



The future of B2B sales is **yes/and**

How to blend traditional human and digital approaches to spark new growth.



“We sell to the enterprise.
We have zero digital sales, and I
don’t expect we will anytime soon.”

— **Chief Revenue Officer** at an enterprise software company

Many B2B executives, particularly those focused on the enterprise customer, share this CRO’s perspective. They say their customers are too sophisticated and varied for digital channels to handle. The deals are too big and complex. Pricing is too intricate. Solutions are too customized. These organizations take a high-touch approach to selling, hiring a bevy of highly skilled business development reps, sales reps, solution specialists, operations managers and more. This approach has proven successful over the years, with corporate leadership justifying the high cost of sales based on the strong gross margins the business enjoys.

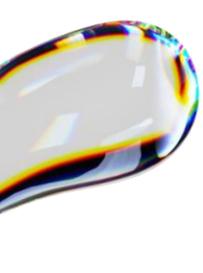
Trouble is, while this traditional approach has stood the test of time, time isn’t standing still. Digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any other innovation in human history,¹ transforming the way people work and live. Today’s enterprise B2B customers are more

likely to be digitally native millennials² than baby boomers, and they’re steeped in easier, faster, streamlined ways to do everything, including business. They still want to have great rapport with sales and account reps who will look out for their best interests. But they also want to navigate aspects of the B2B buying journey on their own terms and timetables—from researching products and services, to placing and managing orders independently, to leveraging both digital and human customer support across different channels and devices—just as they do in their personal lives.

In this fast-changing environment in which virtually everything is being reimaged through a digital lens, B2B organizations need to shed the binary *either/or* mindset that pits digital channels against high-touch human sales approaches. Through Deloitte Digital’s work with many of the world’s largest B2B

organizations, we’ve seen that digital touch points throughout the buyer journey can enrich and amplify—not diminish—the impact of human sales teams. Digital tools can effectively promote sales teams from order takers to trusted advisers by freeing them from time-draining tasks and allowing them to hone their expertise and focus on meaningful interventions with customers.

In this paper, we’ll explore our recent research that demonstrates the business impact of weaving human and digital interactions together to create a cohesive buyer journey. We’ll also look at practical ways to challenge long-held assumptions about B2B sales and shape a new mindset for the future.



Leaders offer high-touch *and* digital across the buyer journey.

Deloitte Digital recently surveyed 100 of the largest software companies for our annual study on the future of B2B sales. We looked at how leaders—those companies with higher-than-average growth rates and lower-than-average cost of sales—were setting themselves apart. We found they had something in common: They were more likely to offer their customers ways to engage digitally at *every* stage of the buying journey, compared to other sellers that on average offered digital channels at only three stages.

Leaders have made digital a priority by offering digital tools that make it easier for customers to not just discover and learn about their products and services online, but to also get customized quotes quickly, make purchases at any time from any place, see automated suggestions for add-ons, access and manage their account details, handle their own renewals, and more.

However, it's not all about digital for leaders—they recognize the power of human connection in the buyer

journey. Deloitte Digital found that leaders are investing more than other B2B companies in hiring customer success managers and sales operations personnel to support their field sales people.

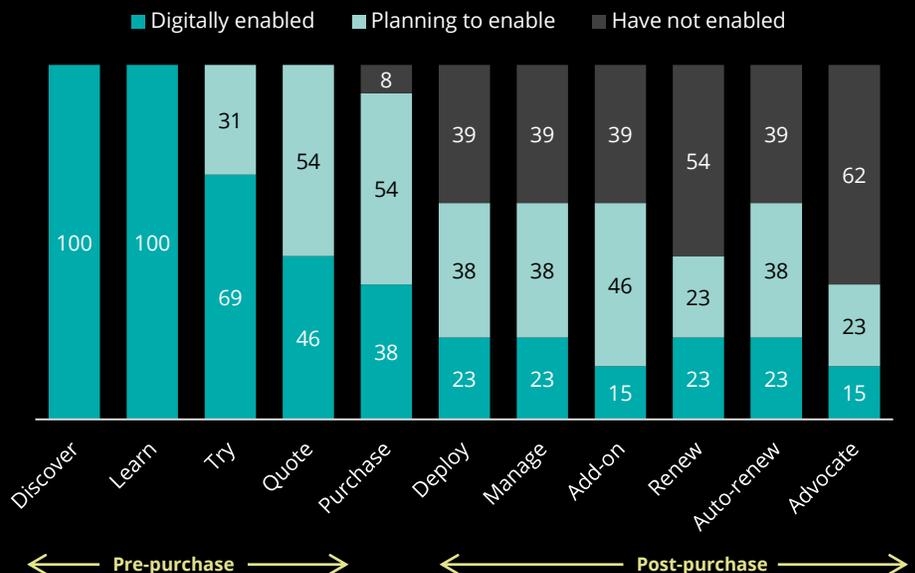
The result of leaders' *yes/and* approach to sales? They're reporting growth rates of 21% on average—nearly 2x higher than other surveyed sellers.³

