

The **Ultimate** **Guide** to Multichannel Communication in Outside Sales



Key Takeaways

- Multichannel gives you the full picture of what's happening
- Prospect interaction is the foundation of the sales process. For such a vital piece of the puzzle, there is no way to manually capture the interactions a rep has from the field.

Calling, texting and emailing are communication channels a rep can use to establish, maintain, and garner a relationship. While all this is taking place, it's up to the field rep to add these interactions to their activities.

But it comes as no surprise this is not happening. It's time consuming, tedious, and reps only care about closing deals, not the nuances that take place between every rep interaction. This is where the problem lies. But when communication channels are automatically documented, management gains true insight into rep productivity.

More than that, sales reps will be able to see how they communicated with the prospect via email, call, and/or text. The nature of those interactions is then documented in your CRM, providing full visibility into activity and tasks.

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Summary

In the current business environment, many companies have fully embraced the idea of multichannel communication with their customers. In fact, 80% of high-growth sales development organizations rely on a multi-touch sales strategy.

While this has been prevalent in the consumer market for several decades, businesses have been slow to adopt multichannel communication. But the time has come to recognize it as a standard business practice.

Case in point: it takes an average of 5 - 15 emails and 3 phone calls to close an interested prospect. Additionally, sending 3 or more texts after initial contact has been made increases close rates by 328% ([source](#)). In other words, multichannel communication is essential.

For inside sales teams every prospect and customer interaction can be tracked either in their CRM or through sales engagement solutions integrated to the CRM.

So those 8% of salespeople who do bother to follow-up five times are scoring more deals. In other words, 8% of reps are getting 80% of all sales.

([source](#))

However, what about outside sales teams? We know there are many great field sales platforms on the market that track and organize sales performance for in-person visits.

But the reality is that outside sales reps communicate with their customers outside of face-to-face meetings. In fact, many outside sales reps take a multichannel approach just like inside sales teams, but have the added benefit of seeing their customers in person as well. Just because a meeting ends, doesn't mean communication stops.

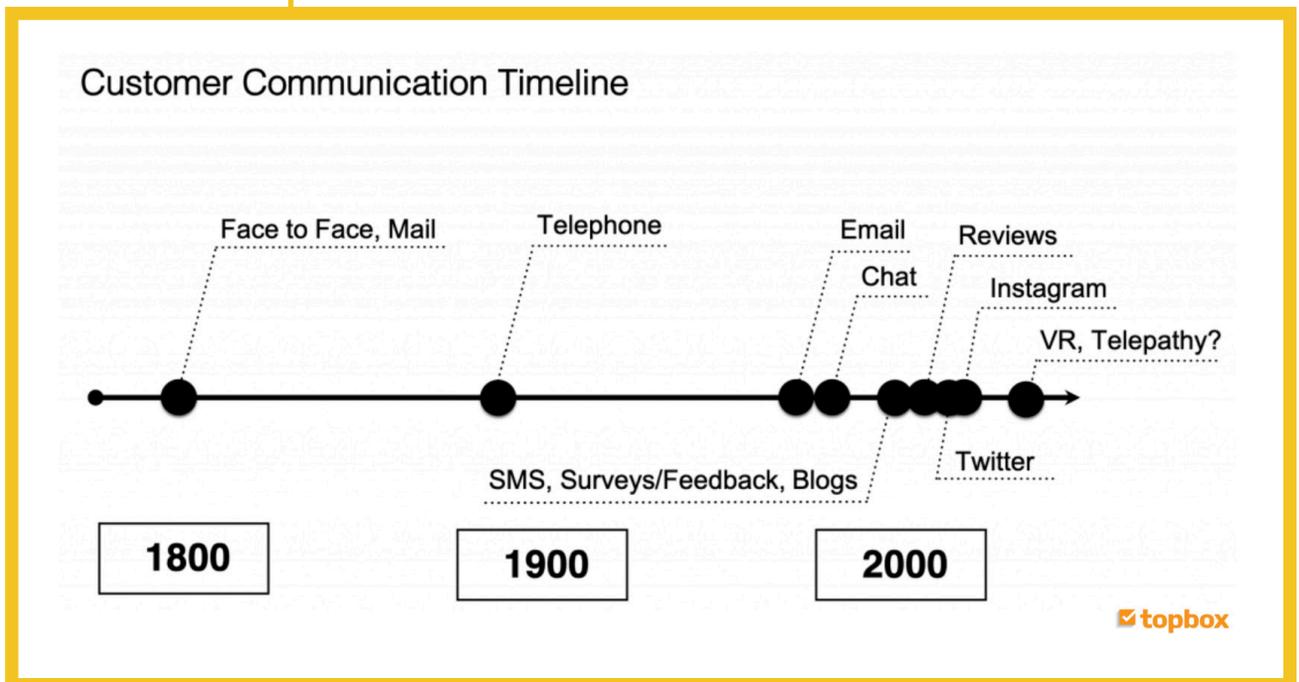
Outside sales reps may be required to email and/or call a prospect several times in addition to going to their home or business. Gone are the days of a linear sales process through one or two communication channels. As the relationship strengthens, so does the tendency to bring in more types of communication channels.

