Podcast Transcript

Sales Conversations Podcast

7 Sales Tech Trends Impacting Sales Training in 2022

Greg Smith: All right. Welcome to the Imparta Sales conversations podcast. I'll be hosting today. My name's Greg Smith, and I lead all things digital for Imparta. We're joined today by a good friend of mine Chris Kingman. Chris is the global head of digital enablement at TransUnion. Chris has accomplished a lot in his 10-plus years in enablement, including being a founding member and board member of the sales enablement society, an evangelist for the sales enablement pro-organization, an accomplished writing advisor mentor and freelance enablement consultant. Welcome, Chris.

Chris Kingman: Thanks Greg.

Greg: Yes. You're very welcome. Today we're going to be talking about sales trends. A year or so ago, I wrote a white paper looking at the different trends in the sales tech space and how we as a company were going to react to those. I wanted to take today to go through each one of those with Chris and see how it is that he applies those trends to his own organization. Now, these are just largely anecdotal it's based on the experience in my observations in the market, and those are some of our colleagues, so it's not gospel by any means. I've let Chris challenge me if he likes or add to them or add his own twist if he likes as well. With that we'll just dive

It's one that guides a lot of what we are doing with our digital products here at Imparta. It's this idea of learning in the flow of work. This is a concept I think first coined by Josh Bethen and it's this

Speakers

HOST

Greg Smith,
Head of Product, Imparta

GUEST SPEAKER

Chris Kingman,
Global Head of Digital Enablement, TransUnion

idea of getting away from event-based learning which is truly just the event. Then you go and do the job. It's about bringing those two together. At Imparta we're building out a learning experience platform, which is designed to do just that, but I'd be really interested to see Chris, what you do in terms of enabling your salespeople to learn and do at the same time.

Chris: We use the term just-in-time learning but it's the same concept of learning and the flow of work. I think when you sit down and you analyze that concept and you say, "Okay, how we're working, how we're living is shifting. How do we seamlessly blend the job and learning about the job or seamlessly blend the education component of selling because I think we can all agree now sales isn't just 100% get on the phone sell, sell, sell. There's an increasing education component. You need to know more about your products, their differentiation. You need to know more about your competitors and their strengths and weaknesses. You need to know more about your markets.

We work those things into a few key areas. I think the easiest one for people to consider is triggering some training based on opportunity progression. There's a number of platforms out there, but when your opportunity hits the 25% or you've quantified a particular opportunity, a module presents itself or an email comes up and says, "Have you taken training?" or some of the other things that we think about is if you look at how long a deal sits in a certain level, or a stage will trigger a training that says, "Okay, if something's sitting at waiting requirements or something for 30 plus days, a training will trigger to say, "Here's how to approach that conversation with the customer." If things are sitting at signing contract that's a typical hire in the 75-percentile range, a training will trigger to say, "Here's how to ensure buyer consensus."

The ways that you look at well what are these training. I think there's a couple of ways that we think about it first. You said it's event-based training and then go do the job. It can't be of that caliber or scale. It needs to be short and to the point. It needs to be backed by data. Your opportunity is sitting at the stage for a certain amount of time. We've analyzed our data, and there's a good chance that it's either A, B, or C reasons why it's there, and here's how to fix those things.

It's more instructional than let's navigate a skill or let's navigate a stylistic change to your selling. I think that's one place we've certainly looked, and I think folks can look. The other piece is really breaking your training and your seller education down into more digestible content. It's accessible whenever. Learning at their time. There are folks that they sell all day and then they go educate after the fact. There are folks that do it at their lunchtime. I think unless you have something that is closer to a workshop or closer that to, there's a lot of interaction. If you just have modules, if you just have things that you just need to digest it, and then you need to do a questionnaire or a survey to validate that you learn the things, serve it up and put a deadline, but make it as easy to access on as many platforms or devices as possible.

Don't water the content down just the facts. Here's what you need to know. Here's what matters. A lot of sales training has a lot of fluff in it. There's a lot of fluffing. I don't know if it's to eat up the clock and say, "We have an eight-hour program, and here's why." but most sales folks are, they're pretty competent. They can put things; they can put two and two together. They just need to know what do I need to learn? How do I apply it? Then how do I validate that I learned?

Greg: Yes. Excellent. How are you seeing the reactions from individual sellers? Obviously, you interact with them a lot, is that their preferred style of learning? Do some of them actually prefer the big upfront workshop stuff or they're actually really buying into this in the flow of work and is it moving the needle?

