

Zendesk Sales Trends Report 2021



zendesk

Introducing the Zendesk Sales Trends Report

The past year accelerated a growing shift in how buyers make purchases.

2020 brought unprecedented change—the global pandemic transformed the way we live, collaborate, and connect. In order to adjust to the many disruptions, buyers have increasingly turned to technology solutions to keep in touch with one another and their vendors. For some, much of the groundwork for technological change was already in place.



While the buying landscape has been changing for years, younger generations, who seem more comfortable in a digital environment, have gained more and more buying power amidst the recent and drastic economic and social changes, and they expect vendors and salespeople to keep up with their shifts in expectations.

Sales organizations are increasingly turning to digital and remote-enablement technologies to deal with a shift in the market, comprised of both generational and situational changes that favor the technologically savvy.

There are five key trends that emerged from this study:

Trend #1: The sales landscape is evolving

Trend #2: Sales teams have shifted their expectations during the pandemic

Trend #3: Sales teams are increasingly agile

Trend #4: Sales teams have embraced their uniqueness during the pandemic

Trend #5: Sales teams are collaborating more with the help of new tools

About our data

Welcome to Zendesk's first annual Sales Trends Report.

We surveyed sales leaders and looked at data from more than 800 companies across 15 countries and 19 different industries.

Based on company size, we looked at what sales teams have been doing to address the needs of their customer and prospect bases during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Read on to learn more about how the sweeping changes in 2020 have and will continue to impact the world of sales and what your team can do to keep up.

01

TREND #

The sales landscape is evolving

The one constant in the world is change, and buyers expect vendors to keep up with those changes. The pandemic of 2020 accelerated a lot of changes that were already underway in the market. The sales landscape has evolved over the last half-decade as Millennials and Gen Z workers continue to move up in their careers and gain a stronger voice in the buying process, bringing a changing set of expectations.

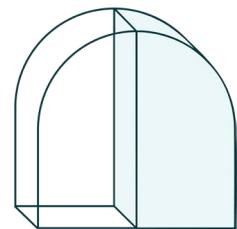
SECTION 1: Information is king

In our research, sales leaders say that prospects' expectations have changed significantly over the last five years. Today's buyers are more informed than those in years past, relying on a growing abundance of online information to learn about products before making any purchase decisions. They have a clearer idea of what they want from their purchases, and they expect their vendors to be willing to negotiate with them.

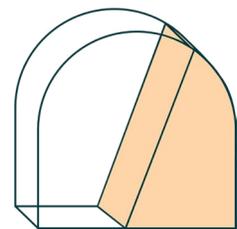
Buyers today hold their vendors to higher standards, too—they increasingly expect their suppliers to understand their problems, and they expect vendor teams to work well together, sharing information and collaborating effectively to solve those problems.

Customers have been changing

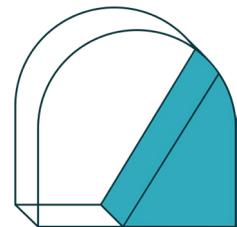
50%
of sales leaders
say their customers
are more informed



32%
of sales leaders say their
customers want sales to
have full context on their
business and the problems
they are trying to solve



26%
of sales leaders say their
customers expect a close
collaboration between the
internal teams and the vendor



SECTION 2:

A preference for digital

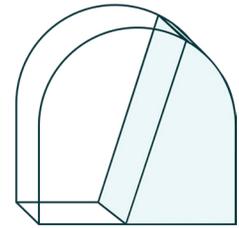
Buyers are also much more digitally savvy than in previous years.

From communications to transactions, buyers want to navigate the purchase process in a digital manner, particularly as the COVID-19 virus forces buyers into an increasingly online world.