In this whitepaper you will find the nuances of how to approach multichannel communication strategies with your field sales teams, and how to bring it all together to get a complete picture of the sales activity needed for modern sales processes.

What is multichannel communication in Sales?

Multichannel communication in sales is the concept of communicating with prospects and customers through a variety of channels such as email, text, phone, social media, and in-person visits.

As technology has evolved over the last several decades, it has introduced more convenient ways for people to communicate with each other. Consider a salesperson in the early 1800s -- the best and only ways to communicate with their customers was through face-to-face interaction and direct mail.



Once the telephone gained mass adoption in the 1900s, it became significantly more efficient for sales reps to reach potential customers and provided them with a much greater reach. The introduction of the Internet and its influence on business, has created even more channels for communicating with customers.

Over the course of the last several hundred years we've found ourselves with these varied channels for communication that span our personal and profes-

sional lives. With each communication channel brings a certain amount of nuance, implied understanding, and complexity. There are certain rules and assumptions that are unique to email, for example, that don't necessarily apply to calling a prospective customer (and vice versa).

As sales reps leverage each type of communication depending on industry, customer type, accessibility, etc, it's critical to the success of their sales process that they consider tracking each customer touch point.

Next we'll be examining the 4 most common types of customer communication channels for today's outside sales teams and why they matter.

Face-to-Face Visits

You've heard it said "nothing replaces face-to-face communication." This idea holds true in almost every aspect of life, but especially in sales. As a salesperson you're able to gather details and insights about your prospect that are simply unavailable through other channels. This is a primary benefit for outside sales teams as opposed to inside sales teams which are limited to other forms of communication.

An in person meeting allows you to read body language and facial expressions, both of which say more than words alone. A [UCLA study](#) suggests that up to 93% of communication is determined by nonverbal cues. This advantage leads to an [average close rate of 40%](#) for in-person meetings.

In addition to getting your intended message across,

there's a huge time-saving component: a 25-message email thread could be condensed into a five-minute conversation.

Face-to-face communication cuts at the core of outside sales and what sets it apart from life as an in-office sales rep. Probably the most important communication channel of the group, face-to-face visits are what give outside sales reps a competitive advantage.

Network [stats indicate](#) that 28% of business will be lost if you interact solely online.

Field sales reps have a [conversion rate](#) of 40%; inside reps only 18% of the time. This is due to a field reps ability to build stronger relationships as a result of non-verbal cues and the more personalized connection that takes place in person.

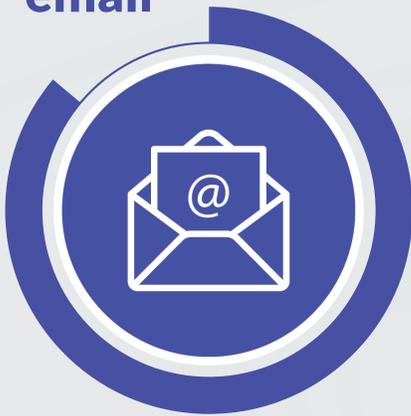
It should be noted that properly documenting visits and activities in the field is necessary in order to accurately measure rep performance, build a successful sales strategy, and maximize sales output.

By utilizing a tool that automates this list of activities, management can track performance over time and discover whether or not the activities resulting from visits are working or not.

Email

For many B2B companies, email is the communication channel of choice. Email enables salespeople to clearly and concisely communicate their message, while allowing customers to decide if they want to engage. And now that email is readily available on our phones, the feedback loops have only gotten tighter.

