# Building the perfect sales tech stack: A Cognism guide

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# Introduction

Last year HubSpot, the inbound sales and marketing software developer, published their report, The State of Inbound 2018. The report was a comprehensive study on the current state of inbound sales and marketing. In the report, HubSpot's research discovered a curious thing: that 40% of salespeople don't go beyond Microsoft Excel or Outlook when storing lead and customer data.

For the year 2018, that statistic is remarkable. In the competitive sales environment of the 21st century, it's baffling to see that nearly half of all salespeople are stuck using the technology of the 20th. These days, a sales team is only as good as the data it works with - after all, if you don't have accurate data on your prospects and customers, how can you sell? And if you want to collect and manage data quickly and effectively, how can you do so without technology?

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## TECHNOLOGY THAT DRIVES BUSINESS

The most successful businesses of the coming decades will be those who learn to harness the power of modern technology and use it to their advantage. Technology will become a key factor for a company in terms of maximising ROI while minimising effort. Forget about Excel and Outlook - such outmoded, outdated services just won't cut it any more. What you need is a sales technology stack (tech stack) that will push your business to new heights.

Unsure about how or where to start? This guide will provide you with all the information you need to create the perfect sales tech stack. It will also supply you with real-world examples of technologies that are already making a huge difference to the way sales teams operate. Furthermore, it will identify the benefits that an effective sales tech stack will bring to your sales team.

> A sales tech stack is a term for the sum total of software and applications used by a particular sales team.

## WHAT IS A SALES TECH STACK?

Before examining the benefits and practicalities, it's important to define what we mean when we say "sales tech stack". A sales tech stack is a term for the sum total of software and applications used by a particular sales team. The term has grown in relevance due to the recent explosion in the number of tech and SaaS (software as a service) companies, especially in the B2B sector.

As a result, most sales departments now have budget earmarked specifically for technology, so that they can build their own sales tech stack. Behind every successful sales team is a suite of tools and platforms designed to optimise or accelerate every step in the sales process. A good, well-managed sales tech stack is the foundation on which your entire sales operation can be built.

# The benefits of an effective sales tech stack

**22% of a sales rep's time is spent generating leads.**

An effective sales tech stack can bring several benefits to your sales team. Here are five of the most essential:

## 1. GENERATING LEADS AND CLOSING DEALS

The task of lead generation is one of the most crucial activities any salesperson can engage in. New business is the lifeblood of any organisation and winning customers relies on a smooth-running lead generation process. Nowadays, technology can assist with this process, enabling the sales rep to source thousands of verified prospects, their names and contact details, at the simple click of a button.

### Value at the start and end of the sales cycle

Just as technology can help at the start of the sales cycle, so it can provide value at the end. Technology can aid the sales rep when it comes to closing deals, speeding up the process so that they can quickly move on and engage with new leads.

## 2. INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

One major benefit of a good sales tech stack is that it frees up time for a sales team. By automating time-consuming or laborious tasks, the best sales technology gives time back to the user.

### Technology that saves time

One good example of this is lead generation, as discussed above. It's estimated that up to 22% of a sales rep's time is spent generating leads, be that prospecting (cold calling, sales emails and appointment setting) or researching (searching for target accounts and building contact lists). Technology now exists that can run these lead generation activities with minimal input. Consequently, sales reps are rewarded with more time - time that can be put to good use in engaging with prospects and closing deals.

## 3. FASTER PROBLEM SOLVING

Having a good sales tech stack can make problem-solving easier and faster. Certain types of sales tech can provide accurate, real-time metrics on a granular level. As a result, a tech stack allows salespeople to quickly identify problems in their sales process and make adjustments.

### Solving problems with up-to-date data

An efficient tech stack will provide you with status reports on every stage of the sales process. The data will show you where the difficulties are, giving you the impetus to change your process or try out new courses of action.

Sales technology can provide meticulous and precise forecasting and analysis.

The most efficient stacks will provide flexibility for your sales team. Look for tools that can easily integrate with your CRM.

## 4. IMPROVED FORECASTING AND ANALYTICS

Before the sales tech revolution, sales forecasting and analysis was conducted by teams of business analysts. Despite their best efforts, the results were often incorrect or incomplete. Information was often clunky (every sales team leader of a certain age knows the horror of a thousand-row Excel spreadsheet). No fault of theirs, of course - they did their best with the technology available to them - but like all business tasks performed by humans, it was subject to the whims of human error.

