this report is strictly for the convenience of our customers and is for general informational purposes only. Publication by Salesforce, Inc. does not constitute an endorsement. Salesforce.com does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of any information, text, graphics, links, or other items contained within this guide. Salesforce.com does not guarantee you will achieve any specific results if you follow any advice in the report. It may be advisable for you to consult with a professional such as a lawyer, accountant, architect, business advisor, or professional engineer to get specific advice that applies to your specific situation.