Yes/and yields higher revenues, lower costs.

Deloitte Digital's latest research on the future of B2B sales shows that B2B enterprise sellers that combine the best of high-touch sales with the best of digital engagement are coming out ahead, with stronger revenues and lower overall selling costs.

The study evaluated sellers' digital maturity at 11 stages of the buying journey.

Percentage of sellers offering digital enablement at each step of the buying journey



Shed the **either/or** mindset.

As our research reflects, B2B organizations of all maturity levels provide digital options for customers at the beginning of the buying journey. That makes sense, because many B2B customers want to conduct a significant portion of their research-before-buying process *before* they engage a salesperson. In a recent Forrester Consulting survey of more than 200 B2B directors with purchasing power—49% of whom were millennials—at least half said they typically researched a supplier’s business and client reviews online before ever accepting a meeting with them.⁴

Yet many sellers draw the line at offering digital options once customers move further into the buying journey. Many appear to believe that digital is okay for helping customers learn about products—but not for getting price quotes. Or that it’s fine for trying out a solution, but not for making a purchase or renewal.

And this isn’t the *only either/or* mindset that persists. Even within B2B organizations that have relatively robust digital options, it’s not uncommon for them to relegate certain types of transactions, products or customers to digital channels, while other types are “owned” by sales reps.

Unfortunately, drawing lines in the sand is overly simplistic. It fails to recognize that different customers have different preferences for how they want to engage. It also limits the powerful role that digital channels can play as enablers that complement a largely high-touch, human-led approach.

Common instances of this binary mindset are:



Transaction size:

Smaller transactions can be on digital channels, but large transactions should be via human interaction.



Product complexity:

Simple products (e.g., low configurability) can be sold through digital channels, but complex products should be handled by humans.



Customer tenure:

Repeat buyers can be handled through digital channels, but first-time buyers should be engaged through human channels.

Truth is, there isn't a clear line in the sand, or anywhere, around how sellers "can" and "should" interact in different situations.

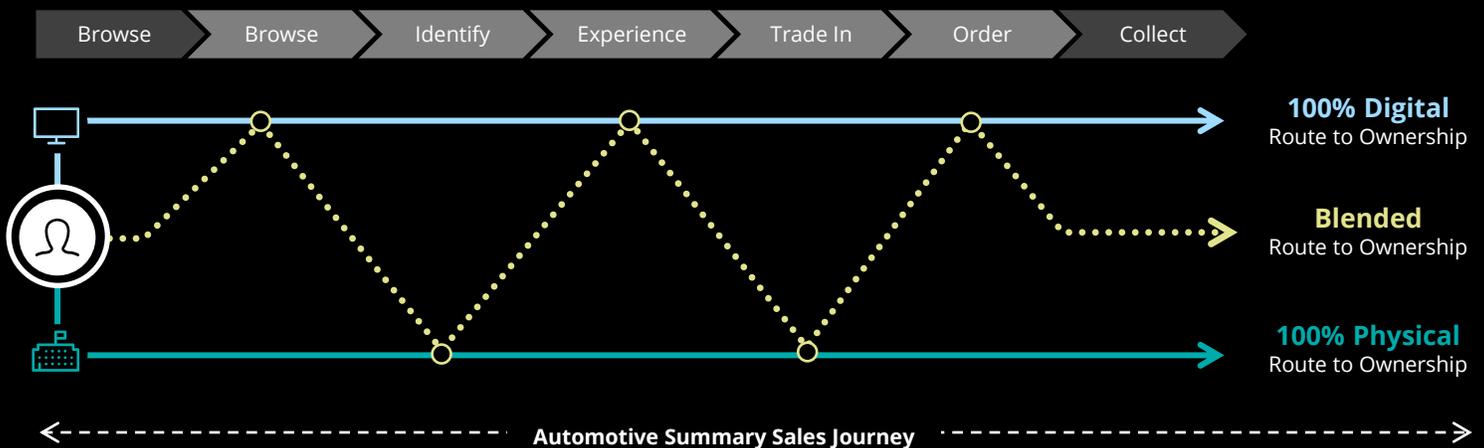
Today's B2B customers expect both human and digital options; they want the ability to choose what's right for them—and when it's right. In a separate Deloitte Digital-commissioned survey by Forrester Consulting, B2B customers ranked easy-to-use, up-to-date digital customer interfaces as the most important characteristic of organizations they prefer to work with.⁵ Yet they also emphasized the need for a strong, ongoing relationship with their sales reps. In fact, more than half said they would stop doing business with a company that failed to meet face-to-face regularly. That speaks to the potent impact of blending digital channels with a high-touch sales model.

