



Research Report

How Does Your Sales Development Program Measure Up?

Benchmarking XDR performance challenges to provide insight for optimizing your own sales development program



Methodology/Respondent profile

Sales development survey: June–July 2021
218 respondents

Company Profile

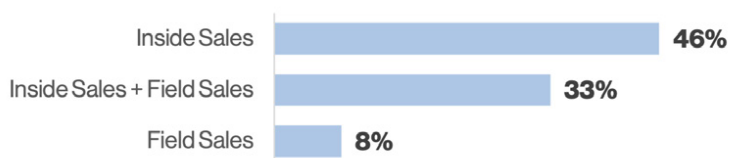
High-growth companies of all sizes:

- More than half growing 20+% a year:
25% growing 50+% a year
- 50% SMB: 50% Mid-Market/Enterprise

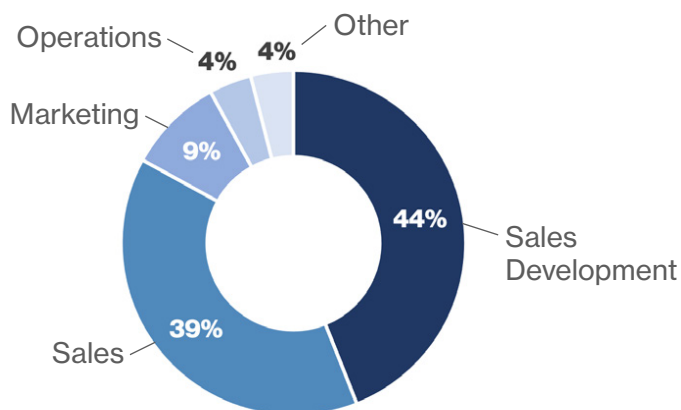
Target markets:

- SMB: 37%
- Mid-Market: 60%
- Enterprise: 58%
- **65% \$25K+ Annual Contract Value**

Primarily Driven by Inside Sales:



Distribution Model



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Introduction

As technology markets have become increasingly competitive over the last several years, companies have had to increase their prospecting capabilities to deliver new growth. Marketing-led demand generation has not done nearly enough to provide necessary pipeline coverage. New technology has massively increased the outreach capabilities of sales development teams and along with it, increased pressure from investors has been exerted on these teams to make up the difference with ever-increasing activity levels.

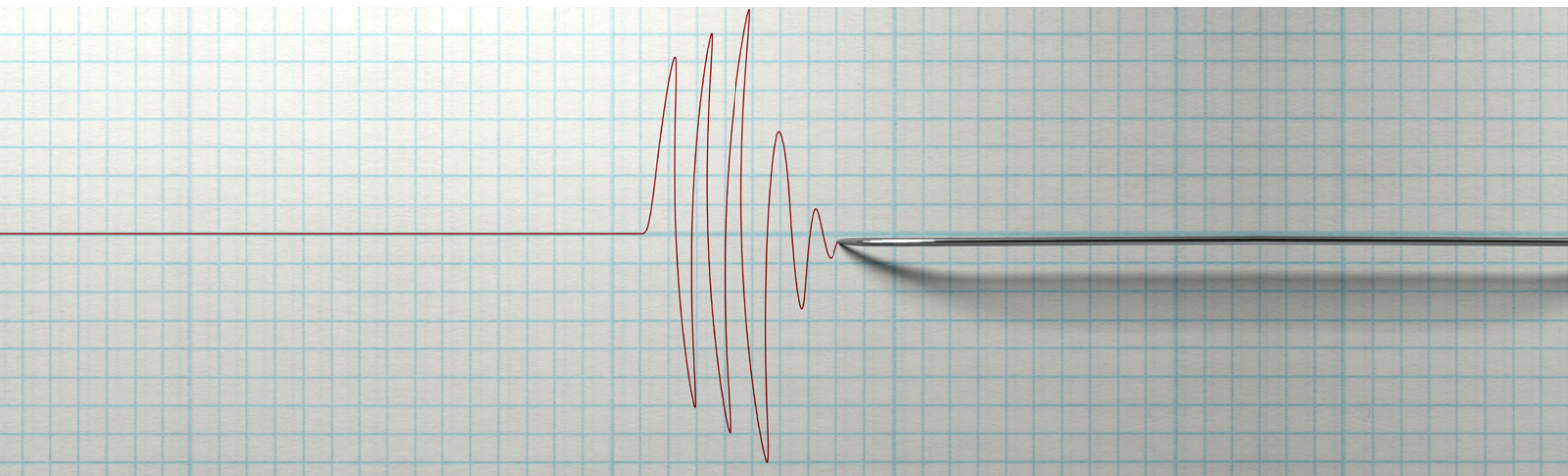
At many companies, sales management is reacting to mounting challenges by trying to solve them with brute force—by adding more people. But this isn't delivering the desired results...and worse, it is having a significant impact on XDR retention.

Marketing-led demand generation has not done nearly enough to provide necessary pipeline coverage.

We fielded this research in an effort to try to determine what's working and what's standing in the way of sales development success.

The end goal is to identify process optimization opportunities and associated development representative productivity enhancement options:

- Throughout June and July, executives, sales leadership, operations and sales development professionals from companies of all sizes answered our questions to provide feedback and insights into how they currently manage the high-velocity outbound prospecting process.
- The research covered a wide variety of process approaches and activity measurements, including list building, outbound activity prioritization, development representation time allocation and conversion success rates.
- Additionally, it took a closer look at the impact that intent data usage is having on sales development benchmarks and performance metrics.



Key findings

Sales development reporting structures may be holding teams back

Sales development remains a generalist role, often reporting to sales (**79%**), which could be preventing more coherent improvements. For example, only **38%** of companies have dedicated inbound sales development teams, highlighting the opportunity to increase pipeline contribution from inbound activity.

Low quota achievement is common

Most responding companies reported that their sales development teams achieved less than **70%** of quota. Only **17%** were greater than **90%**. This shines a spotlight on both the need for improvement and the risk of further attrition.

Performance metrics not aligned to business goals

Approximately **1/3** of companies measure XDRs on pipeline contribution or closed/won revenue. **64%** of companies use “meetings scheduled” as the XDR goal. This can create misalignment between sales development objectives and metrics driving company value.

Beyond activity, conversion rate measurements are critical to ROI improvement

With the increased use of automation for prospecting, if ROI improvements are sought, there's a critical need to better understand conversion rates from activity to-conversation, through to opportunity-to-closed/won.

List processes remain very immature

Only **55%** of companies report having a defined process for provisioning lists to XDRs. More concerning, XDRs are building their own lists **30%** of the time and Marketing helps guide list development just **8%** of the time. Unsurprisingly, this ad-hoc process results in time wasted on low-probability, poor-fit accounts.

