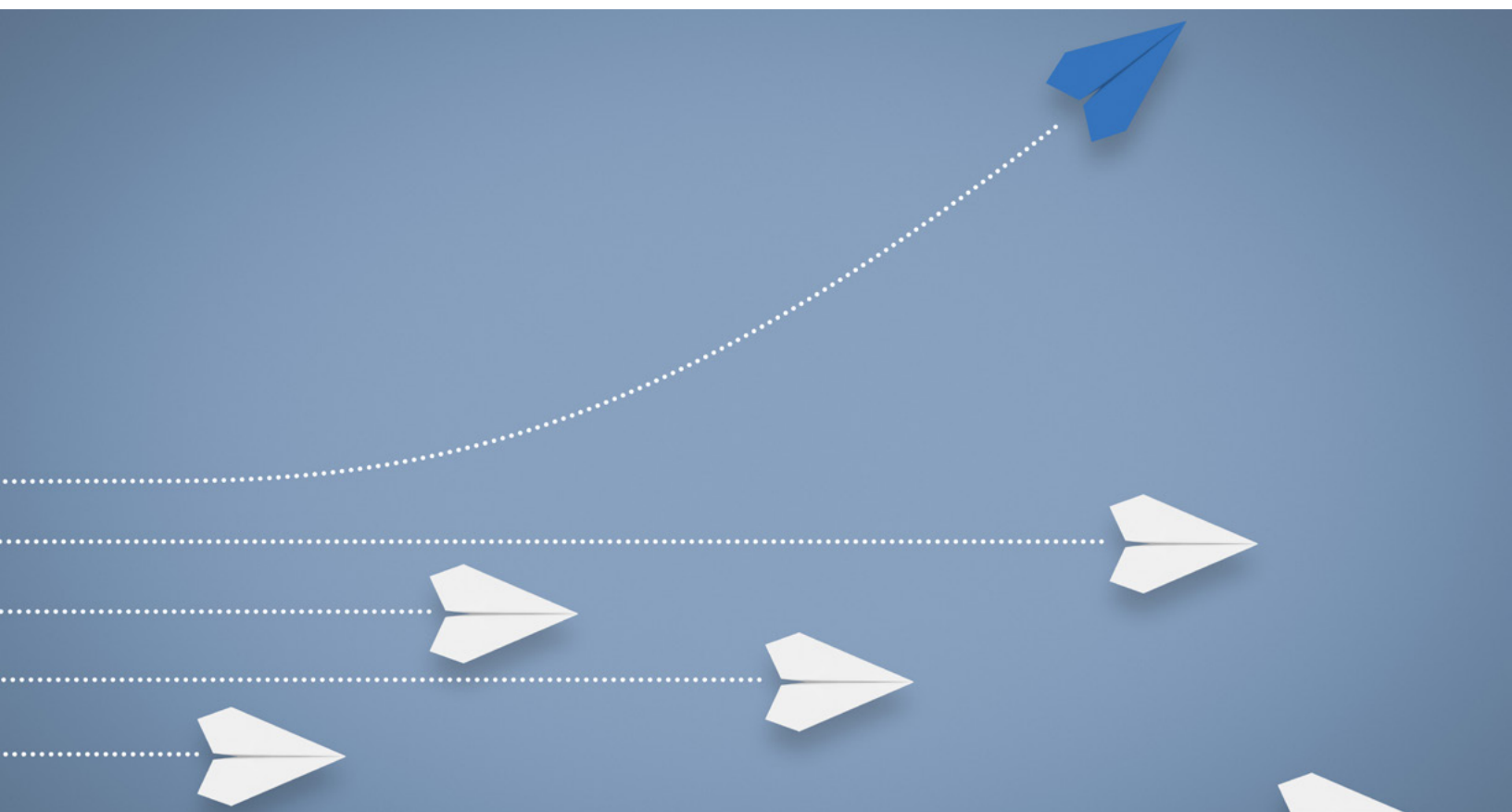McKinsey
& Company

By the numbers: What drives sales-growth outperformance

New data reveals that outperformers are ahead of the pack where it matters in insights, agility, talent, and tech