Proactive companies are taking advantage of this blend by offering digital engagement options that span the gamut—interactive apps or websites, chat functionality, product configuration / design tools, intuitive knowledge bases, real-time order management and more—for deals of every size, for products both simple and complex, and for first-time and returning customers alike.



A mix of digital capabilities and high-touch service supports a blended experience for B2B prospects and customers.

True automotive omni-channel customer sales experience



To instill a new mindset, challenge the status quo

If you think ...

Our customers demand face-to-face interaction with us.

Our product / solution is too custom and complex and can't be sold digitally because we need to communicate personally with multiple stakeholders.

Our pricing and contracting are too complicated to be configured into a pricing tool for customers to use independently.

Ask yourself ...

Have you asked your clients if they really want to meet face-to-face—and if so, in what circumstances? By asking what customers want, you can use both in-person interactions and digital channels more effectively. For example, 85% of B2B buyers in a recent study said that *in-person post-sales support* has an impact on their perceptions of a seller.⁶

Even if your products / solutions are intricate and complex, can you leverage digital in various steps instead of aiming for a fully digital, one-click experience? This question should help evaluate whether the complexity of your offering hinders sales. Is there an opportunity to make the offering simpler so that it streamlines pricing, contracting, etc.?

Have you researched digital tools that can be configured for complex pricing schemes? Nearly three in four surveyed B2B buyers said it is very important / critical that sellers are clear, fair and transparent in negotiations and business dealings.⁷ Digital tools can add transparency, helping reduce uncertainty and ambiguity for buyers, while also allowing your sales team to focus on value selling.

We don't have the resources to invest in digital capabilities / tools.

We've purchased digital tools, but we aren't seeing any value.

Sale teams will struggle because of this change, and we would probably have to shift talent and eliminate roles.

Our incentive structure doesn't support this level of digital enablement.

Have you built a strong business case that supports the investment by showing the positive return on investment other organizations have gained by improving customer experience through digital? Our recent research showed that B2B buyers are 33% more likely to buy from and 37% more likely to renew a contract with a seller that delivers excellent customer experience.⁸

Have you identified your customers' pain points and needs, established key performance indicators, and defined clear outcomes to track against? To use digital tools more effectively, focus on clearly defining goals and desired outcomes. Then, determine what's preventing your organization from reaching those goals. Lastly, work with sales, marketing and operations teams to develop strategies to increase adoption across all stakeholders.

Have you included sales teams in digital development? Have you explored and communicated the positive ways that digital could benefit sales teams? Our recent study of enterprise software companies on the future of B2B sales showed that leading companies with digital options across the buyer journey were hiring more people for sales enablement and customer success to support their sales teams.⁹

What would it take to fix your incentives and quotas to align with what's best for your customer? Leading companies recognize the importance of compensating salespeople when customers on their assigned accounts make purchases through digital channels.¹⁰



Large B2B organizations with complex products and services are reimagining the customer journey through a blend of human and digital enablement. Here's how one medical device company adopted a *yes/and* approach—and grew its online sales channel by 600%.

Commercial leaders at the company were skeptical about whether their customers would buy complex and expensive medical devices online without ongoing personal contact with a sales representative. The sales team also raised worries about what the digital channels would mean for their roles.