XDR time is undervalued

With only **28%** of companies reporting that they track the time allocated by XDR/LDR to list building, it's not surprising that less than **50%** of XDRs' total time ends up spent on outreach. There's an opportunity to increase the productivity of these teams as outbound prospect meeting creators.

Prioritization requires significant help

Less than half have a defined outreach prioritization process. And, **37%** of the time the XDR is responsible for prioritizing who to target. Well-defined prioritization criteria and better inputs (like intent data) can offer potentially dramatic outcome improvement.

Increased use of intent data represents significant opportunity

Use of intent data to prioritize outreach is inconsistent: **16% always** use intent data to prioritize outreach and **45% sometimes** use intent. However, there's evidence that teams consistently using intent data achieve far better outcomes, faster.



tenbound

RevOps²

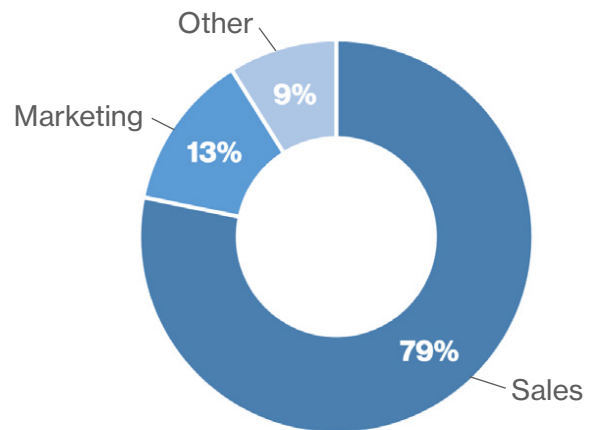
Sales development reporting structures may be holding teams back

Sales development is a relatively new discipline at many companies. These teams are being built very quickly—essentially from scratch. In such conditions, it's understandable that much strategic planning and careful hiring of experienced leadership can often be overlooked in the earliest stages of implementation. Many companies are still unsure where their sales development resources should report and exactly what type of talent and guidelines should characterize the organization. This uncertainty creates the many areas for improvement highlighted throughout this report.

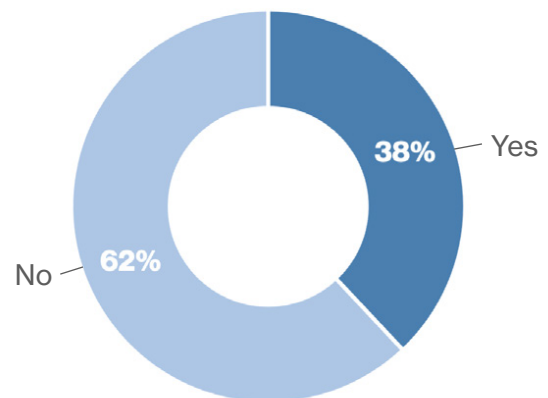
Right now, the large majority of XDR teams continue to report into Sales. And since Sales organizations must necessarily be laser-focused on the near term, this can cause them to be less than ideal operational masters of teams with unique needs.

Most sales development is focused on outbound activity—**less than 40% of organizations have a dedicated subset of resource specializing on inbound inquiry.** This lack of specialization within the team suggests that plenty of inbound conversion opportunity is likely to be squandered due to inexperience and related enablement issues.

Reporting Structure



Inbound Activity Focus?



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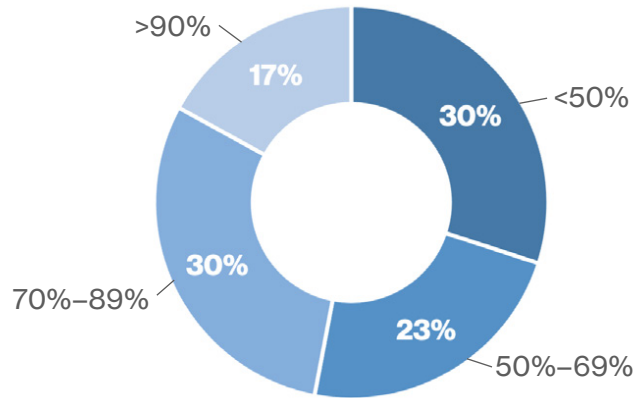
RevOps²

Quota achievement is low

While the pandemic certainly impacted Fiscal Year 2020 in particular, it is important to note that quota achievement trends have been trending downward for more than 3 years. As companies are hiring more and more sales development reps, these young people are “failing” at an astounding rate. **Only 17% of reps are achieving 90% or higher of quota. More than half don’t even get to 70%.** Is this a situation any one of us is likely to view as attractive? As “The Great Resignation” rolls on, morale of the people left will decline and performance across the group will continue to suffer.

These results suggest that without significant improvement and a deeper look at all the processes in play, many organizations could be dedicating considerable resources to an effort that, overall, remains destined to keep underdelivering on expectations.

SDR Quota Attainment



Performance metrics not aligned to outcomes

Like any team, goals define the focus of XDR pursuits. Given the enormous amount of people resources organizations are dedicating to sales development, their performance metrics should be very closely aligned to overall business objectives. The reality is far from this.

Only one-third of companies goal their XDRs on business end-goal outcomes, pipeline revenue contribution or better yet, closed/won deals. Most still incentivize XDR teams on traditional activity-based measures:

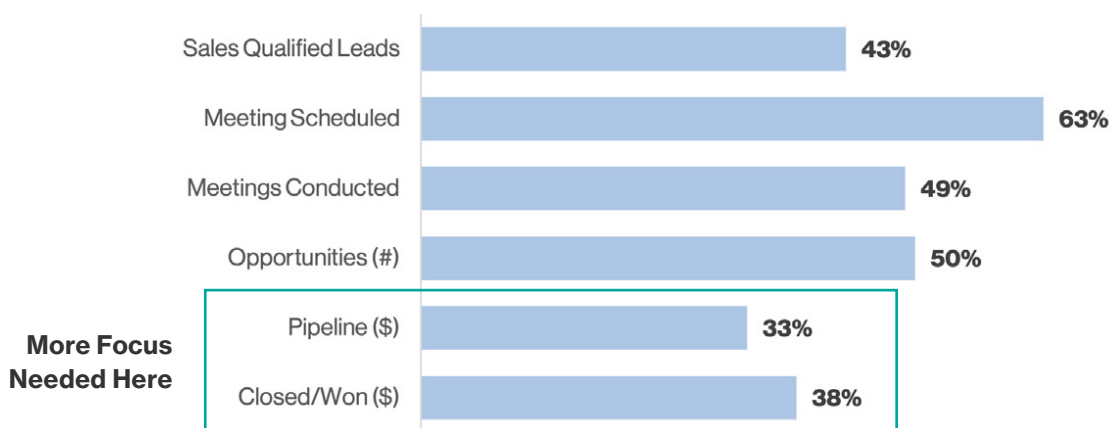
- SQLs
- Meetings scheduled
- Meetings held
- Opportunities created

Meetings scheduled is the #1 measure common to XDR teams. And so, XDRs try to deliver more meetings at all costs. But just as a bad marketing

process can create more and more leads that never convert, meeting numbers can go up without having any major impact on business success. In the process, these false positives may very well be serving to undermine the trust and collaboration necessary between XDRs and the AEs they serve, further exacerbating the issue. The less an AE trusts the quality of the meetings they are receiving, the less effort they put into making each meeting count. Instead of being eager to have XDRs working with them, they may start to discount XDR contribution altogether. This is obviously bad both for outcomes and morale across the teams.