Chris: I think it's content and situation specific. I like the big event trainings, but I think they need to be driven by participation and discussion. It's just my observation that the best training we've ever done is there's maybe 10% of it is talking at people. The majority of it is discussion of ideas and concepts or discussion of experiences. In my world, the thing I think educates sellers the best is a very straightforward here's the customer, here's the problem. Here's how we approached the problem and here's how we won the business. Those tell me how you did it type trainings? That can manifest itself in a variety of ways.

You can certainly turn that into a module. It's not too hard. Those concepts really resonate with people, and it makes it a whole lot easier and tangible to say, "I had a customer in financial services here is the problems that they had. Here's the people that I talked to. Here's how I mapped our solution to that problem and solved it." versus a big product demo of what you sell. I think those things resonate better with folks. Then the just in time stuff, you only need to do it maybe once or twice, and then you get it, but it's nice to serve it up and say, "Hey, did you look at this, did you look at this? These are additional considerations that you may not have thought about at this stage in the sale."

To me that's important because some sellers could be pretty repetitious and they'll they have their formula, or their plays and they will stick to them. "I'm going to run this play on every single sale until it doesn't work. Then I'm going to run my other play." I think it disrupts that. Possibly provides an alternative. You do it this way. "Hey, have you considered trying these two things?" It's these micro inflection points at where you are in your process that can help you move forward or nudge whatever it is that you're doing forward.

Greg: Yes, excellent. It's actually quite a nice segue into the second trend I identified here and it's one that-- A phrase I actually coined, self-enablement because you're talking there about, they have their own plays. Sometimes you have to suggest a bunch of other options and methodologies and content for them to grab and start to bake into their own process. That's exactly the concepts of self-enablement. It's getting away from purely and exclusively prescribed training saying, "Hey, look this is what we do. Go learn this and do it." but allowing the individual to take more control over their ability to consume curate and calibrate for themselves figure out where they're at and start to really own their own way of selling.

Obviously, a lot of companies want people selling in a generally similar manner, so they can coach to it and whatnot. How have you seen or encouraged your people to start taking a little bit more ownership in their own learning path, and not just the learning but the doing as well, the actual total enablement, picking their own ways of completing their job.

Chris: We implement this in a few different ways. One is, we use content management platforms. You don't necessarily have to have those, but you just need some level of organization where people can go and find things. We do a recurring email every week of, "Here's all of the content that comes out. Here's who it's for. Here's where it is." Sellers, they're inundated with the amount of stuff that they can review, but there's enough information in there for them to say, "I don't need that, but I should probably read this." My personal opinion on training and development is you do need a small percentage of your seller education needs to be mandatory.

It needs to be very formal. It needs to be or used to be like classroom-style learning, or you need a webinar. You need people on there. You need to take attendance. It's more about, "We're introducing something. Here are some changes. Here are some things that we have to assure that you are now privy to." I don't think that will ever go away. With the shift into the last few years and how people work, I think that work-life balance thing is gone because you've got people who they can do a sales job, but from 8:00 to 9:00 in the morning and then from 3:00 and 4:00, they've got to get their kids, and so they have to sell a little bit later at night or they do their emails a little bit later at night. The self-enablement thing goes hand in hand for those organizations that aren't bringing people back in. It's on you to do these things. I think it's an agreement between the seller and the organization. "We'll enable you, but you actually have to do it. We'll let you do it on your own time." Personally, I think if I ever return to selling, I would probably read everything I could possibly read about the market in which I sell or the challenges that are facing my customer base. At worst, you're just going to get more educated. At best, you're going to be able to articulate where you fit between the customer, the situations that they're facing, and how that piece of technology or software, whatever it is that you sell, addresses those.

I think it's incumbent on that seller to always self-enable. The advice I would give to any organization, though, is that that is a cultural thing. I've worked at places, I'm sure you have too, where training is non-existent. There's no training. There's no support. There's, "Here's your book of business. Here's your product catalog. Good luck. We'll see you on Friday." It just doesn't fly anymore. Unless it's a commodity, I can't imagine there's too many things out there where you're a true sales professional that are really easy to sell. It's incumbent on that salesperson to always self-enable, self-educate.