### The power of AI

Nowadays, sales technology can provide meticulous and precise forecasting and analysis. AI technology, for example, can analyse vast quantities of data, at a much faster rate than any human can. This leads to improved reporting and forecasting. The upshot of this is that the instant availability of accurate data empowers sales managers to make better decisions. If your sales tech stack is predicting that revenue will be down next quarter, then you'll know exactly where to focus manpower and resources going forward.

### Creating a feedback loop

The best sales tech stacks should also create a feedback loop. As more data is fed into the system, it leads to better reporting and better results… which in turn leads to more data being fed into the system, which leads to better reporting and better results…ad infinitum!

## 5. GREATER FLEXIBILITY

Tech stacks shouldn't be static; they should evolve as your company grows or your goals change. Big sales teams will need a different tech stack compared to small sales teams. Your technology must be able to evolve, based on your company's needs.

### CRM integrations

The most efficient stacks will provide flexibility for your sales team. Look for tools that can easily integrate with your CRM. Seamless integrations equal a seamless working experience for your team.

# How to build the perfect sales tech stack

## Five stages of the sales cycle

1 Prospect

2 Connect

3 Research

4 Present

5 Close
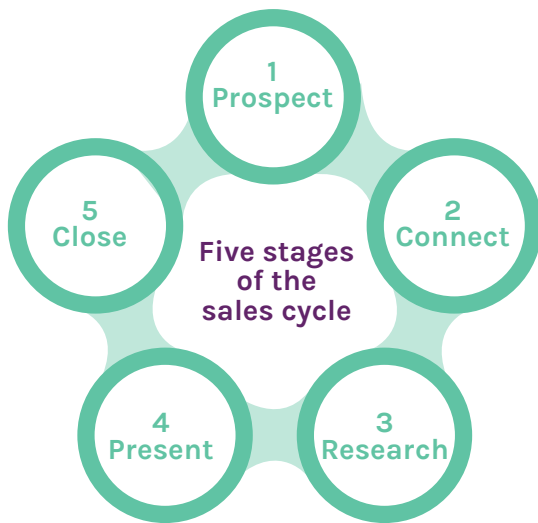
When building your sales tech stack, you also need to think about the sales cycle. The sales cycle is a series of actions that every salesperson should follow in order to win a new customer. It is made up of five stages:

To be truly effective, your stack must impact every stage of the sales cycle. Here's some advice, using real-world examples from sales tech providers, on how to build the perfect tech stack for selling.

## 1. PROSPECT

The first stage of the sales cycle isn't the most glamorous, but it is one of the most important. Prospecting is the activity of going out into the market and looking for potential new customers. It includes tasks such as:

- Searching social media
- Browsing company websites
- Checking for relevant news stories
- Following up on referrals
- Building contact lists

### Targeted prospecting

It may sound haphazard, but there are things you can do to make prospecting more targeted, and therefore increasing your chances of reaching the right people. You can create buyer personas of your ideal customers, which will help you to find others just like them. The most useful buyer personas don't just include standard information like job title or location, but also more specific criteria such as:

- The industry the prospect works in
- The technologies they use
- The skills they have acquired
- What content they read and where

### Prospecting tech

One tool that can help you during the Prospect stage is *Cognism Prospector.* With Prospector, B2B salespeople can gain access to a global database of 400 million business profiles and 10 million companies. It enables the sales rep to create personas of their target customers and search for others who match the same characteristics. Cognism's data asset is one of the broadest in the world, covering international territories and a full market range of startups to enterprise companies.

Two types of buyer personas can be developed using Cognism Prospector:

- **Person** - where a sales rep can search for a certain type of individual in any location and any industry in the B2B sector
- **Company** - where a sales rep can search for target companies working B2B, using categories such as company revenue, company funding, hiring and event appearances

Prospecting is one of the hardest stages of the sales cycle, and it can take a lot of time out of a salesperson's day. Using lead prospecting technology such as Cognism Prospector can automate this process for you, taking much of the headache away and keeping your pipeline full of fresh leads.

## 2. CONNECT

Once you've located your prospects, it's time to make contact with them. This is the second stage - Connect. These are the three most popular outreach activities:

- Cold calling
- Sending sales emails
- Engaging with prospects on social media

### Sales acceleration tech

There are many technologies available on the market that can accelerate the Connect stage. Indeed, sales acceleration tech is a growing part of B2B sales outreach. Examples include outbound automation software, which allow salespeople to send hundreds of emails per day to their target prospects, or auto-diallers, which automatically call prospects at the most optimal times in the day.