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XDR Performance Measurement



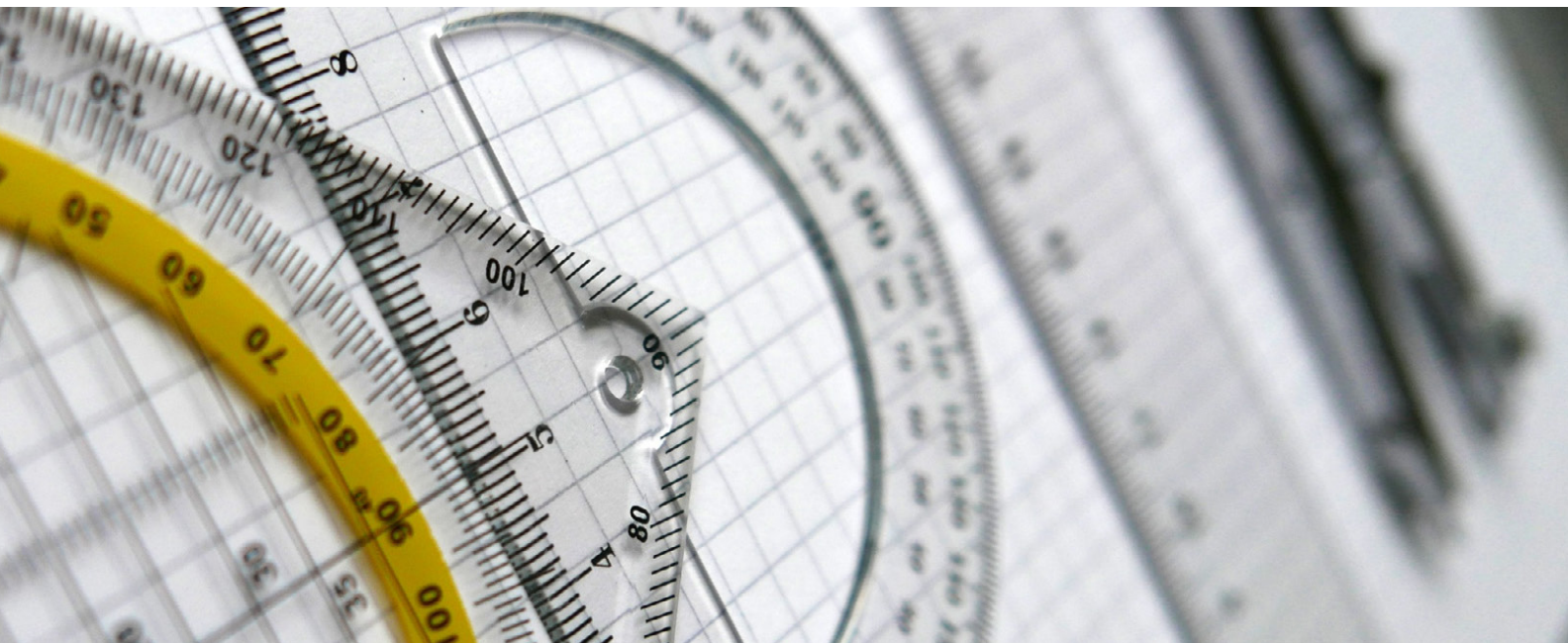
Beyond activity, conversion rate measurements are critical to ROI improvement

The advent of automation technology and sales engagement platforms have encouraged sales development reps to pursue buyers aggressively using more and more outbound touches. But more touches are not the same as good touches, especially to the recipient on the other side. With a goal of moving buyers into the pipeline as quickly as possible, it is often early XDR activity that can make or break whether real buyers convert into real pipeline opportunities downstream. The reality is that companies are not effectively measuring the quality of those touches nor are they looking closely at conversion effectiveness at these early stages:

- Conversation Rate
- Conversation-to-Meeting Set Rate

Poor conversion to conversation rates at these stages can indicate a range of problems— Yes, it could be prospect fit, but what about personalization of approach, outreach timing, prioritization of accounts, etc.? Any one of these, and more, can have detrimental impacts on the ability to create and hold meetings that lead to quality meetings.

XDR leadership would do well to re-examine the data it already has to better understand why meeting rates and meeting conversions to opportunities may not be leading to greater pipeline and revenue health. As we will see later in the report, there is real promise for substantive outcome improvement by leveraging the information embedded in high-quality intent data to address areas like prospect identification and outreach messaging.

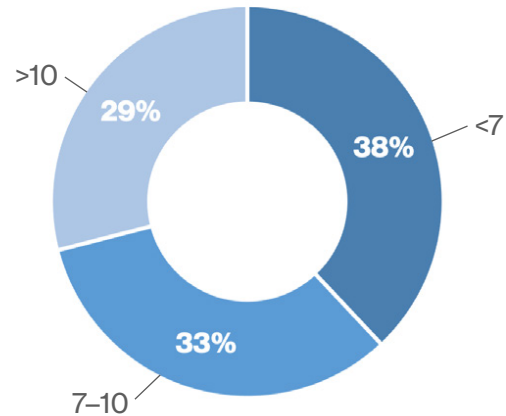


More and more touches, but worse and worse meeting rates!

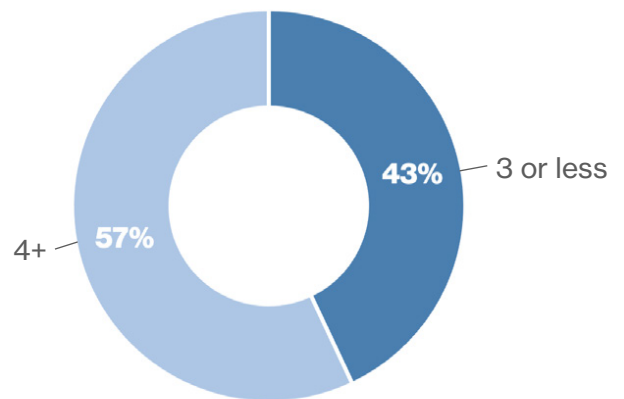
62% of XDRs require seven or more touches per successful connect. More than half require an additional four or more conversations to schedule a meeting. This is a minimum of some **11 touches** before the meeting even happens. To make matters worse, **60%** of teams see their meetings set turn into real meetings **less than 80%** of the time. And should that meeting turn out to lead nowhere – a false positive – not only has an XDR wasted their own and others' precious time, they've magnified the negative impact on ROI across the board. This very real risk will be a stark takeaway when we examine meeting to opportunity and opportunity to closed/won data on the next page.

