

BRAINSHARK®

**SPECIAL
REPORT:**

Where Do Great Sales Enablement Leaders Come From?



INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, if you asked a business leader about their sales enablement strategy, the response likely would've been, "what's sales enablement?"

It's not as if companies weren't preparing their sales forces – with onboarding, coaching, etc. – but for most, the view of sales

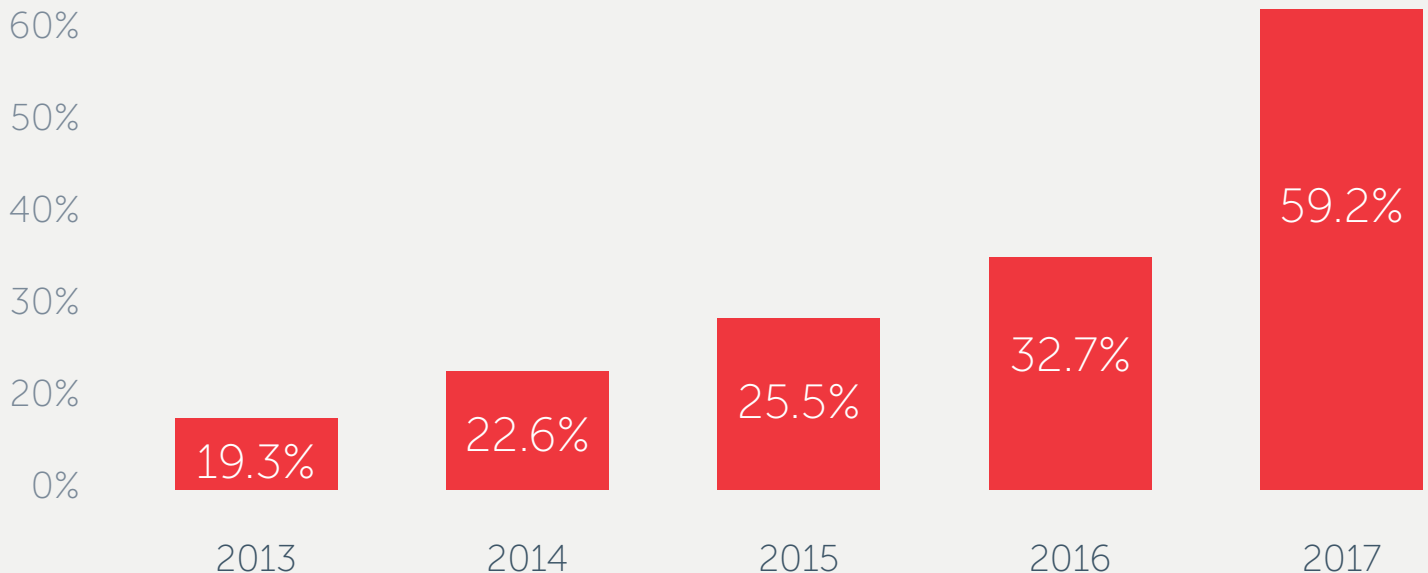
enablement as a strategic function was largely non-existent.

Times, of course, have changed.

Today, investments in sales enablement have risen rapidly – the number of companies with a dedicated role has more than tripled since 2013, according

to CSO Insights. That number is striking when you consider that as recently as 5 or 6 years ago, a strategic, formalized sales enablement function wasn't on many companies' radar, says **Heather Cole**, service director of sales enablement strategies at SiriusDecisions.

Companies with a dedicated sales enablement person, program or function:



Source: CSO Insights



The evolution of the function has informed the path of today's sales enablement leaders. As sales enablement has fought for its 'seat at the table,' leaders have strived to be more strategic, more visible to the C-suite, and seen as key contributors to sales and company goals.

The question is, where do these people come from?

If the formalized function is only a few years old, the enablement

practitioners of today must have been doing *something* that prepared them for their current roles. What skills do they have? What are their common backgrounds and experience? Where does sales enablement stand today, and where does it need to go?

The answers to these questions are important for both the professionals looking to make the jump to a sales enablement career path, as well as the companies preparing to hire them. This Brainshark special report will

explore these topics through insights from some of today's sales enablement leaders, with details on their view of the current state of the enablement function.

BECOMING A SALES ENABLEMENT LEADER – WHAT’S THE PATH?