by Boudewijn Driedonks, Sinem Hostetter, and Ryan Paulowsky

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Insight, agility, talent, and technology continue to be the four most important dimensions in next-generation sales growth. But excellence in each of these areas looks far different today than it did five years ago. A McKinsey global survey of 2,500 B2B companies across industry found that those willing to shake up their sales models and embrace next-generation capabilities are growing revenue at twice the rate of GDP.
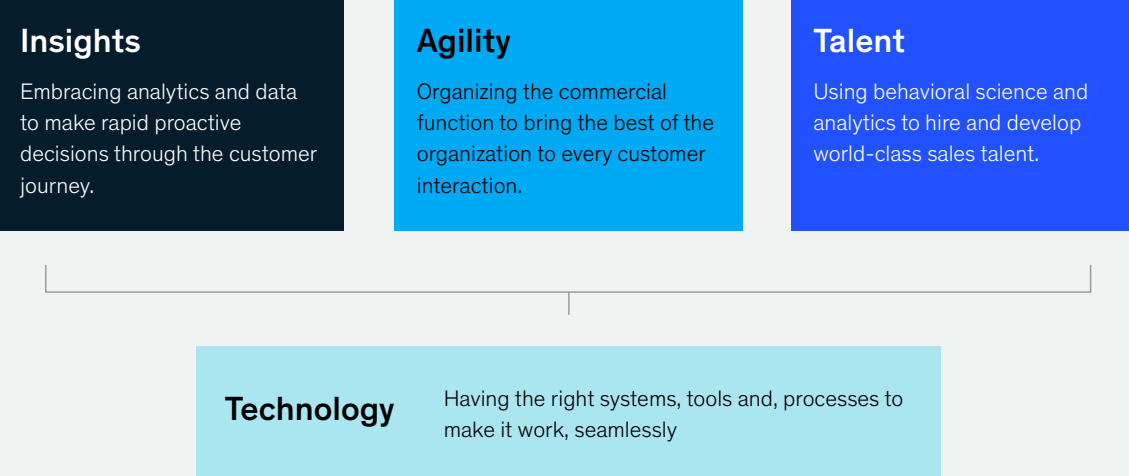
In each dimension, top performers nail the basics, then move quickly to levers that drive exponential gains. For insights, that's predictive data and analytics. For agility, that's speed in customer responsiveness and cross-functional teaming. Collectively, it's a capability and mindset shift that leads to always-on innovation—and above-average growth.

Outperforming B2Bs zero in on specific dimensions, then go all in generating outsized advantage.

In insights, leaders gain a 2 to5 percent bump in sales as a result of data-driven decision making. In agility, cross-functional coordination and teaming drive a 5 to 10 percent increase in sales. In talent, behavioral science and analytics shape training and development, leading to a 10 to 20 percent improvement in productivity. And in technology, the right digital enablers and processes set the foundation for continued growth and innovation.

Driving sales-growth outperformance

Four dimensions

Insights	Agility	Talent
Embracing analytics and data to make rapid proactive decisions through the customer journey.	Organizing the commercial function to bring the best of the organization to every customer interaction.	Using behavioral science and analytics to hire and develop world-class sales talent.

Technology — Having the right systems, tools and, processes to make it work, seamlessly

Driving sales-growth outperformance

Take action

■ Insights

Basics: Core pipeline and pricing metrics

Outperformers add: Predictive analytics focused on growth pools

■ Agility

Basics: Organized to support multichannel

Outperformers add: Organized to scale solution selling, account reprioritization & omnichannel

■ Talent

Basics: Strong in universal sales skills

Outperformers add: Tailored coaching, continually adapted training

■ Technology

Basics: CRM & backbone tools

Outperformers add: Advanced, seller-friendly tools

**Total impact:**

5–10% higher sales

10–20% higher productivity

Fast growers scale insights by centralizing analytics

Eight in ten fast growers cluster data science, engineering, workflow integration, and other cross-functional skill sets into a centralized hub to build critical mass. Close coordination lets teams design new use cases, iterate and deploy them faster, and build scale. Sales leaders that use centers of excellence report greater confidence in their ability to harness the potential of data and analytics than companies that don't.

Insights

% of B2B companies that have an analytics center of excellence

81

68

Outperformers invest in an analytics center of excellence

19%

more than slow growers

Outperformers   Slow growers
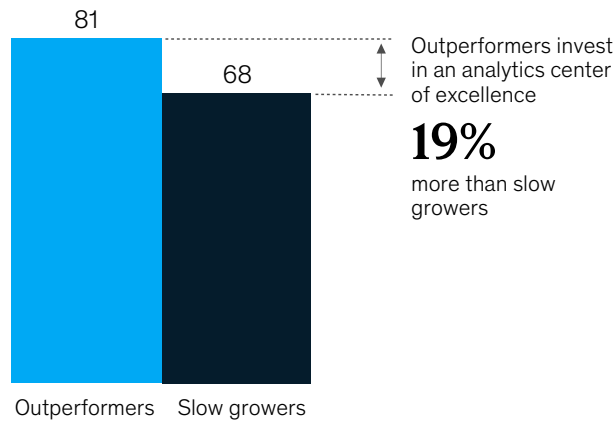
Companies with an analytics center of excellence are