All activity to conversation rates are directly impacted by the timing and relevance of outreach messaging. As a part of their re-examination, teams should be taking a closer look at activity-to-conversation rates for cold outreach versus follow-up and intent-driven outreach as a best practice.

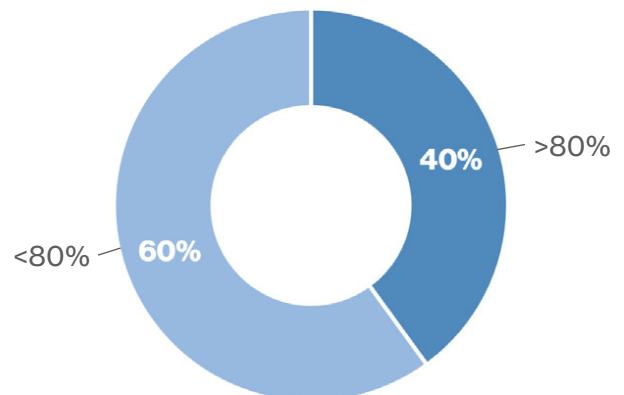
Touches Per Successful Connect



Conversations Required to Schedule a Meeting



Percentage of Meetings Kept

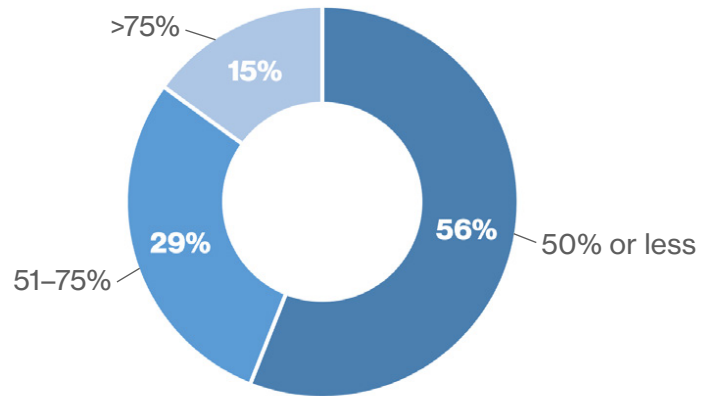


Need more XDR focus on pipeline

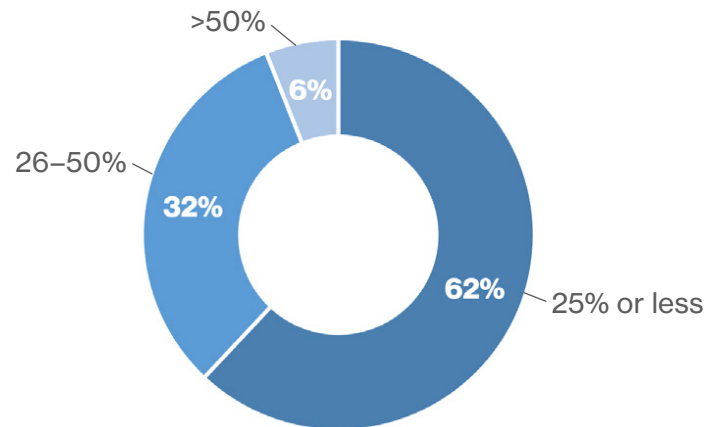
The majority of respondents see **less than 50%** of meetings converting to a pipeline opportunity of any kind. Worse, almost two-thirds of organizations have a **25% or lower** closed/won ratio. Meetings converting to opportunity **less than 50%** of the time highlights a strong opportunity for enhanced account scoring and lead qualification, supported by data sources that can better validate both target profile appropriateness and target behavioral readiness.

Measuring and incenting conversion of meetings to pipeline (\$) and closed/won (\$) together with proper enablement (guidance, training and provisioning) will dramatically increase the contribution by XDRs to quality meetings, pipeline acceleration and revenue growth.

Meeting to Opportunity Conversion



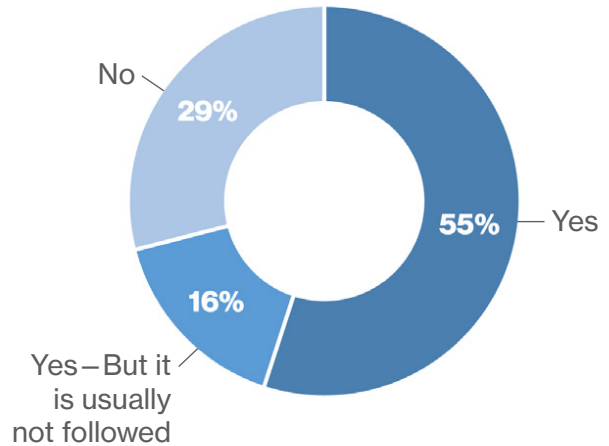
Opportunity to Closed/Won Conversion



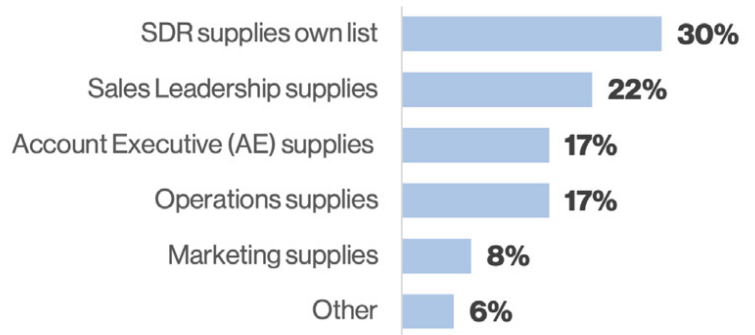
List building processes are very immature

No matter what else XDRs do and no matter how much sales management analyzes their outputs, if the inputs are wrong, success will remain elusive. In the end, performance of any XDR team will be highly dependent on the list of accounts and prospects they are going after. Many companies either do not have any defined list building process or have one that is not followed. **30%** leave it solely up to XDRs to define their own account lists! Organizations must have a long look in the mirror and ask themselves why they ever would have some of their most inexperienced people be the ones trying to determine how best to source additional business.