### Driving efficiency and engagement

Two market leaders in this type of technology are Outreach and SalesLoft. Outreach has developed a single platform to drive efficiency and effectiveness for sales teams, and optimise customer engagement throughout the entire sales cycle. The technology includes automated email sequencing and dialling functions, enabling the sales rep to reach buyers through multiple channels.

SalesLoft, meanwhile, is a sales engagement platform designed by salespeople, for salespeople. Its features include cadence scheduling, integrated dialling and sales intelligence and analytics. Both platforms are ideal for different sizes of sales teams.

## Speeding up the sales cycle

One useful bit of tech that Cognism has as part of its sales stack is Chili Piper. It works like this: when someone fills out a form on your company website, Chili Piper prompts the lead to book a meeting direct into your reps' calendars. Or it can start a call by instantly dialling the correct rep's phone. Once a meeting is booked, Chili Piper sends automated email and SMS reminders, slashing the probability of a prospect no-show.

It's a perfect sales acceleration tool, speeding up one stage of the sales cycle so you can quickly progress to the next.

## 3. RESEARCH

Now you've found your prospect and connected with them, it's time to move onto the next stage of the sales cycle: Research. During this stage, you'll need to learn more about your prospect, their business, their needs, and identify if your product or service is a good fit for those needs. The prudent sales rep will collate all the information they have on the prospect so far and then set up a discovery or qualifying call with them.

## CRM systems

To conduct Research properly, you need a central database to collect all your prospect data. Customer relationship management (CRM) systems are what you need at this stage. CRM platforms have been around for 20 years and there are many high-profile providers currently trading, the most famous one being Salesforce.

A good CRM system should be at the heart of your sales tech stack. It's the central repository of all your business and contact data. Many of them provide bespoke services, from predictive forecasting and data analysis to customer personalisation and automated invoicing and billing. A CRM system, working in tandem with a high-performing and diligent sales team, will go quite some way to shortening the sales cycle and accelerating the volume of closed deals. And of course, for best results, every other part of your sales tech stack should be able to integrate with your preferred CRM.

## Leading CRM platforms

Salesforce is the market leader but many other providers are available. HubSpot and Microsoft Dynamics are two worthy competitors. In particular, HubSpot is a good choice for SMEs and scaling companies.

If you're an early-stage business, take a look at Pipedrive, which markets itself as the CRM system of choice for startups. All have different USPs and are aimed at different sectors. Shop around, try out the free trials, and see which one works best for your business.

## Company insights

One very exciting bit of tech that can make a big difference to your research is DueDil. Its mission statement is to make information on private companies as accessible as it is for public ones. It does this by providing a clean interface that makes segmenting any company or market as easy as clicking a button. With DueDil, sales reps can gain insights into a company's ownership chain and the individual roles of key decision makers, including directors, shareholders and owners. A very useful tool, especially for those working in B2B!

## 4. PRESENT

The fourth stage in the sales cycle is when the salesperson presents a live demonstration or pitches the product. Typically, the audience will be comprised of decision-makers at the prospect's company. The presenter should expect to address questions from key stakeholders. While it's important to have a pitch template in mind when delivering your presentation, don't just read from a script. Every presentation you deliver should be customised for each prospect's unique business needs.

### Capture attention with video

Video is one medium that sales teams can now exploit to capture attention and engage with prospects. In the past, the technology wasn't sufficiently advanced enough for it to be useful. But now, with superfast broadband and HD cameras on every smartphone, it's easier than ever for salespeople to create and send videos.

### Remote working

Video conferencing tools such as Zoom have revolutionised how sales teams conduct business. They have allowed sales reps to work remotely and pitch products across different geographies and time zones. Using video conferencing to communicate with buyers has also been proven to increase conversion rates by 25%. Not surprising, when you consider that video is a much more immediate and personable way to communicate than emails or phone calls - after all, it's estimated that 55% of all human communication is via body language, not speech!

### Connect with customers

Then there is Vidyard, the leading video platform for business. Its GoVideo app makes it easy for B2B sales professionals to connect with customers and accelerate the sales cycle. How does it work? The Vidyard GoVideo app is an embeddable video communication and sharing tool. Users are able to create and send video content, assemble video playlists, and receive notifications about who has watched their video content, and for how long.