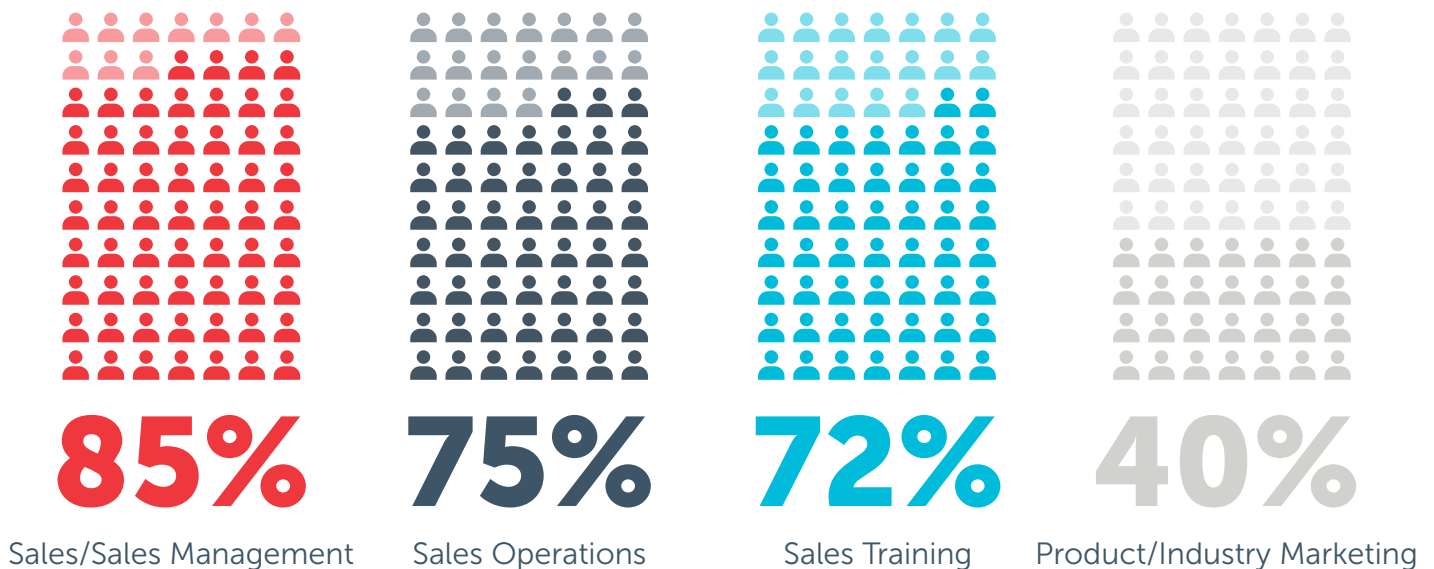
Naturally, many sales enablement roles are filled by former sales professionals (both managers and reps), because their selling skills translate well to the needs of the function. At the same time, training and marketing professionals, as well as those with unexpected backgrounds, have found that they can apply

their skills to enabling sales reps as well.

Today, 85% of sales enablement professionals have some sales or sales management experience, while others have sales operations, sales training and product or industry marketing backgrounds, according to SiriusDecisions.

As Cole explains, “Typically, most enablers are in sales and given a management role or they’re a proactive rep that shares the wealth and makes people better. We also see a significant amount of people coming from training.”

Past Experience of Today’s Sales Enablement Professionals



Source: SiriusDecisions



"I think I was the only person in Silicon Valley to have the word 'enablement' in my title."

Daniel West, Oracle

But in real life terms, how does the transition into sales enablement happen for today's leaders?

As **Daniel West**, VP of go-to-market strategy and operations at Oracle and founding member and chapter president of the Bay Area Sales Enablement Society, furthered his career, the sales enablement function began to surface. He joined Mercury Interactive in 2000 and became director of partner enablement in 2004, where his job was to figure out how to prepare partners to carry out messaging to their customers; this was the first time he had heard the term "enablement."

"I think I was the only person in Silicon Valley to have the word 'enablement' in my title," he joked.

The importance of sales enablement became apparent in 2005 when Mercury made an acquisition. They realized the sales force needed a consistent message to communicate out to customers and prospects about the new capability.

So West pitched an idea to the chief operations officer and head of sales for a single enablement function that served the needs of all stakeholders, including partners, sales, pre-sales, services and customers.