Defined List Building Process



Account Selection Process



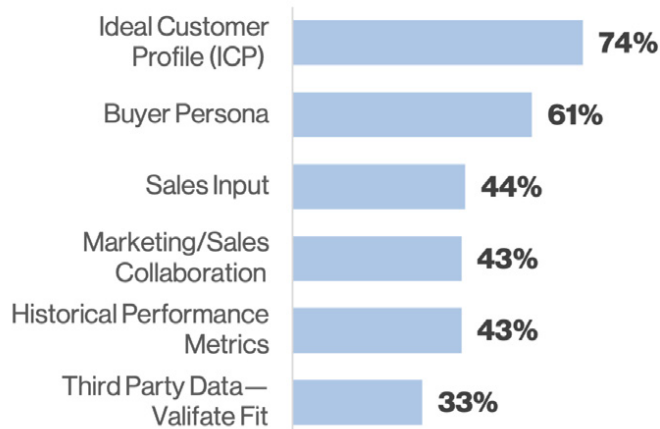
When you look at the variables that go into building account lists at most companies, it remains heavily dictated by long-held traditional approaches:

- Personas (often based on sales history or sales preference alone) – Can easily not include important roles and change rapidly yet they are rarely revisited by most organizations more than once a year.
- Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) – While ICP is certainly useful for directional purposes, it should be used with caution when strong indicators of demand are coming from outside the frame.

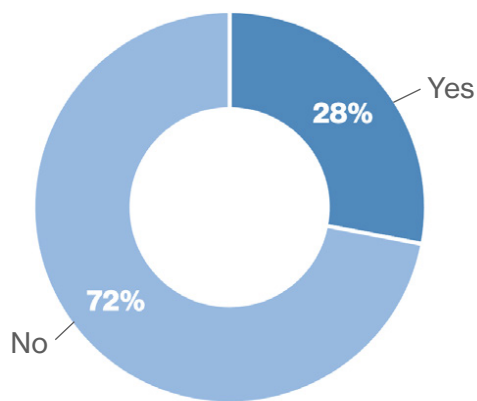
First-party historical performance data and second-party behavioral data – like high-quality intent data – are not widely used in XDR organizations, but they can provide a much stronger, more accurate view of where real, convertible demand exists in any market.

Among respondents, **72%** report that their company does not actually monitor the time and effort it takes XDRs to build lists. By essentially disregarding the waste of both time and potential these junior players are spending on building low-performing lists, it seems very much as if leadership is discounting how much investment is actually tied up in this activity.

Account List Input Variables



Measure Time for List Building



XDRs are not spending enough time on outreach

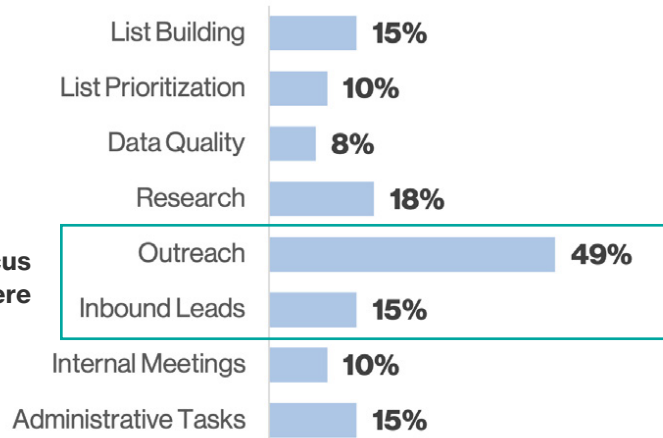
Despite there being more tools and technologies than ever to help sales teams engage their prospects and customers, why then is it that XDRs are spending so little of their time on actual outreach? **On average, XDRs spend less than half of their week on actual outreach!** The data shows they are just too busy doing all the prep work they aren't particularly well-trained or enabled to do:

- **33%** of time is allocated to list building, prioritization and data quality.
- Almost **20%** of time is spent on “research.”

15% of a typical XDR's time is spent on inbound leads, which represents potential upside, but is hugely impacted by experience with both proper disqualification and qualification alike.

Note: Most participants in our survey allocated more than 100% of XDR time across all tasks, indicating no consistent understanding of how these resources actually spend their time.

XDR Median Time Allocation (Median)



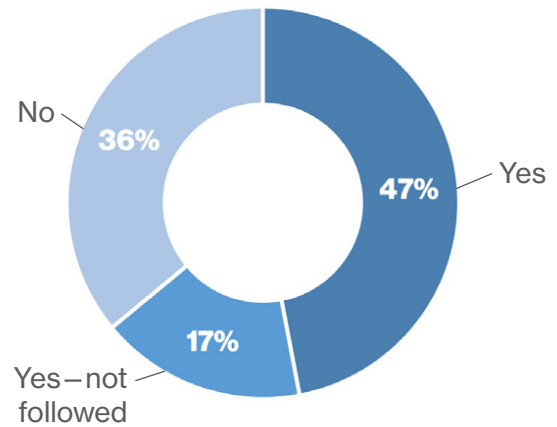
More Focus Needed Here

XDR outreach prioritization needs significant attention

62% of Where XDRs actually pursue demand continues to be heavily weighted towards individuals—without reference to the associated account. The research shows relatively few outbound prioritization processes aligned at the account or buying team level, so XDRs pursue anyone they’re told to. 53% of companies either have no defined account prioritization processes or have one that is not being followed. Another 45% have no defined account outreach criteria at all—they seem to be leaving their XDRs to just “have at it.”

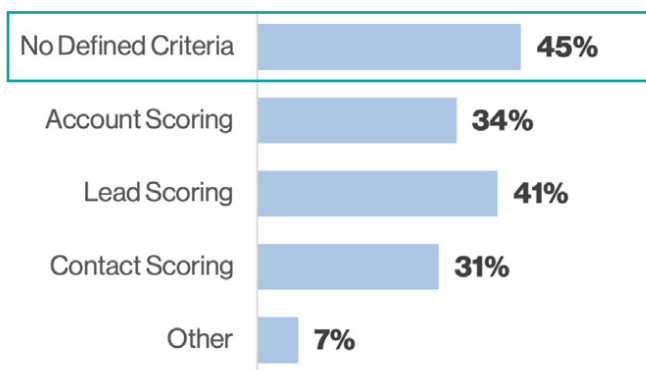
Indicative of the immaturity of many organizations, most XDRs continue to work mainly in “Lead” (77%) and “Contact” (67%) records within a CRM. Less than half are working within “Account” records (which would be an indication of a prioritization process being in use). Account scoring is simply not widely leveraged enough yet for guiding XDR teams’ outreach targeting.