Online video is extremely beneficial to sales teams because it's a great way to communicate with leads in a clear and speedy manner. The sales rep can record presentations and demos that are personalised to each prospect.

### The benefits of online video

Adding video to your sales tech stack can improve results for your sales team. Here are some impressive stats for adopting video to your stack:

- Attaching video to an email can increase clickthrough rates by 200-300%
- Video has been shown to triple response rates and increase the number of meetings booked by 500%
- Video has been proven to accelerate the sales cycle - 90% of customers say that watching videos helps them to make purchasing decisions

## 5. CLOSE

This is the final stage in the sales cycle. After you've given your presentation, it's likely that you'll have some things to follow up on. You might need to handle a prospect's objections or work out logistical details with other departments. Once you've completed these steps, it's time to close the deal - i.e., asking the prospect if they're ready to buy.

If the prospect says "Yes"  - great! Draw up the contract and send it over for signing. If the prospect says "No", there may be further objections to address, or you might just have to walk away from their business for now.

### Contract management

Several products exist to help salespeople during the Close stage. Automated, intelligent contract management tools are particularly popular here. Juro is one such tool. It helps businesses to create, sign and manage contracts through an AI-enabled workflow. Its intuitive platform helps sales teams to close deals up to 30% faster, while delivering a great experience to customers.

### E-signing

DocuSign is a useful e-signing tool. Its cloud-based solution offers a way to sign agreements electronically on practically any device, from almost anywhere, at any time. Both tools integrate with CRMs, helping to speed up closing and increase efficiency. The Close stage may sound like a simple part of the sales cycle - but having contract management tools in your tech stack can make a real difference here. They speed up this final stage, allowing you to move on to prospecting new customers.

# After the sales cycle

An important point to stress is that your tech stack's usefulness doesn't stop when the sales cycle ends. Technology can still be effective after you've closed a deal. Here are two vital areas you should bring in to your tech stack.

## 1. MARKETING

Every sales team needs marketing support. Technology can align the two functions and drive better results for the whole business.

### Marketing automation

One of the world's most popular marketing tools is Pardot. It's a marketing automation platform that empowers sales and marketing teams to work better together. It does this by helping them to find and nurture leads, close more deals, and maximise return on investment.

Pardot is primarily aimed at enterprise-level companies, but other options exists for SMEs. Mailchimp is a good example. It's an all-in-one platform which provides solutions to build, launch and measure marketing campaigns across multiple channels.

## 2. REPORTING

Some of the most vital tech you can implement into your sales stack is reporting tech. Modern analytics platforms can provide accurate reporting and forecasting in real-time, helping sales teams to optimise their processes and improve results.

### Collect and measure data

One of the most important things a 21st century sales team can do is collect and measure data. Without data, how can you tell which business functions need to be reviewed, or which approaches work best? Also, for sales team leaders, measuring data is very important when it comes to performance management.

### Smarter forecasting and revenue insights

Kluster, the sales analytics and forecasting tool, is an essential component of any sales team's tech stack. It provides foresight and visibility across the entire sales cycle, offering smarter forecasting as well as actionable and timely pipeline insights at a granular level. With Kluster, sales teams are able to use data to improve revenue consistency, free up their time, and create a predictable system for hitting targets.

salesforce
pardot

mailchimp

kluster intelligence

# Conclusion: Keep stacking!

When you've built your sales tech stack and everything is up and running - don't stop there! You must keep on improving and refining it. One tip from Cognism Sales is to A/B test different technologies and see what works best for your team. Study the data and measure the results to improve your tech stack, and ultimately, your sales.

## TAKE ACTION

Cognism is the perfect addition to any B2B sales tech stack. Struggling to find good quality B2B leads? Cognism Prospector is just the answer for you. Our technology can help you to:

- Build personas of your target customers

- Generate actionable B2B leads from Cognism's global database

- Use event-based triggers to identify the most optimal times to outreach

- Automate the process of engaging with your leads through multi-touchpoint cadences

Want to see our pioneering lead generation and sales acceleration tech in action? Then don't delay - contact Cognism today!

## Request a demo

Cognism is a sales acceleration platform, using patented AI technology, to provide B2B sales teams with a blend of real-time company, people and event data to streamline prospecting, find and deliver new revenue.

Cognism