

## **Taking Sales Operations to the Next Level**

by Mary Gospe

IDC's 2011 guidance for sales executives includes four areas of focus to boost sales productivity:

1. Upgrade the sales operations function
2. Elevate sales reps' knowledge
3. Invest in next generation sales automation technology
4. Get the pipeline in shape

At the March 2011 Sales 2.0 Conference in San Francisco, I had the pleasure of hearing Michael Gerard, Program VP for IDC's Sales Advisory Practice, give a presentation on the first initiative above - sales operations. Here are a few take-aways from Michael's presentation entitled, "The Next Generation Sales Operations Team".

Sales Operations has traditionally been a tactically-focused organization responsible for sales forecasting, sales compensation, sales automation and the quote-to-order process. But as companies look to squeeze more efficiencies and effectiveness from sales teams, Sales Operations is evolving into a more strategic function focused on operational excellence.

In this expanded role, Sales Operations becomes a "center of excellence" responsible for sales strategy and planning, sales analytics and sales enablement (defined as "providing the right information to the right team at the right time to move the opportunity forward").

IDC has developed a Sales Operations Maturity Matrix that shows the transition from decentralized, tactical Sales Operations teams to a global "center of excellence" focused on operational excellence.

## IDC - Sales Operations Maturity Matrix

<b>Role of Sales Operations</b>	<b>Operational Excellence</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good executive support</li> <li>• High level of productivity</li> <li>• Agile sales organization</li> </ul>
	<b>Tactically Focused</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggling to build credibility</li> <li>• High level of redundancy</li> <li>• Inability to focus on longer-term initiatives</li> </ul>	
		<b>Decentralized</b>	<b>Global Sales Operations Forming, SO in Regions, BUs Operate in Silos</b>
		<b>Level of Centralization</b>	
		<b>Global Sales Operations as a Center of Excellence</b>	

Source: IDC

Right now, Sales Operations is struggling to build credibility. In order to make the shift to the next generation role, executive support is essential. Steps to take to make this transition include:

- Defining roles and responsibilities
- Identifying opportunities for improvement, including resource allocation, sales enablement, and customer intelligence. Data quality is also a big one.
- Setting short and long-term objectives
- Measuring and communicating impact/results

How big should the Sales Operations team be? A good rule of thumb is 8%-12% of entire sales organization. Core skill sets needed include process re-engineering, metrics-driven analysts, sales automation fluency, and cross-functional and global experience.

According to IDC's 2011 Buyer Experience Study, 27% of the delay between desired versus actual buying time is due to vendors' sales processes. Delays come from lack of preparation by the sales rep, lack of response time, poor access to experts and pricing concerns. The next generation Sales Operations function has a huge opportunity, then.

to streamline internal processes and build sales skills in order to shorten the sales cycle and increase win rates and revenue.

For more information, follow Michael Gerard at his blog:  
[blog.salesadvisorypractice.com](http://blog.salesadvisorypractice.com).

**About the Author:**

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