Customers want to work with their vendors digitally

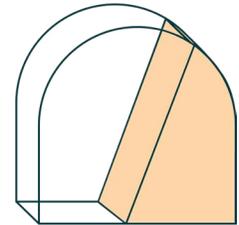
41%

of sales leaders say their customers want to communicate digitally more



38%

of sales leaders say their customers want to buy online



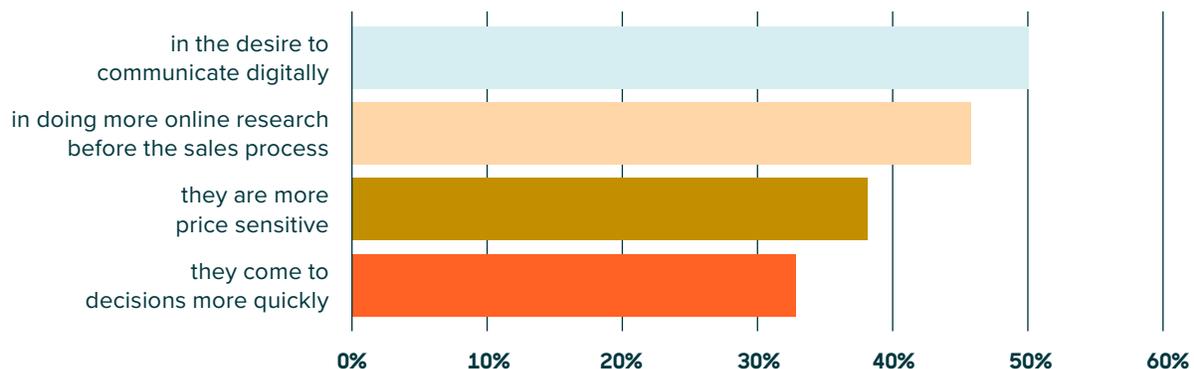
SECTION 3:

Customers want to work with their vendors digitally

Generational shifts among the workforce have amplified technological shifts in the workplace. Millennial and Gen Z workers have moved up in their roles and responsibilities, bringing higher levels of digital-savviness to the buying process.

At ease in an online environment, these buyers are doing more advanced research before engaging vendors, and they expect those same vendors to be comfortable communicating along predominantly digital channels. More research yields more knowledge, so buyers have clearer expectations of fair market prices and are more willing to walk away from a purchase in a short amount of time if those expectations are not met.

Millennials and Gen Z are changing the sales landscape



Top ways sales leaders say Millennials & Gen Z differs from Baby Boomers & Gen X

SECTION 4:

What should I do?

Every salesperson has heard the old adage that the customer is always right. While that maxim should not be taken literally, it is important to give your customers what they want. Technological and generational shifts are migrating the buying landscape into a digital space, and vendors need to be ready for that change.

Digital communication channels are increasingly considered table-stakes in the modern sales process, and a robust web presence with product and customer service information will often be the difference between making the shortlist and being removed from consideration. Invest in your customer-facing technologies, and buyers may be more likely to invest time in you.

Technological and generational shifts are migrating the buying landscape into a digital space, and vendors need to be ready for that change.

02

TREND #

Sales teams have shifted their expectations during the pandemic

While the expectations of Millennials and Gen Z workers were already shifting, COVID-19 has accelerated and exacerbated the need for sales teams to change their approach in how they interact with customers and with each other.

SECTION 1:

Sales teams have changed the way they do business

Whether large or small, sales teams have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Almost two-thirds (61%) don't believe that things will ever go back to the way they were before.