I think there's also, back to that cultural piece, if you encourage it, if it's part of your culture of, "We're going to train you, but you also need to educate," there needs to be an aspect where people bring it back in like, "Here's what I learned. Here's what I found out. I went out and I researched sales training software. Based on SEO, we're third, we're second." or "There's 10 other ads out there for things that aren't related to what we do. How do we combat that?" The self-enablement piece I think is a little bit broader. It's twofold. It's, educate yourself, but you also need to understand that if you find something, if you learn something, you also need to share it. The high tide raises all boats type of scenario.

Greg: Yes, that's really interesting. I've never actually lumped time management in with the self-enablement track like you're talking about like people designing their own day, which has been obviously a big thing over the last couple of years. I really like that. Yes, it's encouraging. They call it entrepreneurship, don't they? Running your own business within the company. You and I have spoken about seller experience before. I'm stealing your thunder there, but I think that will start to become something that's important in the hiring process.

Sellers are going to want to know how much control, or how much autonomy do I have over my own day? That's really interesting. Then finally, at the end there, you're thinking about it twofold. The other bit is around passing on knowledge, and that's actually the next trend that we come to so another good segue there. That's democratization is what I'm calling it. It's a very millennial cliché I know, but we're both millennials, [chuckles] so there you go. That's the idea, that it's not just a few people who have the right to contribute. It's not purely top-down. There are those that have studied.

As a company, we've done this for 22 years or so. There's that, but there's also that tacit peer-to-peer knowledge too they should be sharing. We talked about self-enablement around the consumption, curation, calibration. Democratization is more around the creation and contribution. A lot of alliteration there. How do you encourage your people to tuck into sharing knowledge across teams and peer-to-peer? Then the second part is, how do you monitor that and ensure the quality?

Chris: Sure. There's a couple of things to consider. I think the easiest way to introduce that into an organization is actually just drop the word training from it. That formalizes it. We hate to say it, but people will automatically say, "Oh, I don't want to make training. I need to sell. I don't want to waste my time training." Repackage it. What I've been able to do over the last few years is create just systems of communications. Newsletters are very simplistic, and you always run the chance of people not reading them, but if you focus on the wisdom and the value that it provides, you can actually create a fairly valuable tool that democratizes the training.

One of the things that we would put in there is many case studies of, “Here’s how we want it.” It was always the larger deals, but it didn’t focus on who was on the deal, what was the product. It would focus on, “How did you navigate understanding a customer’s challenges?” The thing I think that gets lost in asking sellers to put together training is it may seem very formal and forward. Your trainer is going to talk to you about sales skills when the reality of a seller contributing, it’s a seller’s perspective. It’s, “Here’s what I did. Here’s how to navigate it.”

It’s not the, we talk about this in enablement. There are people that study the enablement, and then there’s the people that do the enablement. The people that study it have an opinion, but the people who do it are like, “That’s a great idea. Here’s how and why it won’t work.” I think that’s the same thing with sellers providing training. You have to construct a program or a series of communications or something informative that folks know contains things they can use and that are applicable. That typically, in my experience, it’s been having sellers talk about their experiences.

You can’t talk to a seller and say, “Tell us which training session you sat through that helped you close this deal.” It doesn’t resonate. It doesn’t make sense. “Oh, I took Negotiations 201. That’s how I did it because I took this module.” It doesn’t work like that. There’s that human component that’s, How did you interact with this other person? How did you listen to what they had to say? How did you empathize, and how did you help position where you were?” Take all the modules you want, nothing’s going to replicate that. I think there’s power in enabling your sales folks to say, “Let’s come talk about how we’re being successful.”

On the flip side of that coin is, “Talk about why you’re losing.” Yes, that will fold in this person’s skills are terrible or they’re not good at following up, but there’s also instances where you’re beat by a competitor and you need to talk about why that happened, or the customer didn’t respond right, or you didn’t do an RFP right. Failure is still an educator, arguably better than success. I think those are the ways that you take the democratization of training, and you bring it in-house, and you get people to think in ways that, “Okay, I sell for this organization, but I can also provide value elsewhere. I can also contribute to the success of my peers and here’s how.”

Greg: Yes, absolutely. It’s a cultural thing, isn’t it? Almost more than anything, that willingness to share and everything. With content, you’re leading into the next trend here, which is personalization. I think we live in an age where I log in to Netflix and what I’m going to get is different. What you’re going to get based on activity and this is to say if you go into Amazon or anything else, we’re used to things being tailored to our needs and that’s all in the name of driving adoption. For me, this is all about creating a platform where the user feels like it’s theirs, they’ve got some ownership over it.