"That was my new job an hour later," he said. Sometimes, sales leaders are born that quickly. Since then, West hasn't looked back, holding enablement leadership roles at HP, Informatica and InfoBlox.

Kristine Buonopane, senior sales program manager at Quick Base, has never been a sales rep,

nor had she worked directly in sales until about 6 years ago. But throughout her career, she did everything from leadership development and instructional design, to organizational development and change management.

Her transition into sales enablement happened when she was working in training and performance management at Constant Contact. The company was about to launch a new product and needed a way to inform the sales force about it. Buonopane raised her hand, and so began her journey in sales enablement.

"I was an internal person and my job was to identify the challenges the business was facing and figure out solutions, which fundamentally is what sales enablement is all about," she says.

WHAT EXACTLY DOES A SALES ENABLEMENT LEADER DO?

Part of the growing pains of a new business function include developing a universal, all-encompassing definition that can be applied broadly to all types of companies. However, if you asked several sales enablement leaders today how they define the practice, you'd still get several different answers.

"I don't do sales training; I believe you train animals, but you enable people," says **Roderick Jefferson**, VP of global enablement at Marketo and a founding member of the Sales Enablement Society.

Early in his career, Jefferson was in sales for five years before he realized he loved the process of selling more than selling itself. From there, he moved into various skills development and enablement roles at NetApp, BusinessObjects, HP, eBay, Salesforce, and Oracle (to name a few).

Today, he views sales enablement as, "getting the right people in the right conversations at the right time and supporting them with the tools, process and programs to drive incremental revenue," which trickles down to three

areas: decreasing ramp up time, increasing productivity per head, and partnering with first line managers, sales and company leadership.

Don Cooper, VP of global sales enablement and programs at PTC, defines sales enablement in just six words. "We help sales sell more, faster." He explains that it's about helping salespeople achieve more as well as increasing the velocity in which enablement support is provided within the context of business goals.



"We help sales sell more, faster."

Don Cooper, PTC

To **Bob Britton**, also a founding member (and Dallas chapter president) of the Sales Enablement Society, sales enablement is all about “finding the friction points within the

organization that impede sales and reducing them.”

He believes complexity is driving the sales enablement profession today. In other words, with more

information available to buyers than ever, companies are having a hard time keeping up. As a result, companies are being more reactive than proactive, and it’s sales enablement’s job to bridge that gap.



“Enablement
has to be woven
into the fabric of a
company. It can’t
be forced on it.”

Roderick Jefferson, Marketo

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS AND TRAITS OF SALES ENABLEMENT LEADERS?

Though sales enablement often sits within the sales organization, the function isn't responsible for selling or directly involved in deals. Which leads to the question – do great sales enablement leaders need to have direct selling experience?

What are the unique skills that make sales enablement professionals who they are?

While Buonopane has never 'carried a bag' as a full-time salesperson, her extensive experience in change management translates well to the continuously evolving and

reactive requirements of a sales enablement professional.

"My path was definitely not a straight line. My pet passion is around how people change and how organizations and systems are set up to help people succeed. This is what we [as sales enablement leaders] do most of the time; we identify problems and find solutions."

On the other end of the spectrum, Jefferson is an advocate of sales experience, in addition to being customer-focused, transparent, collaborative, metrics-driven and influential.

"[At Marketo], my team is part of the interview process for salespeople and everyone has to

do the role they support prior to enablement. It's hard to talk about how uncomfortable shoes are if you haven't worn them."

In the same vein, West says empathy is one of the most important traits a sales enablement leader can have.

"You need to have empathy for the audiences that you serve," he says. "That doesn't mean you have to be a 7-time President's Club participant, but it helps if you've done the job because you have empathy for the people you're enabling and you understand their day-to-day challenges and struggles."

SiriusDecisions' Cole says previous sales management



experience can give enablement leaders a leg up because “if they’ve been successful in a sales manager role, [for example], you likely already have the knowledge and understanding of how reps sell, the nuances of the buyer’s journey, and the sales process and methodology.”

Cooper spent his entire career in various sales roles – both at PTC and Siemens – when he realized he was doing much of the work of a sales enablement professional.

“If you complain about the need for sales training and enablement the most, you’ll probably end up getting the job. I was doing a lot of sales enablement work before I really knew what it was,” he says.