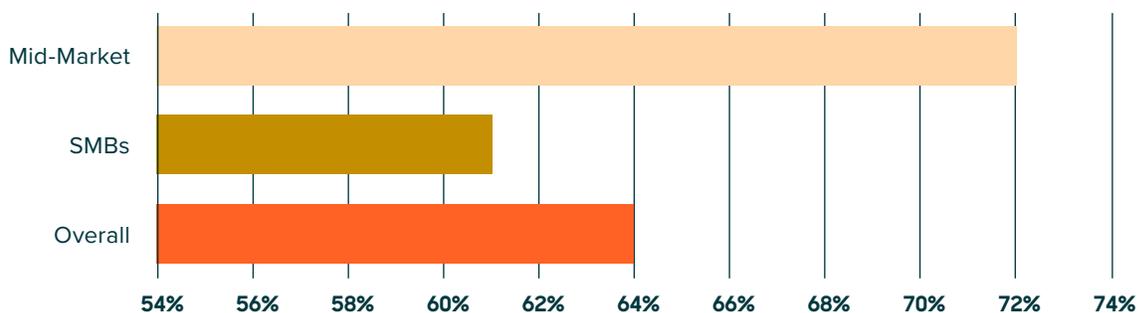
Shifts to digital communications, remote work patterns, and virtual team structures have challenged even the most well-prepared organization. And sales teams have risen to that challenge:

64% of sales teams feel they have the tools they need to be successful in a remote environment.

Unfortunately, that means that not every team is fully equipped with the tools that they need, and that situation is worse for Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs), which are buying new technology at half the rate of Mid-size companies.

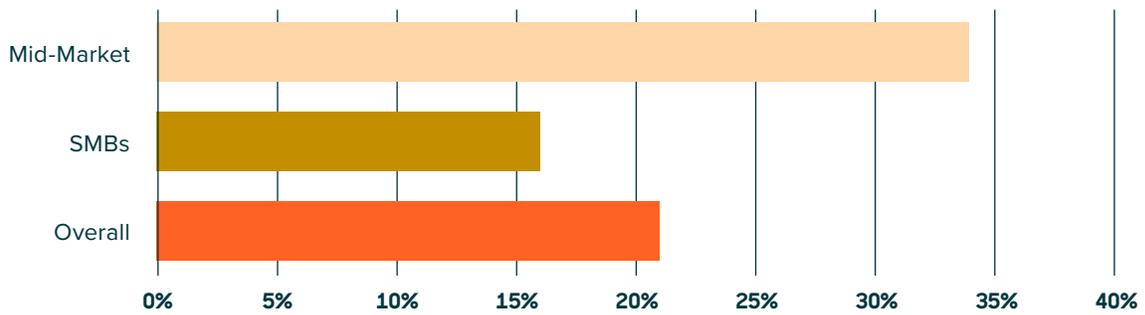
Availability of remote tools

Percent of sales teams that believe they have the tools they need to operate remotely



Purchases to support remote work

Percent of sales teams that have purchased new technology to support remote work



Many sales teams are making other changes, too, whether it's to their business processes, communications, or something else.

Changes to support remote work



of sales teams have changed their internal processes



of sales teams have added new communication channels

SECTION 2:

Finding synergies between generational shifts and pandemic responses

Many sales leaders are finding that changes they made to better serve Millennial and Gen Z buyers have helped to prepare them for the challenges that they are facing during the pandemic.

A generational shift among buyers has driven a steady rise in digital communications and online interactions over the last five years, as growing numbers of digitally savvy individuals are being included in buying decisions. Many of the same technologies that are needed to address this change are being used during the pandemic.

Technological shifts

49%

of the sales teams who have added new communication channels have added video conferencing

40%

of sales teams have added messaging apps

38%

of sales teams have added live chats or chatbots

SECTION 3:

What should I do?

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a shift to digital that was already underway. With generational changes among buyers bringing more digitally savvy customers, sales teams have had to adjust the way that they do business to meet their prospects' demands. Enabling digital and virtual communications is even more important now.

Sales teams need the proper tools to work remotely, whether it is being able to hop on a video call with a buyer or collaborating with other members of their own organization—and they need updated business processes and guidance to do that work effectively.

03

TREND #

Sales teams are increasingly agile

Sales organizations have a direct feel for the pulse of the market. They know their customers, and they see changes coming before the rest of the organization. That's why they've been shifting their priorities in response to changes in the customer base and the underlying market long before anyone else.