Defined Account Prioritization Process

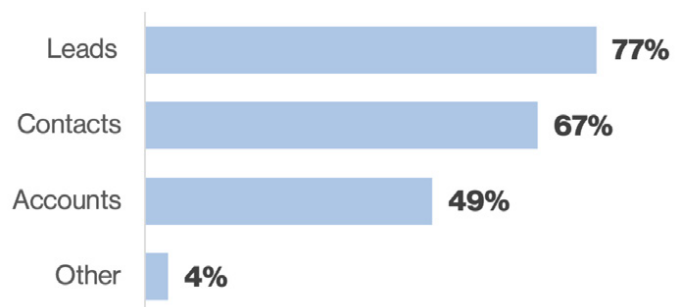


45% have no defined account outreach criteria at all—they seem to be leaving their XDRs to just “have at it.”

Criteria for Outbound Activity Priority



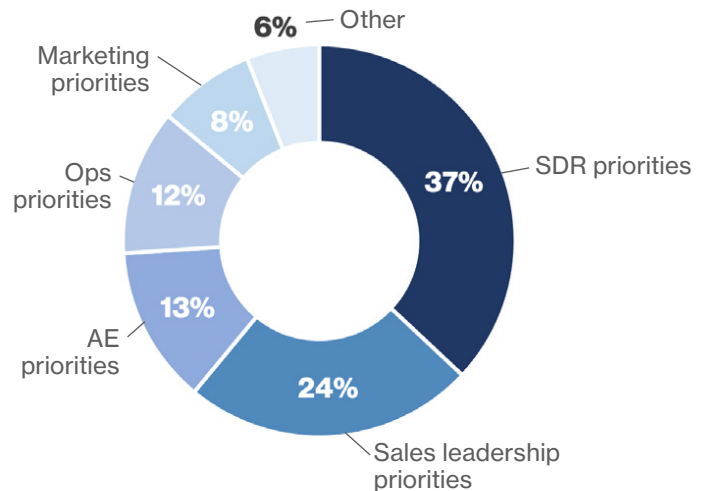
Records XDRs Work In



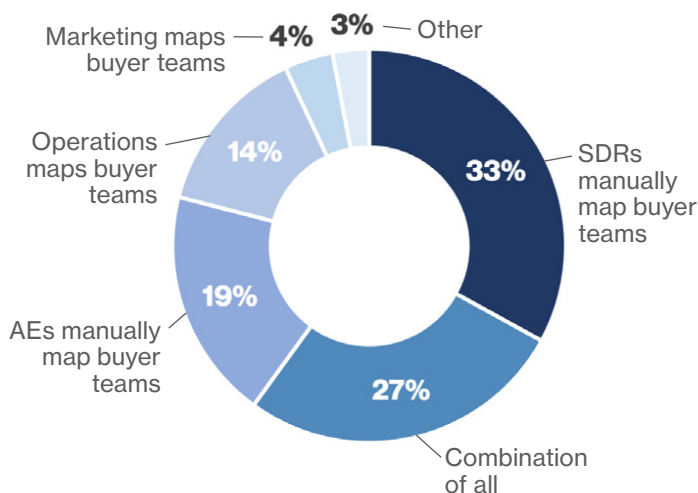
Fully 75% of the prioritization of XDR investment is being determined by near-term, tactically focused/activity-incentivized people.

In this operating environment, in addition to being expected to construct their own lists, many XDRs are left to figure out who exactly should be on them. Others take their guidance from AEs, whose own perceptions of current priorities there determine where XDR resource is applied. Where sales management may guide XDR focus, they are almost as likely to be subject to frequent change in assignment as quarterly numbers are being made or missed. The big aha here is that many XDR teams are being treated entirely as a flex resource rather than as a coherent, specialized capability pursuing a strategy-guided contribution. To deliver better ROI from this resource, and to direct its progress more effectively, Management (perhaps with the assistance of Marketing inputs, especially where lists are concerned) should strongly consider treating it as a specialized unit with goals, processes and support unique to the groups.

Account Prioritization Process



Buying Team Mapping Process



For example, being able to quickly understand account and buying team relationships can help XDRs have better informed, more targeted outreach for maximum effectiveness. This is nearly impossible when they are left to make their own decisions on prioritization and being asked to manually associate leads to accounts and buying teams. Sources of data, like high-quality intent, can provide quicker visibility into the connection between prospects, buying teams and accounts. This presents a clear opportunity to help companies streamline XDR preparation and strengthen outreach yields.




Recommendations for improving and optimizing your sales development program

Issue highlighted:

Metrics not aligned to outcomes

Revenue performance starts with revenue alignment across the go-to-market team. To ensure everyone's rowing in the right direction, we recommend our clients begin with the revenue goal they expect to be contributed as an outcome of sales development investments. At a minimum, to create smart goals, they should then go deeper to document and analyze their processes from setting a new sales appointment, to adding qualified sales pipeline to recording closed/won bookings. Once a realistic goal is understood and can be established, they should further analyze what tasks are actually required to achieve it; what are all the activities truly needed to add to pipeline and revenue bookings over an established timeframe. Then it's time to determine how long those activities are actually taking and to ask yourself the question: Is that time well spent, or is it time to do things in a different way?

All necessary activities and measurements should be open to discussion, further analysis and improvement. As the maxim attributed to Peter Drucker goes: "If it isn't measured, it can't be managed."



**If it isn't
measured,
it can't be
managed.**



Issue highlighted:

List building time and quality is a problem

If at this point you don't know how much time your XDRs are spending making lists, or worse, your list making process is essentially random, it's time to dig in. Many of our clients find one of the biggest time wasters in the sales development process is having your sales development representatives (XDRs) create their own target lists. An accurate and targeted list is your foundation for success in sales development prospecting—it can lead either to better time management and effectiveness for the XDR team, or remain a tremendous time waster, with your team wasting time sifting through bad data, creating bad lists and spending hours calling on the wrong prospects. We recommend running a quick time usage survey with your team or doing virtual “ride-alongs” to get a rough estimate of the time being spent on their data-related activities. You should consider looking at samples of the lists they are coming up with. The results may shock you.

Many organizations are rushing through the process of creating their outbound lists. They often have no owner for this important activity and no documented and recommended approach. Many leave it up to the XDRs themselves. Many others leave it to the ever-changing whims of individual sales managers or even distribute it to the AEs themselves. We suggest that the XDR list strategy should be prioritized as a critical activity going into each year and be updated each quarter. It should have a dedicated owner who is responsible for its maintenance and its enrichment using research and analytics based on the continuous changes occurring in any given market. The list must contain the freshest contact information, targeted account guidance and enriched contact records. And for maximal XDR efficiency, it must be presented in a way that makes it simple for XDRs to execute on while adding their unique personalization messaging to each target prospect.

You should consider looking at samples of the lists they (your XDRs) are coming up with. The results may shock you.



Issue highlighted:

Outreach prioritization offers significant opportunity

Prioritization is obviously critical in sales development goal attainment. While clean data, presented simply, is an important step, it must be supported with guidance on where to focus most. It won't work to have your XDR team calling on a clean data list when they end up focusing on the wrong account targets and prospects who are likely to lead nowhere.