“Where the sales leader is the head coach, the sales enablement leader is the practice coach. I really enjoy the practice coach role because I have a passion and interest in developing people as opposed to closing deals.”

Cooper, who now leads a 35-person enablement team to support a sales force of 2,200, says enablement professionals should have a passion for helping sales reps be productive, the ability to think creatively and differently, and an understanding of the business and how the sales organization works. However, he doesn’t believe a sales background is an automatic indicator for success.

“I’ve seen people from the field that don’t fit well in sales

enablement,” he says. “There’s a difference between having a passion for teaching versus telling someone how to do something.”

Cooper also says he feels sales enablement will have the best outcomes if leaders are appointed for the right reasons.

“Sometimes, people put sales enablement leaders in the role as the final resting place before they retire, but they’re thinking isn’t logical. Just because someone has been in the field for years, doesn’t mean they really know how to sell. Sales enablement isn’t a dumping ground and doing that minimizes [the function] to a training organization.”

4 TRAITS EVERY SALES ENABLEMENT LEADER SHOULD HAVE

Passion:

“Leaders need to be motivated and truly passionate about helping sales reps be more productive.”

-Don Cooper

Flexibility:

“We have lots of ideas but it’s all about failing fast and learning from what you’ve done. You also need to be able to pivot on a dime if your approach isn’t working.”

-Kristine Buonopane

Empathy:

“It helps if you’ve done the job because you have empathy for the people you’re enabling and you understand their day-to-day challenges and struggles.”

-Daniel West

Problem solving:

“Friction could be anywhere within a sales organization, you need to be able to identify where it is and how it’s affecting sales; you need to pull it apart and put it back together again.”

-Bob Britton

WHERE DOES SALES ENABLEMENT GO FROM HERE?

The outlook for sales enablement is bright, says Cole, because leaders are starting to get that 'seat at the table.' According to SiriusDecisions, 40% of sales enablement leaders report to sales leadership, 26% report to the CEO, but 13% report to sales operations and 10% to marketing leadership.

"CEOs are starting to recognize the function as a strategic lever they can use to get reps to sell more," says Cole. "But many organizations are still seeing sales enablement as a pet project where it'll be incubated through a certain department first."

Whether it's called sales enablement or something else, West of Oracle believes the

future of the function will be a combination of strategy, operations and enablement working together with the objective of improving productivity through efficiency and effectiveness.

"Many people are so focused on their specific area that they don't realize there is a function that does sales readiness."

Don Cooper, PTC

"It's about ensuring reps are efficient, so they have more time for more conversations and that those conversations are as effective as possible. That's where enablement comes together."

But he says companies will fail at sales enablement if they don't take the time to define their vision and the impact enablement can have on the organization. They also need to take a broader view of the enablement audience, which includes all customer-facing workers.

"Many leaders just focus on sales... For me, it's always been about making sure everyone in the chain has the skills to do their part when it comes to customers."





Cooper believes that sales enablement is still misunderstood across some organizations because it was originally born from the training organization, which isn't always viewed through a strategic lens.


"It's a pure lack of understanding. Many people are so focused on their specific area that they don't realize there is a function that does sales readiness," he says. "In sales enablement, we haven't always done a good job of letting

our companies know about what we're doing."

Areas that sales enablement functions (and those who lead them) need to work on? Publicizing its contributions to the organization, scaling operations so it's more cost effective and getting closer to customers in all areas. What will make this all possible, Cooper says, is getting (and keeping) executive sponsorship.

"We're going into the next frontier of sales enablement,"

he says. "We have the ear of sales management, a voice at the table and alignment to a culture of learning. But above all, we need to get sales leadership to view sales enablement as more than a training function."



"Sales enablement leaders need to be **strategic** by prioritizing what's important, aligning with sales, and delivering **results** in a meaningful way to show what the function does for the organization."

Heather Cole,
SiriusDecisions

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Brainshark sales readiness software equips businesses with the training, coaching and content authoring capabilities to achieve sales mastery and outsell the competition.

With Brainshark, companies can: prepare sales teams with on-demand training that accelerates onboarding and keeps reps up-to-speed; validate readiness with sales coaching that ensures reps master your message; and empower sales organizations with rich, dynamic content that can be created quickly and accessed anywhere.

Thousands of companies – including more than half of the Fortune 100 – rely on Brainshark to identify and close performance gaps, and get better results from their sales enablement initiatives.

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