SECTION 1:

Meeting changing needs

Faced with unprecedented challenges from a global pandemic, sales teams have begun to change their priorities. Success is only possible with targeted investments, aimed at better meeting the needs of their customers and better supporting their salespeople. Sales leaders are learning from the pandemic and are responding accordingly.

These leaders are seeing a gap, and are looking for ways to fill that gap. The flip side, though, is that three-fifths of sales leaders don't see this as an urgent need. Hopefully, that means that they've already made the necessary adjustments, but the possibility exists that some are being left behind in the race to better serve customers and enable sales teams.

40% of sales leaders feel they need to be more responsive to the changing needs of prospects and customers as a result of the pandemic.

SECTION 2:

Improving support for sales people

Ensuring sales teams have the tools and processes they need to win is one of the core responsibilities of sales leaders and their back-office support staff. They have processes in place to respond to an ever-evolving market, but events like the COVID pandemic can test any good process.

That's why sales leaders see the importance of learning and growing from this unique situation. Motivation, enablement, communications—sales leaders identified all of these as key areas for improvement as they raced to respond to the changes in the market.

Areas of focus

Percent of sales leaders who believe this is a top area for improvement in response to the pandemic:



SECTION 3:

What should I do?

Sales teams understand buyers and markets. They know what they need to succeed. Sales leaders have to listen to their teams and give them the help they require to win.

Communication technologies, remote work technologies (including information management and collaboration), and motivation/incentivization restructuring have all been identified as priority investment areas. Supporting teams in their key areas of need is just good business.

04 Sales teams have embraced their uniqueness during the pandemic

TREND #

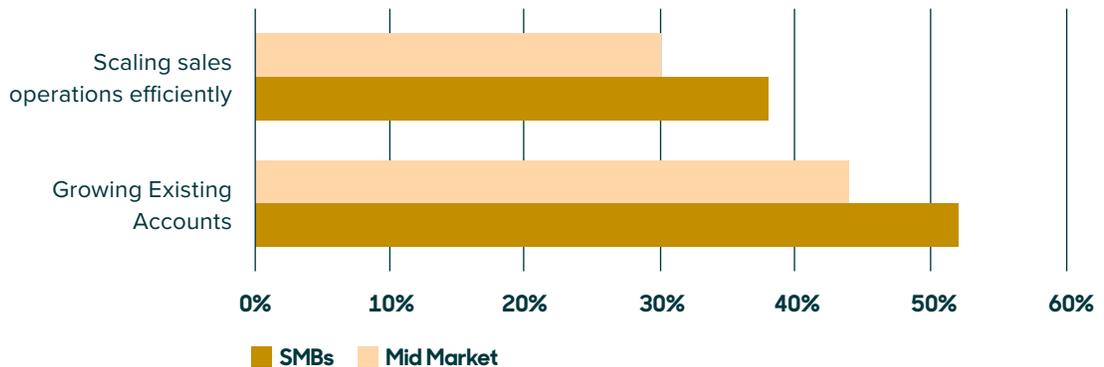
While all sales teams have been impacted by the pandemic and have adjusted their go-to-market approaches, teams at SMBs and Mid-size companies have diverged in their responses.

SECTION 1: SMBs are investing more in their existing approaches to sales management

As their approach to doing business is challenged by the pandemic, SMBs increasingly see the value of further investment into their existing approach to sales management. They see the value of scaling operations and better selling into existing accounts. In fact, more SMBs consider these actions to be a top priority than do larger Mid-size firms.

Focus on growth

Top priorities for sales leaders:



Tending to existing accounts and growing operations is top of mind for SMB sales teams, and they are actively looking for tools to support them in those efforts. More SMB sales teams than ever before are willing to consider adopting a full sales CRM system, and many are looking to refresh their existing systems with more robust technologies.