We recommend a simple bucketing of all possible TAM accounts based on a top-down prioritization strategy into a A, B, C, and D categories that are then recorded and easily accessible in your CRM.

One approach is to have:

- **A accounts** reserved for senior account executives and assigned at a limited number per quarter.
- **B accounts**, a much larger number, can be assigned to XDRs.
- **C accounts** can be processed when they come inbound but are never to be actively targeted in an outbound campaign.
- **D accounts** are those that should never be acted upon, because while they might fall into the TAM, they are deemed to be unsellable.

For individual contacts, a similar system can be used based on a combination of the function and role/authority of the individual, and their intent activity visible through first- and second-party sources. Intent data providers like TechTarget can easily help with that level of prioritization.

It won't work to have your XDR team calling on a clean data list when they end up focusing on the wrong account targets and prospects who are likely to lead nowhere.



Issue highlighted:

Sales development reporting structures

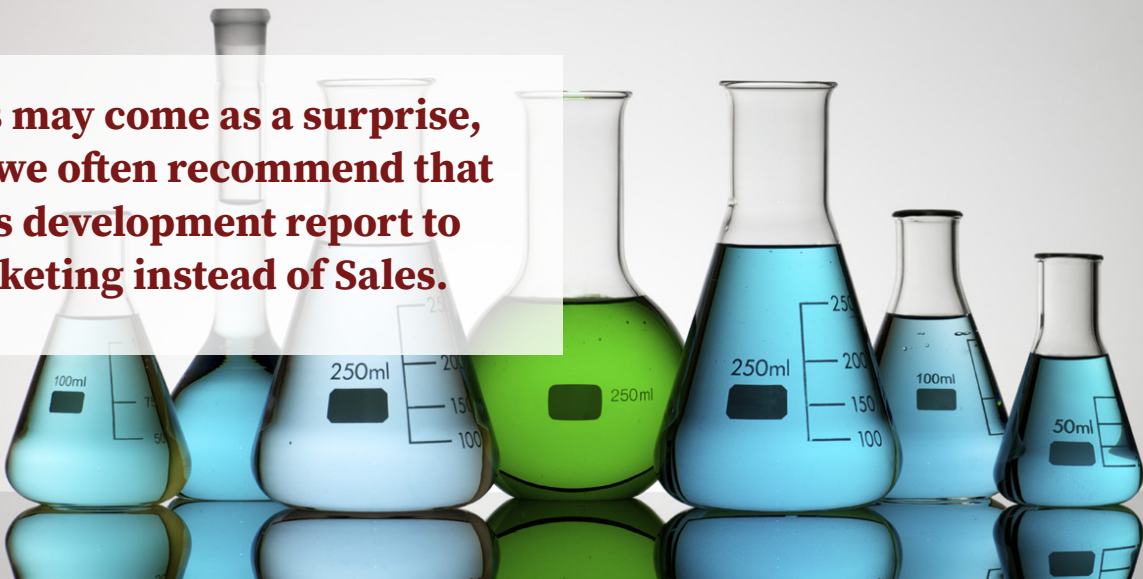
This may come as a surprise, but we often recommend that sales development report to Marketing instead of Sales. Of course, many variables exist in making this choice—most importantly the enthusiasm of the Senior Leader in Marketing or Sales to manage the sales development program. At stake here is the propensity of the manager to do or provide the research, analytics and coordination necessary to properly provision the team and support it in a continuous fashion.

The inputs that go into finding accounts, finding appropriate contacts and adding data to enrich those, often live more within the purview of the Marketing department than anywhere else. Marketing is likely providing the necessary inputs to many downstream users: clean data, prioritized lists, intent intelligence, scripts and playbooks. Like others, XDRs need those inputs to create new sales meetings and SQL pipelines to hand

off to AEs. When this is working, AEs and Sales Leaders can provide mentorship, training and coaching to the XDRs through an active sales enablement program. The Sales team really wants the XDRs outputs—qualified meetings and pipeline opportunities—it does not want to have to create the inputs necessary to achieve those.

If the Marketing department is responsible for pipeline contribution, it shares the same ultimate goal with the sales development team. Sales development, is in essence, the connective tissue between the Marketing and Sales departments. It has both foundational needs that are natural for Marketing to provide, and maturing needs that are better delivered from Sales. Sales training and coaching must take place, and this can be delivered as an element within an overall sales development program coordinated and synchronized between Marketing and Sales leadership.

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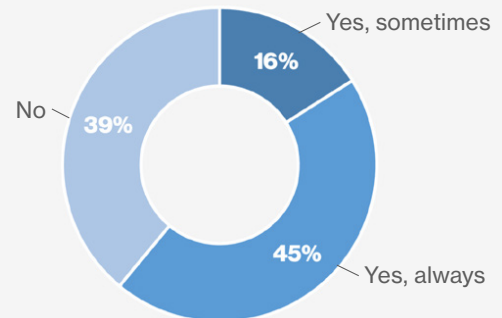
The impact of intent data usage on sales development success

Intent data drives better, faster sales development outcomes

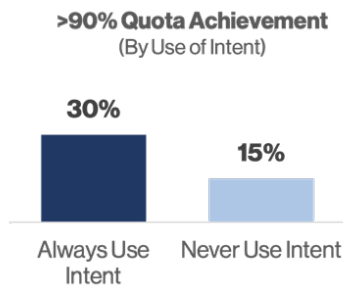
While intent data has not yet become a staple for XDR teams, it is growing in usage: **16% always use** intent data to prioritize outreach and **45% sometimes use** intent. What is already clear, however, is that those using this new resource consistently are outperforming their peers across a number of critical measures.

These teams are:

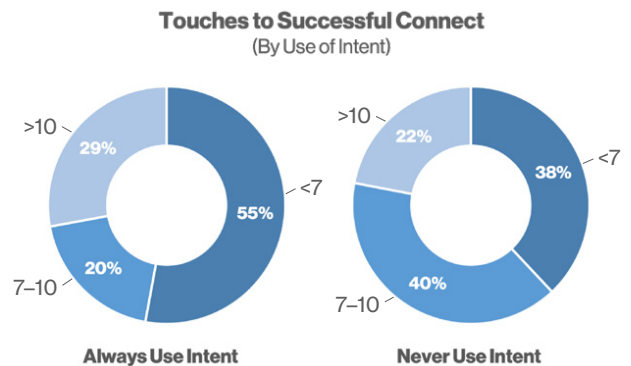
Use Intent Data to Prioritize?