**86%
prefer
email**



**86% of professionals
prefer to use email
when communicating
for business purposes.**

10

Here are some more interesting stats to consider:

- [Eight out of 10 prospects](#) want to talk to sales reps via email over any other medium.
- Tellwise found the average consumer gets over 100 emails per day, but opens just 23%.
- Sending more follow-up emails can triple your reply rate ([source](#))
- The ideal length of a sales email is between 50 and 125 words ([source](#))
- The best hour for the highest open rate is 8am ([source](#))
- 86% of professionals prefer to use email when communicating for business purposes. ([source](#))
- 26% of the companies surveyed found email to be the most successful channel for their sales representatives to connect with a prospect. ([source](#))
- Emails that contain one to three questions are 50% more likely to get a response than an email without a question. ([source](#))
- Subject lines with three to four words get more responses than subject lines with other word lengths. ([source](#))

The biggest challenge sales reps face is the glut of emails their prospects receive throughout the day — the majority of which go unread, or worse, unopened. Emailing prospects is a necessary part of the sales process, so as an outside sales rep how do you make sure your message is received and engaged with?

Outside sales reps need to consider how they are interweaving their email communication with other forms of customer communication. For field sales teams, email isn't usually introduced until late in the process when email contracts or purchase orders are

sent.

For others, email is a part of the top of the funnel sales prospecting strategy and is a touch point to drive awareness before or after an in-person visit. The strategy that's right for your field sales team will depend on your customer and industry.

What we do know is that the majority of business professionals and consumers are utilizing email as a means of communication. Outside sales reps should consider how they can fit this channel into their sales strategy.

Phone Calls

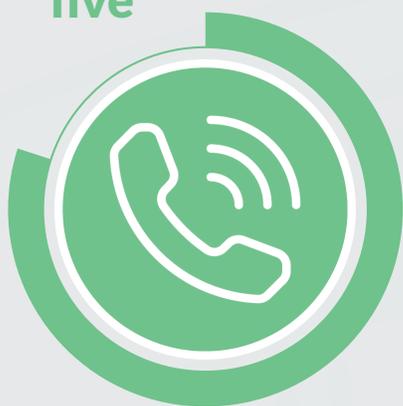
As outside sales teams consider a more multichannel sales approach, introducing phone calls to their field prospecting and sales efforts is usually one of the first and best things they can do. There are many strong opinions and supporting data on either side on whether or not cold calling is still a viable strategy for customer acquisition.

Regardless of where phone communication fits in your sales funnel, it's important to note that speaking to customers via phone provides field sales teams with a less invasive secondary touch point. Most people are within arms reach of their phones at all times. This fact enables both the sales rep and prospect to engage in conversation in ways other channels don't.

Some statistics to consider before dialing:

- 80% of sales require 5 follow-up calls after an initial meeting. But 44% of sales reps give up after just one follow up call. ([source](#))

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80% of sales require 5 follow-up calls after an initial meeting. But 44% of sales reps give up after just one follow up call.

- It takes an average of 8 cold call attempts to reach a prospect. ([source](#))
- The best days to call are Wednesdays and Thursdays from 6:45 to 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. ([source](#))
- The worst times to call are Mondays at 6:00 am and on Friday afternoons. ([source](#))
- It takes an average of 18 calls to actually connect with a buyer. ([source](#))
- The optimal voicemail message is between 8 and 14 seconds. ([source](#))

As you mix phone calls into your sales process, ensure your team is able to easily track their activity. A great way to scare off a promising potential customer is to over engage with them. By the time they visit in person or contact the prospect via other channels, the prospect has usually lost interest. Having a history of each touch point increases the likelihood of success for each account.

Text

SMS text messaging is the newest kid on the block as it relates to sales communication channels. What was once reserved for family and friends has now made its way into the professional world.

Like email, texting allows for customers and prospects to engage on their own terms. For younger generations, it has become the preferred method of communication given its convenience and brevity.