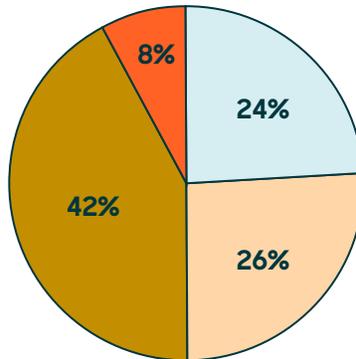
Embracing Sales CRM systems

Percent of SMB sales teams who:

Do not use Sales CRM 50%

Do not plan to use Sales CRM 

Want to buy their first Sales CRM 



Currently use Sales CRM 50%

 Want to keep their current Sales CRM

 Want to replace their current Sales CRM



of SMB sales teams are looking to buy new sales CRM tools this year



of SMB sales teams are looking to buy new sales CRM tools after this year

SECTION 2:

Mid-size sales teams are embracing advanced technologies as they rethink how they work

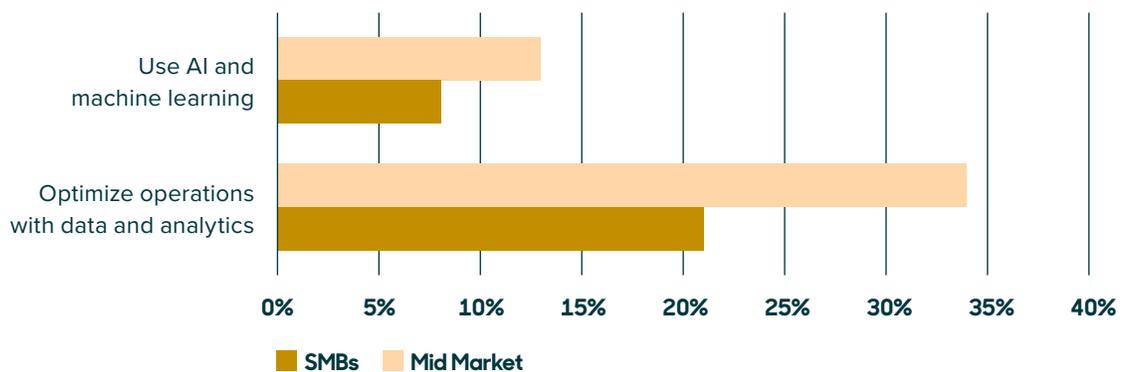
Mid-size sales teams are increasingly looking for advanced technological solutions to meet the ever more complex needs of their prospects and customers. From distributed workforces to advanced analytics, Mid-size sales teams are looking to technology solutions to support and enable a changing sales landscape that has been buffeted by the COVID pandemic. Mid-size teams are much more likely than SMBs to work remotely, and so are more willing to invest in technologies that support a distributed workforce.

Many more Mid-size sales teams are operating in a fully remote environment than SMBs, with 57% of Mid-size teams operating fully remotely, vs. 42% of SMB sales teams.

30% of Mid-size sales leaders say that investing in technology for a distributed workforce is one of their top priorities in 2021.

Mid-size firms are embracing advanced technologies

Percent of sales leaders who want:



Over one-third of Mid-size sales teams see the value in optimizing operations with data and analytics and are looking to incorporate these technologies into their existing business operations. Meanwhile, over one-and-a-half times as many Mid-size sales teams are looking to leverage AI and machine learning than are SMB teams.

SECTION 3:

What should I do?

Your pandemic responses need to be tailored to your client base—since you know your customers best and what it takes to serve them, connect with them in the ways in which they are most comfortable. And, don't be afraid to augment your technological footprint to improve your flexibility and efficiency during the sales process.

Whether you embrace digital communications or you see the value in tracking and monitoring your sales interactions with a Sales CRM tool, choose the technology that best addresses your situation. If you already have a solid base to work with, consider adopting more advanced tools and capability sets. Advanced analytics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence can unlock new ways to meet your customers' needs, but they need to be built upon a solid foundation of data capture and customer intelligence.