Sales tech is notoriously poor with adoption, mostly CRM. How do you think personalization could be used to drive adoption of learning and doing platforms, your LMSs, CRM, or that kind of platform?

Chris: There’s a couple of thoughts here. One of the things that I advocate for, and we’ll pick on the CRM. I think most people CRM, imagine stepping into a cockpit of a plane, there’s all these buttons, there’s all these switches, “I just need this thing to take off, what do I do?” When we approach training on a CRM, or how do we use the CRM to drive process? We take just the bare minimum of button clicks, and literally, map that out and say, “This is the fastest route to getting from A to B, from prospect to contract, whatever those processes are.”

I am a big fan of-- I use the term paint by numbers, simple. This box is red, paint it red, this box is blue, paint it blue. Don’t deviate from what you’re doing. The training is just like that. It’s, “Here’s a screenshot, click this button, use this text field, write these things." I don't think I've ever met a salesperson who loves process. [chuckles] Who sits there, and he's like, "Oh, yes, great. Great process guys. Lots of buttons, lots of red tape. It's my favorite thing." I think you can simplify those things. What I picture in my head is a redacted screen. It's like, "Don't look at this, don't look at this. This is the only box you need to look at." and drive it that way.

Make it as painfully simple as you can and push them to-- It's a level of personalization that just happens to apply to every salesperson. In other areas of technology, you're right, I think it can be a little difficult. One of the things we're looking at now, and we're realigning our resources. I have several trainers, and I got a couple of people who support the actual sales tech stack. It used to be, "Here's what the platform does. Here's what it does." We were getting abysmal use, abysmal ROI.

It's very hard to determine an ROI of a plugin outside of your CRM, so we went back to the drawing board, and we said, "Okay, I'll take LinkedIn Sales Navigator," it's a great tool. They're the only one really in that space with those capabilities and that access to that data. A generic training wasn't cutting it, so we went and said, "Okay, how many varieties and sales roles do we have? What are the commonalities?" We distilled the 11 sales roles that we have globally down to two aspects, acquisition, or account protection, and growth. Account executive, account manager, whatever you call them, and now we are realigning. "How do I use this tool in support of my responsibilities as an account manager?" Relaunching training and saying, "Here's what you need to do. These are the buttons. These are the features. Here's how you make sure it gets into the CRM, here's how to make sure that it's recorded properly." Going that level of specifics, is there further tailoring that can be done down to the individual and how they work? Absolutely, but I think that's about as far for now as I'd like to go is "Here's how to use this tool in support of your role."

Get rid of sales because sales is more than one thing and so let's take it down a notch, let's make it specific to what that person needs. It's like, I think you have an iPhone, I have an iPhone, how you have your phone set up is, look, what's on that main screen is probably what you use most of the time, then the rest of it is, "Okay, here's the occasional apps," and you probably got all the other stuff tucked away in the back in a folder that you never necessarily need. That's how I think technology should be. It should be just what you need and as little of it as possible and as simplified as you can get it. I say this a lot, but the less technology sometimes is better.

Greg: Yes, absolutely. We talked about self-enablement, democratization, and personalization, it's a link between the three of those. In terms of the adoption, I think, by selecting things, self-enablement, and people you know contributing to them, equals personalization in some ways, right?

Chris: Right. Every salesperson is on their "Choose your own journey," type path. You need to give them a selection of tools. It's like setting yourself up in Call of Duty. What's the objective? Win. How do you go about winning? This person is going to pick this load out of items, and this person is going to pick this load out of items. If we're going to keep going with video game examples, like Counter-Strike, there's different classes of characters and roles. Sales is no different. You have different sales roles, but within those roles, you have people who like to act and execute those roles in different ways.

If you calibrate your technology, if you calibrate your processes, if you calibrate your learning and development to fit how these people operate, you're going to have successful folks, you're going to have people that are engaged, they're enabled, they want to do their jobs and they're-- From an enablement perspective, I like to remove all obstacles to success so when somebody doesn't make it, they have no one to blame but themselves. You have your tools, you have your training, you've got access to everything that you need at your fingertips, at your specified times.

Then the only thing left is, “Well, is it a skill or a will issue?” These aren’t necessarily hard things; these may be nuanced concepts or maybe newer concepts. By no means are these things hard to incorporate or work on.