However, the way in which you introduce texting to customers and prospects is crucial. In fact:

**61%
don't
use**



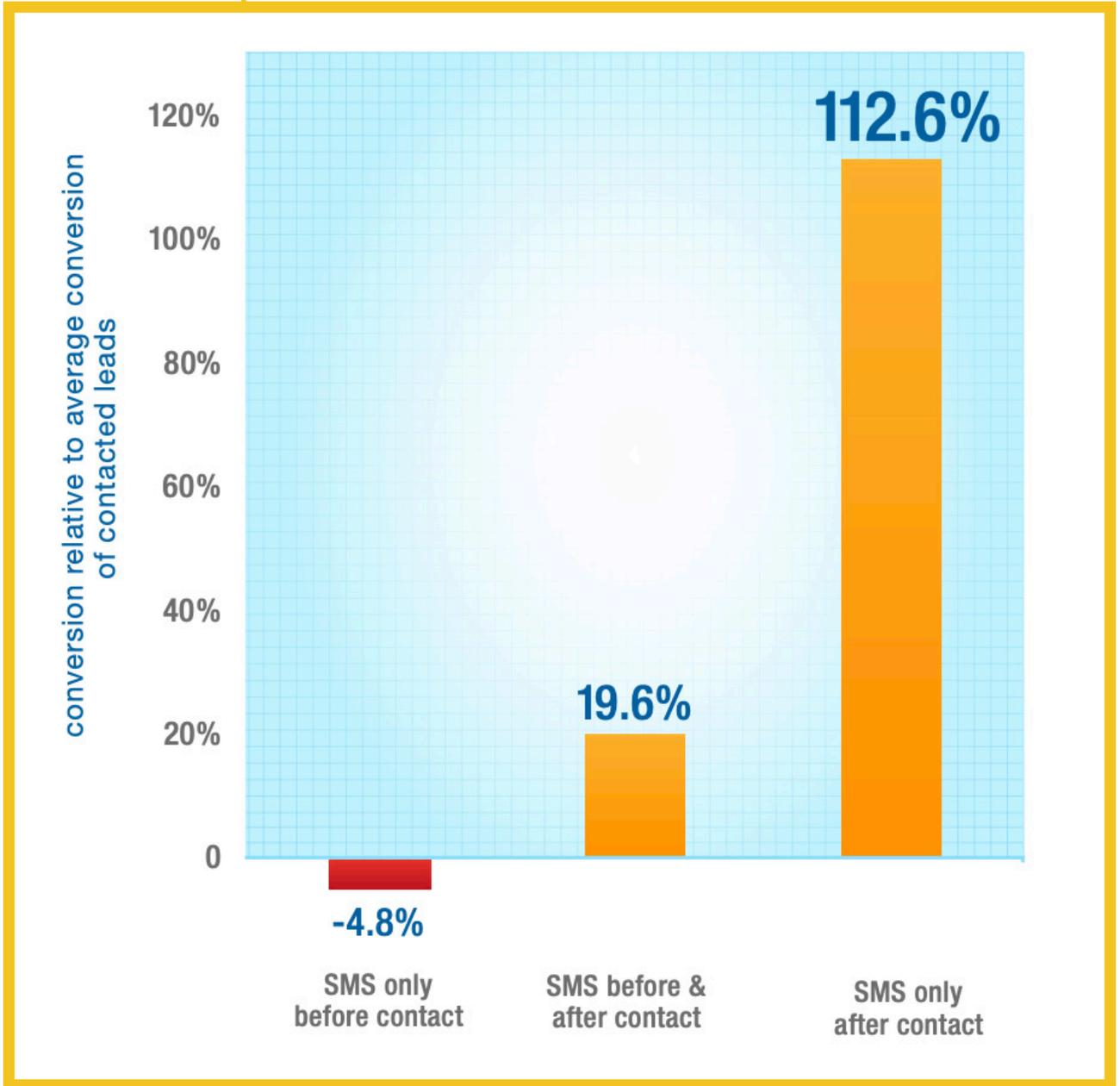
**Beat the competition!
About 61% still don't
use SMS for business.**

- Text messages are opened and read almost 138% more than email (98% to 18% open rate). ([source](#))
- Text messages have a response rate 8 times higher than email (45% - 6%). ([source](#))
- As many as 45% of people reply to branded text message blasts they receive. ([source](#))
- Beat the competition – about 61% still don't use SMS for business. ([source](#))
- 85% of customers prefer receiving text messages over a phone call or email. ([source](#))
- 97% of companies found they communicated with consumers more efficiently after launching texting initiatives. ([source](#))
- The average SMS campaign conversion rate is 45% ([source](#))
- 95% of texts from businesses are read within 3 minutes of being sent. (Forbes)

We know texting is a one of the most popular communication channels, so it only makes sense to apply this practice to the sales process. But this form of communication, when used as a business strategy, can be seen as intrusive, which means it needs to be approached carefully in order to be effective.