Whether you embrace digital communications or you see the value in tracking and monitoring your sales interactions with a Sales CRM tool, choose the technology that best addresses your situation.

05

TREND #

Sales teams are collaborating more with the help of new tools

Sales leaders believe that collaboration between sales, marketing, and customer service is critical for business success; teams are making efforts to improve their collaboration, but have so far utilized asynchronous interactions over integrated tools for real-time collaboration.

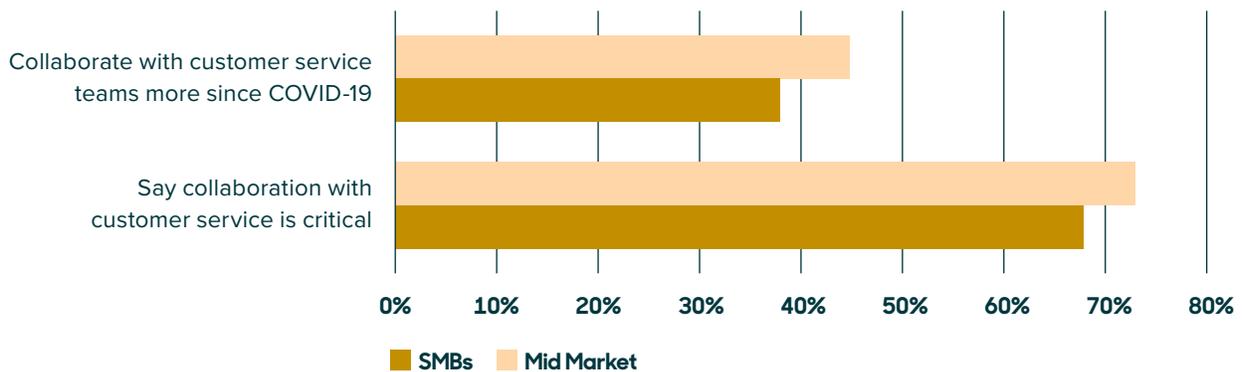
SECTION 1: Collaboration is paramount

A good sales leader knows they can accomplish more with better information about their targets, and that is where collaboration with customer experience teams comes into the equation. Sales leaders understand that working with customer service teams can be the key to winning a big deal.

The extra insights that they gain can make their conversations and outreach more targeted and personalized, and many see this as increasingly important since the beginning of the pandemic. But this is rarely a linear path—prospects will often engage with customer service, then switch to sales, then go back to customer service, then sales again, and may repeat this pattern several times before completing a purchase, particularly in today’s remote environment.

Mid-size teams are more willing to collaborate

Percent of sales leaders who:



SECTION 2:

Room for growth in collaboration

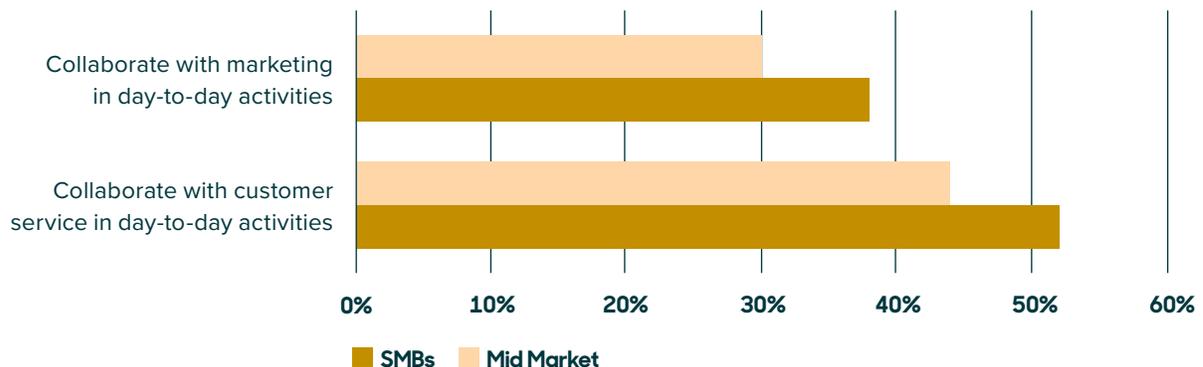
While 73% of sales leaders see the value in collaborating with customer service or experience teams, only 53% of them collaborate with Customer Service regularly, and only 41% collaborate with marketing regularly.