1.4x

more likely to be outperformers

They move beyond table stakes and apply analytics use cases

Outperformers make data and analytics a strategic asset and invest heavily in building foundational skills. The results pay off: 72 percent of the fastest-growing B2Bs say their analytics are effective in helping them with sales planning, compared to 50 percent of the slowest-growers.

Having mastered the basics, leaders look for "spikes" that give them a customer and scale advantage. From web-crawling to sentiment analysis, outperformers use specialized analytics to dig into individual deals, propensity to buy, and lifetime profitability with greater precision than the average B2B. Two-thirds or more generate deal-level insights, account-level intelligence, and customer-specific sales opportunities. Only about half of slow growers say the same.

Insights

Outperformers   Slow growers

3 out of 4

outperformers apply tables stakes analytics such as sales planning **(vs half of slow growers)**

Outperformers   Slow growers

2 out of 3

outperformers apply analytics use cases to be more granular on deal and account level opportunities **(vs half of slow growers)**

Top sales organizations turn "outside-in" from aspiration to operational discipline

Outperforming B2Bs are more aggressive in making adaptations that put the customer first.

For example, 75 percent are solution sellers, compared to 68 percent for the overall sample and 59 percent for slow growers. Many establish dedicated application marketing and engineering teams, staffed with experts who work across product lines to help customers find best-fit solutions.

Agility

% of B2B companies effective at solution selling

75

59

Outperformers are

27%

better at
solution selling

Outperformers   Slow growers
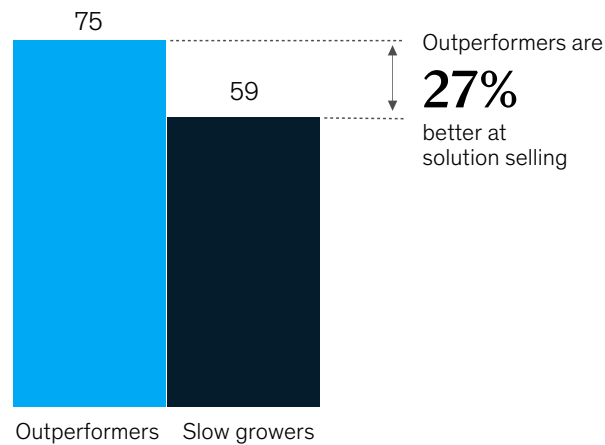
Companies strongly or
moderately effective at
solution selling are

1.5x

more likely to be
outperformers

Outperformers update account priorities more frequently

Instead of reviewing and reallocating coverage once a year as is typical of many B2Bs, outperformers are 50 percent more likely than slow growers to adjust their accounts monthly (25 percent versus 17 percent, respectively). That continual realignment allows growth leaders to assign resources toward the highest-value opportunities.

The shift to more frequent reviews is likely to become more widespread—even outperformers have room to improve—enabled by analytics that surface key triggers, such as end-of-life product cycles and insights into particular investments that customers have planned.

Agility

% of companies with account coverage reprioritization happening at least monthly

25

Outperformers reprioritize

47%

more frequently

17

Outperformers   Slow growers
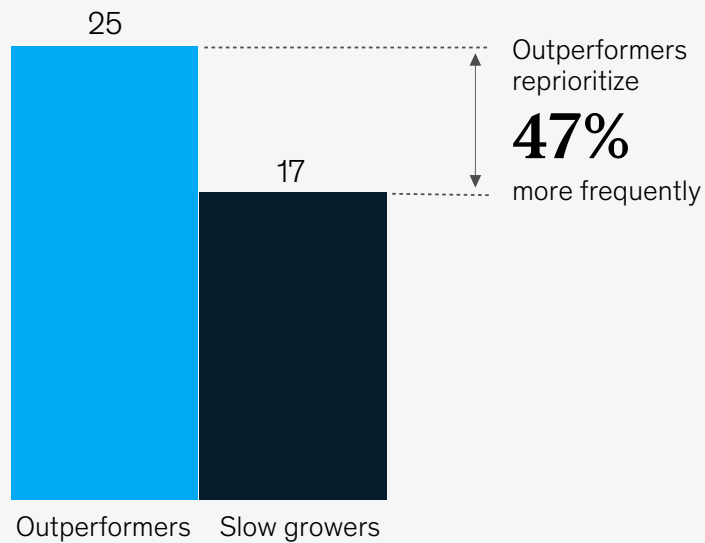
Leaders go where their customers are—and that's increasingly online