Here's how they overcame their initial reservations—and reaped the benefits of a more efficient process that still credited sales reps for every transaction in their accounts but allowed them to interact with customers in more meaningful ways.

Case in point: Global medical device company

1 Model technical features on customers' B2C experiences.

The company knew that customer expectations were increasingly shaped by the online shopping experiences in their personal lives. To live up to these expectations, the company applied a customer-centric lens to decide which features to include in its digital commerce platform. Its team knew, for instance, that customers wanted:



Fast-loading product images and specs



The ability to email quotes to other people in their organizations



Automated product suggestions based on items in their carts



The ability to keep certain products in a cart while purchasing other products



Flexible control over shipment scheduling

Further enhancements allowed end customers to make purchases directly from their cellphones, despite some doubts about whether customers would purchase medical devices that way. These doubts were dispelled when a \$100 million purchase came from a cellphone shortly after the system went live.

2 Digitally enable all purchasing channels.

Like many B2B organizations, the medical device company's sales process was complex—with multiple channels that included third-party sellers such as integrators, distributors and resellers, many of whom had their own digital portals.

To enable digital sales across all of these channels, the company replicated the user-friendly digital functionality configured on its own customer-facing website to its third-party partner portals.

3 Design a high-touch sales process in parallel to a fully online sales process.

Despite the ease of a direct online sales process, some customers prefer to work with a sales team member before making a purchase. This is where a strategic *yes/and* approach was critical. Customers who were comfortable online could initiate and complete their purchases independently, while sales reps gained the ability to enter an order on a customer's behalf, which pleased buyers who preferred to do business that way.

Digital enablement also expedited the transition from prospect to customer. New customers were able to immediately make purchases online, after which they were contacted by customer care to set up their accounts and finalize all contracts and customer agreements.

Blending human and digital.

“We created a private digital experience for our top enterprise customers. Each one has a private digital experience portal where they can see current purchases, add / subtract licenses, manage contract terms and request support.”

— **CRO** at another enterprise software company



Consider this leader’s perspective compared to the one we opened with. Both sell complex products and solutions, but this one is leveraging digital channels for its top customers—arguably the most complex and nuanced accounts.

There’s no question that B2B sales are complex. Buyers have extraordinarily specific requirements for products and solutions, ranging from performance characteristics to parts’ dimensions to price requirements to the origin of component materials. Pricing is dynamic and variable, depending on myriad factors, such as purchasing volume and supply chain constraints. And within every account there are multiple stakeholders, each playing a distinct role at different points in the decision-making process.

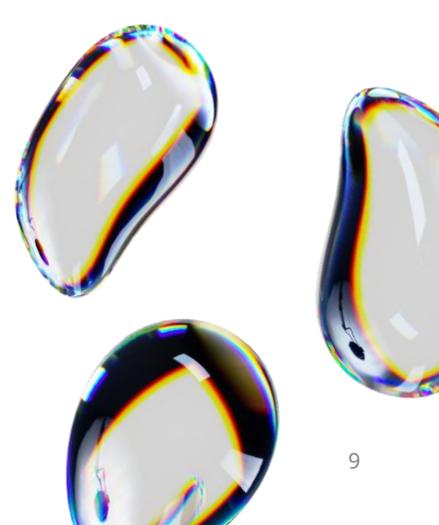
Yet this very complexity is exactly what makes B2B sales suited to an approach that taps the power of both people and technology.

That’s why the most successful B2B organizations are striking a balance between human-led sales and digital interactions. They’re doing it because it’s what their customers want—and because it’s good for the bottom line. As sales organizations evolve their models to keep pace with changing expectations, digital simply must play a role, regardless of the customer’s point in the buying journey, the product / solution complexity or the transaction size.

That means letting go of an *either/or* mindset that limits your ability to reimagine the buying journey through a digital lens. After all, the possibilities for reaching, persuading, closing and managing customer relationships through

digital will only continue to proliferate. And customers will continue to expect them.

And while person-to-person interactions will continue to play a role in building and maintaining customer relationships, *it’s the right combination of human and digital that will drive future success.* Blending the best of both—digital and human—will drive down the cost of sales, generate stronger sales volumes and keep your customers coming back for more.



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