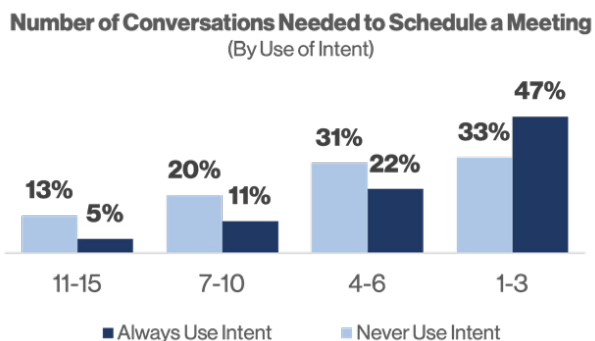
2x more likely to achieve 90%+ quota.



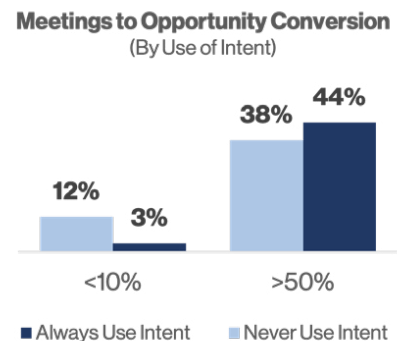
45% more likely to connect with prospects in seven touches or less.



42% more likely to schedule a meeting within one to three conversations with a prospect.



15% more likely to convert 50% or more of meetings to opportunities (those not using intent are 4x more likely to convert less than 10% of meetings).

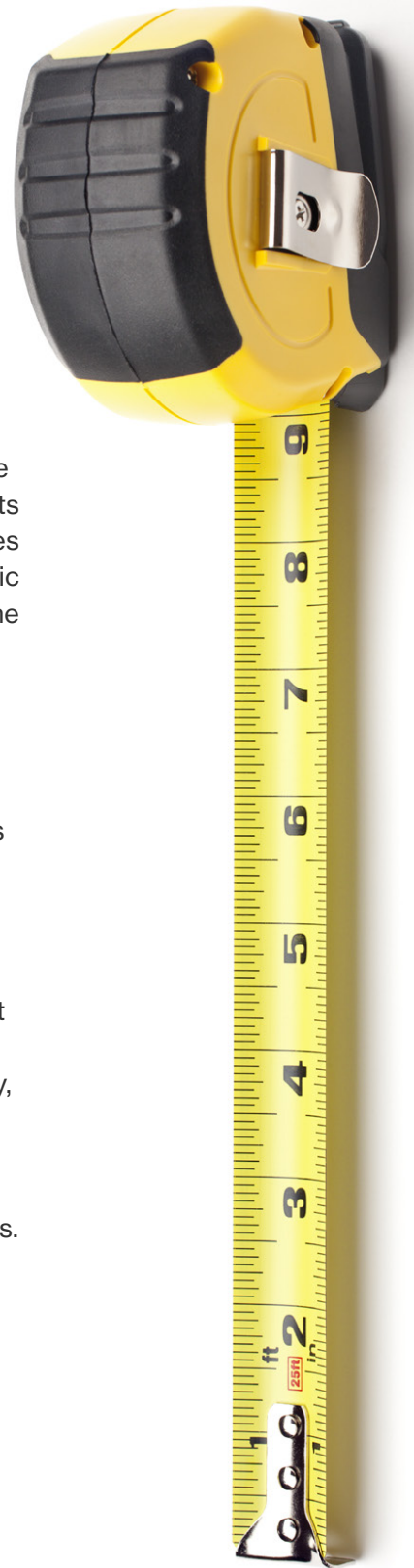


How XDRs can specifically leverage intent for maximum success

This study shows how intent-guided XDR activity versus traditional behavior yields substantial improvements in conversations, meetings and opportunities. And these better opportunities are more likely to close. It's a cascading effect where the intent data helps create a better list and better prioritization within it—of titles, of messaging and so on. Real high-quality intent at the individual prospect level helps XDR teams:

- **Deliver more precision at scale**—Intent data helps XDRs with some of the key issues this research shows they struggle with. With a strategy in place to broadly focus outreach, high-quality intent will then help prioritize which accounts and people within them represent the best possible targets based on the intensity current demand signals. And the best intent sources can show an XDR precisely the right messages to deliver based on specific topical interests, installed technologies and competitive engagement at the account, buying team and individual prospect level.
- **Associate real prospects to real buying teams**—One of the most revealing things within this study was that many XDR teams are manually mapping leads/contacts into buying teams. This is both time-consuming and prone to error without strong, accurate data. Prospect-level intent, as available from TechTarget's Priority Engine™ platform, will help you find, monitor and engage full buying teams at your most important accounts.
- **Be confident they've reached the right people and know exactly what to say**—When an XDR reaches out to a prospect, they need to know what to say in the first 8–10 seconds. For this to work, it must be a prospect from the right account, the prospect should be in an active buying journey, and the XDR must be clear on what the prospect needs. All of this can be obtained from a high-quality intent source like TechTarget because its publishing model is based on delivering decision-support information to buyers as they research solutions to their most pressing business problems.

XDRs can go directly into their intent data platform to use such insights when prepping outreach. Alternatively, XDRs may prefer to use an existing interface (like CRM or a sales execution platform), which is why TechTarget clients commonly integrate the data directly into their Martech and Salestech stacks. Note that while XDRs should be responsible for using the data to customize messaging, their actual cadence frameworks (together with relevant assets to send that amplify that messaging) should come from a sales enablement capability.



Conclusion

Sales development organizations are at a critical tipping point—too many XDRs have been dropped into a sink or swim situation. They're not making their numbers, they're not enabled in their roles and they're certainly not empowered to drive change, so they're at an especially high risk of leaving. In the short term, companies need to pay a lot more attention to the problems before this gets worse. And the long-term success of the function—which depends so much on the success of the XDRs themselves—requires real senior focus on some very clear areas.

To optimize yields from XDR investments, the targeting of accounts and personas should become a strategic matter that is planned and monitored in an orderly fashion.

At a minimum, organizations need to take list building and prioritization off XDRs' plates—they really have no business doing this for themselves. To optimize yields from XDR investments, the targeting of accounts and personas should become a strategic matter that is planned and monitored in an orderly fashion (quality intent data can help with this). But that's just one piece of a more formal operationalization of the capability—one designed to ensure proper training, infrastructure, support and measurement. Organizations who intend to improve and scale the capability should really take on board a serious commitment to do the work necessary to properly build out the components necessary for success here as they have done in their other departments.



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RevOps Squared enables companies, especially SaaS and subscription-based companies, to exponentially increase customer acquisition, customer expansion, and customer retention efficacy. This is accomplished through an enhanced alignment of marketing, sales and customer success processes, success metrics and shared performance goals resulting in a more holistic, systemic approach. The Company measures performance metrics both against internal historical performance, and also evaluated in context against peer group benchmarks and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

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