Outperformers fast track omnichannel capabilities, with an emphasis on digital. They have more digital interactions, sell more through digital channels, and offer a more seamless experience across digital and in-person touchpoints. Others are likely to follow: 80 percent of B2B decision makers say that omnichannel sales are as effective or more so than traditional models. Buyers also intend to stick with omnichannel interactions. They see remote and digital self-serve channels as on a par with face-to-face interactions.

Agility

Outperformers interact and sell digitally, in line with developing customer expectations

32%

of outperfomers have more than half their customer interactions through digital channels **(vs 20% for slow growers)**

42%

of outperfomers generate more than half their revenue through digital channels **(vs 25% for slow growers)**

68%

of outperfomers combine traditional and digital channels in the customer journey **(vs 56% for slow growers)**

Outperformers lean into talent development

In elevating the most successful sellers to management roles, B2Bs reward accomplishment. But they sometimes neglect to reinforce the responsibilities that come with the role—namely, to cultivate the next generation of sales stars. Outperformers do things differently. They ensure that top managers are top coaches, with structures and incentives that make this possible. Examples include weekly coaching and giving must-win deals additional executive and team support, backstopped with analytics that track time spent on individual and team development. The result is a virtuous cycle that drives sales growth.

Talent

% of companies where sales managers spend more than 50% of their time coaching

25

14

Outperformers   Slow growers

Outperformers commit to

79%

more coaching than slow growers
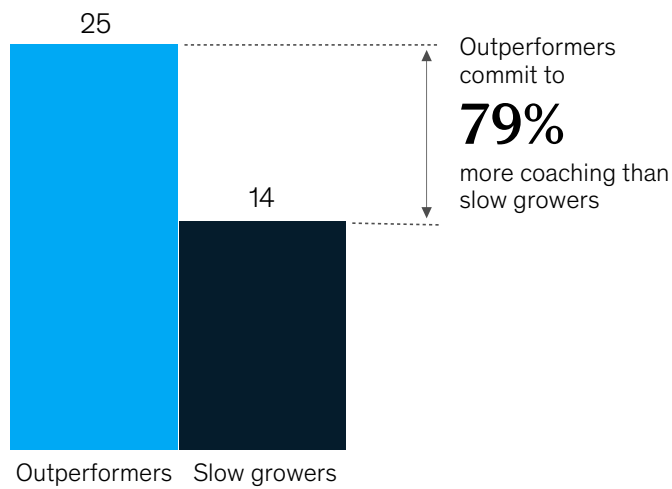
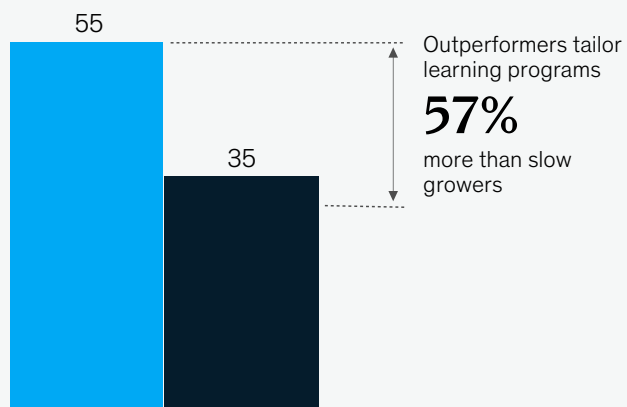Companies where sales managers spend more than 50% of their time coaching are

1.4x

more likely to be outperformers

Sales outperformers eschew one-size-fits-all training

Top B2Bs train for their most pressing needs and adapt learning programs continuously. In addition to tailoring learning journeys for their sales teams, outperformers drill down to the individual, with training tied to the seller's objectives and skills deployed against real opportunities. The experiential learning combined with ongoing coaching empowers sellers to be more effective. Outperformers are 57 percent more likely to tailor their learning programs and 1.3 times more likely to outperform their peers in revenue growth.