There is clear room for growth in enabling these crucial interactions. But those who already work with other internal teams do so avidly.

87% of those who collaborated did so at least weekly.

Frequent collaboration varies by company type

Percent of sales teams who:



SECTION 3:

Need for better tools

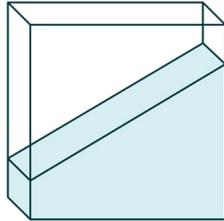
Most sales teams see the value in collaboration, but fewer are actually doing so. Why? Not having the right tools in place might be to blame.

In fact, the number of sales teams who interact with customer service teams is no more than the number of sales teams who have the technological ability to integrate their Sales CRM tools with Customer Service tools. Mid-size sales teams are leading the way in adopting the right tools, both in terms of collaboration and in terms of information sharing.

SMB and Mid-size Sales teams make very different technology choices based on specific market needs

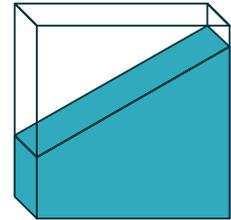
49%

of SMB sales teams' Sales CRM tools integrate with customer service tools



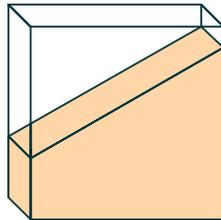
59%

of SMB sales reps can see a history of prospects' customer service interactions when making a sale



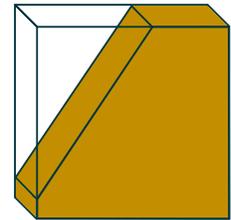
59%

of Mid-size teams' Sales CRM tools integrate with customer service tools



76%

of Mid-size sales reps can see a history of prospects' customer service interactions when making a sale



SECTION 4:

What should I do?

Collaboration is the key to growing sales for many successful organizations, regardless of size. But it cannot develop on its own, at least not in a socially distanced pandemic. Successful sales teams increasingly work with other customer-facing teams to go to market with the most up-to-date picture of their customers and prospects.

They are making sure to equip themselves with the right technology to paint that picture—whether standalone collaboration tools or Sales CRM systems with collaboration modules. And they are accelerating past their competitors who lack these technologies.

Make the most of this year's trends

Between the pandemic and a steady generational shift to digital, it can be hard for sales teams to know what to do next. But the answers are surprisingly simple:

If you're a Mid-size company, invest in advanced tooling and capabilities to better understand your customers and prospects.

As a Mid-size firm, you are likely already working remotely and collaborating internally. Investing in big data and analytics toolkits, potentially combined with AI and Machine learning, will help you to better understand (and predict!) the needs of your customers and prospects.

If you're an SMB, invest in Sales CRM tools and remote / collaboration capabilities to support your sales team's go-to-market activities.

To scale, you need to unlock more value from your customer insights, and the first steps to doing that involve investment in a robust Sales CRM tool that can track customer interactions and enables collaboration with your customer service team.

**Get started with Zendesk:
[sign up for a free trial today](#)**

About this data

This data is from insights provided by over 800 sales leaders drawn from 15 different countries and 19 different industries, all of whom participated in the Zendesk Sales Leader Survey in late 2020. 70% of respondents work for SMBs and 30% work for Mid-size firms; 70% derive most of their revenue from one-time sales, while the remaining 30% generate sales from subscription, recurring or other sources.