While there are pros and cons to the impact it can have on your sales process, it's important to understand how to use this approach in a way that's positive. When executed correctly, it can be tremendously beneficial to your sales efforts.

[Mobile Marketing Watch](#) found that 98% of all text messages are opened compared to 22% of emails.



Sales Activity Management

Embracing the reality that multichannel communication is occurring between sales reps and customers is one thing, tracking each touch point to make strategic business decisions is something else entirely.

The benefits of understanding how many calls, emails, visits, and texts it takes to acquire a new customer enables companies to better manage their sales teams and better predict future performance.

Although sales activity can be collected and manually entered into the CRM, it's usually inaccurate given the laborious nature of tracking each interaction. For traditional CRMs like Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics, an outside salesperson would need to manually record each visit, call, email, or text message.

While there are some great inside sales engagement products on the market, none of them have the ability to track visits in addition to other forms of communication.

Sales operations and management leaders should consider finding frictionless ways for their sales reps to capture sales activity data and enrich their CRM. The benefits of tracking sales activity are as follows:

- 360 degree view of sales activity - see exactly the level of effort required to advance prospects through the sales funnel.
- Transparency & accountability - get eyes and ears for what's happening in the field across your team. Sales coaching - once its clear who's doing what, coach your team on where they're getting stuck.

CRM Enrichment

Ask any sales operations professional and they will tell you that one of the biggest challenges they face is CRM adoption. With a less than 30% end-user adoption rate ([source](#)), it's nearly impossible to combine management's desire to gather rich data about each customer interaction with the status of each and every opportunity in the sales funnel that doesn't feel intrusive and time consuming.

The reason it feels impossible is because it is. The CRM is a system of record as it relates to the customer, thus it has a database undertone to it with many inputs designed to measure business performance. But the data is only as good as the information the salesperson provides. And if the sales rep doesn't provide accurate information, then there's no point.

However, if sales reps have an auto-capture mechanism that works at the pace they do and feeds into the CRM, the value of each system increases significantly.

In addition, as more sales teams embrace multichannel communication and move beyond simply "the visit," they become equipped with a modern selling approach designed to maximize their efforts.

Sales Administrative Burden

As a sales rep in the field, getting onboard with multichannel communication is easy because it's already occurring. But getting to a place where that activity log is now visible to management can be perceived as invasive.

For inside sales teams, this has been happening for quite some time and is considered table stakes. However, introducing this idea to outside sales reps might present a challenge. But if outside sales reps can see how it will help them sell more product and earn higher commission checks, then the discussion is neutralized.

According to the [State of Field Sales Report](#), 2/3rds of outside sales reps' time is spent on non-selling activities. Which means we ask our sales teams to do a lot of "not-selling."

Consider what it would look like to reduce that time by 20-30% by automating the manual administrative work. In addition, consider providing management deeper customer insights.

Lastly, consider what it means for the customer to have a more engaged and meaningful sales experience.

Multichannel Business Insights

The introduction of new capabilities, naturally leads to the desire to report on data and understand what it means. Adopting a multichannel communication strategy with your outside sales team is no different.

How do your buyers prefer to communicate with your reps?

What qualifies as too much or too little communication?

What channel is most effective in the sales process and how should your reps sequence each channel?

When does marketing come into the picture and what type of messaging should they craft?

These are all questions sales leaders and reps should consider as they professionalize their sales communication plans. What we do know is consumers regularly engage with businesses, friends, and other professionals across multiple channels. We also know each has their own preferred channel. It's critical to the success of a multi channel sales approach to measure the performance of each channel individually.

Conclusion

The world has embraced multiple channels as a means of communicating with each other. Each channel has its benefits, with unwritten rules in which to engage buyers. For some, texting may feel intrusive and a cold door knock is preferred.

Technology has made the various types of communication complex for sales reps in the field. If approached strategically, however, it can provide outside sales teams with a competitive advantage. Buyers like personalization and convenient methods of communication.

Field sales organizations should strongly consider how they are enabling their sales teams to embrace multiple types of sales communication channels as well as how they track each of them for their organizations.