Talent

% of companies that tailor learning programs for the sales team

55

35

Outperformers tailor
learning programs

57%

more than slow
growers

Companies where sales
managers always tailor
learning programs based
on observed strengths are

1.3x

more likely to be
outperformers

With technology, leaders create smart tools—and ensure sellers use them

Most sales organizations have plenty of digital tools. The problem is that their reps ignore them. Poor user interfaces, unclear use cases, or confusing recommendations condemn many would-be enablers to the trash heap. Sales leaders emphasize digital tool building. But they place equal focus on adoption—involving sellers in the design to build trust in the system, creating solutions that address key seller pain points, and making those tools intuitive and easy to use. The combination of smart tools and strong adoption translates to higher sales.

Technology

% of B2B companies effective at using digital tools & capabilities to support sales

■ Strongly/moderately effective   ■ Somewhat effective and ineffective

Outperformers are

62%

more effective in using digital tools

CAGR growth, %
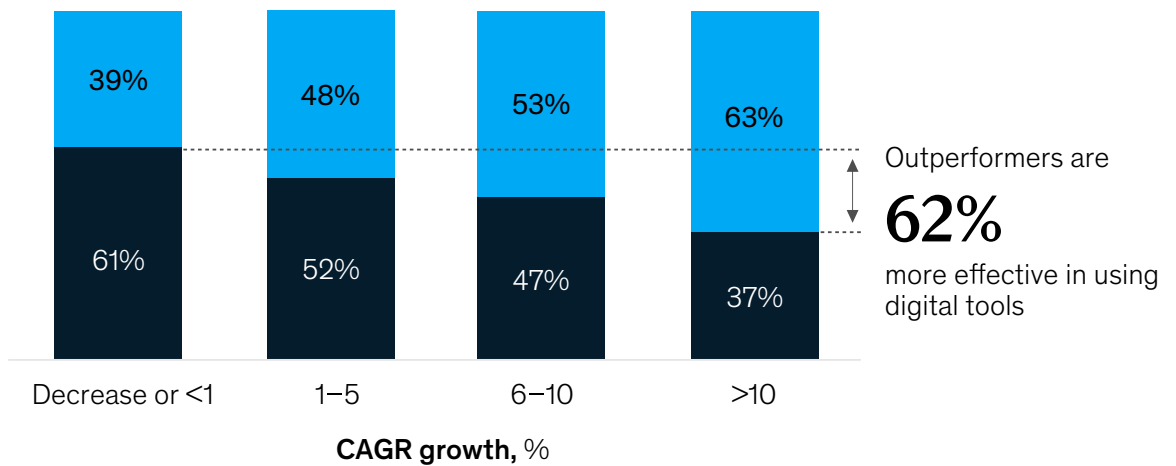
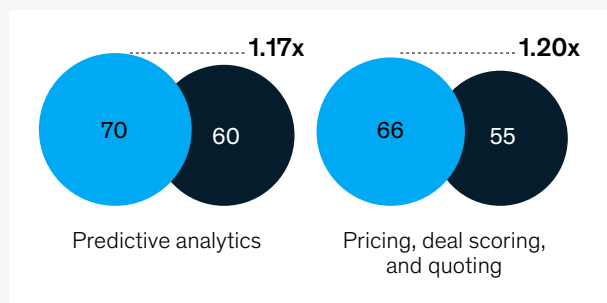# Outperformers invest in advanced digital enablers

Outperformers are widening the investment gap in granular use cases vs. versus basic use cases. Leading B2Bs plan to invest more across digital use cases. Topping the priority list are actionable granular analytics such as pricing and deal scoring, and predictive analytics such as churn prevention, propensity to buy and next product to buy. Starting with their already-strong base, these investments could widen the gap between digital sales leaders and the rest of the field.
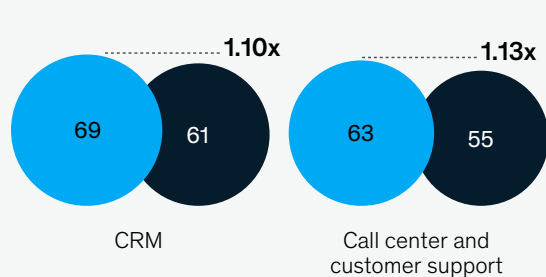
Technology

Share of companies that plan to increase investments per use case

● Outperformers　　● Slow growers

Outperformers **invest more in granular use cases**

while **building on investment in the basics**

	Predictive analytics	Pricing, deal scoring, and quoting	CRM	Call center and customer support
Outperformers	70	66	69	63
Slow growers	60	55	61	55
Ratio	1.17x	1.20x	1.10x	1.13x

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