Greg: Absolutely. I didn’t know you’re such a gamer, Chris. [chuckles] Learning a lot. [chuckles] In terms of content itself, the next trend I’ve got here, it’s not a new one, microlearning. It’s been around quite a while now. I like to build it into that white paper I wrote last year because I think it’s still so relevant, and we’ll continue that way. What do you see from a microlearning perspective that resonates best in terms of types of media, the when and where, how would you go beyond it just being a buzz phrase to what it actually means and the best way to use it?

Chris: I’ll go back to a point I made it earlier, and that’s, it’s got to be just the facts. I think the last two years have very quickly shown us that markets can change overnight, things can change overnight, things that weren’t popular or needed, or immediately popular needed. Your training, your micro learnings need to reflect that. If you’re talking about what’s going to be most effective, there’s cultural aspects you need to consider. If you’re a small organization, probably an email is going to work.

You don’t need to go buy a bunch of technology, just to send out an email every week saying, “Here’s the five things you need to know if you’ve got the headcount or the resources. I like two-minute or shorter videos, here’s what’s going on in your market this week, and here’s how it impacts your customers.” These are some of the questions you should be asking, or here’s some of the things you should be listening for. If whatever solutions that you sell are particularly prone to market conditions in whatever region or country you are, talk about those things and give people very small, easy-to-remember things to act on.

I think that’s where I would focus. What is the most immediate thing that you need? A, a sales skills workshop is probably not going to be broken down into 15, one-minute videos. I just don’t think stuff like that resonates. I think you need to get in a room or in a webinar and you need to discuss things you need to participate, but if you have a product and you need to talk about applications, or we sold something to a customer and they’re using it in a way that we haven’t actually ever explored. We need to inform you because this is now a use case. Break that stuff down, keep it under two minutes and talk about it. I think all of that is key, as long as you don’t also overdo it, because suddenly you can have “Well, I’ve got 45 minutes of learning to do because there’s this video, there’s this email, there’s this and this and this.” Be conscious of your audience and what time and how much time they’re spending doing other things.

Greg: Hopefully, people listening will see the connection between a lot of these because you mentioned market learning earlier and the nudge tech and billing part of that learning and the flow of work system there. I think there’s a general theme here I think running through them all which is really good to see. In terms of the technology platforms themselves, the next trend I’ve got here is sales-specific learning platform. The reason I got that one in is that I found that a lot of companies will have an LMS. Most do, especially the larger ones and they’ve got an LMS that they’ve had for many years, and it’s got all of their company-wide trainings on there, compliance training, onboarding or employee handbook type stuff.

I think sellers have more bespoke needs, more acute needs, and so I think sales enablement has siphoned off the L&D component for salespeople from the L&D department and therefore need their own platform. It can be synced up. Walk me through that, about how the role of LMS versus platform-specific to salespeople. Is that how you have structured your operations, or what can you tell me there?

Chris: I think you hit on one thing, and we have a learning and compliance portal and it’s an old platform, it’s an old piece of technology, and so there’s limits to-- You need a dedicated person to run it. It requires a deep level of knowledge of it and so that's great. That's where we leave all of our compliance training. I do think a sales learning platform is an excellent investment because you need to be able to produce, we'll use a generic term "module". You need to be able to produce a training, a module, a learning event, and you need to be able to get it out and get it absorbed and ingested by folks in a quick window. You need to be able to communicate that back and tie that back to performance.

Those platforms are great. We're looking at using one of those. We had one previously, I think we used Trailhead from Salesforce and it was great. It's nimble, it's easy to use, we're moving to a different system now. What I like about those platforms is most of them have that, show me you learn something component. Demonstrate that you watch this video, you understand the key talking points and pitch. Even if it's just a pitch to a plain screen, I think that's valid. You always say this, is that sales are the only sport in which we play, we don't practice. A lot of people echo that as well. I think these platforms give you the ability to go learn something and then actually fumble through it before you have to talk to a customer.

I'm on the receiving end of sales pitches all the time. I'm sure my LinkedIn profile has got a target on it or something, but you get people who you clearly know do not practice. Maybe they don't proofread their emails, or they don't understand what they're saying, or they don't understand the value and they just pitch and is pitch, pitch, pitch. You bring in a learning platform, you structure some learning, you structure some demonstrations and some practice. Very quickly a regurgitation of facts turns into a well-articulated argument. I think there's a need for that. How many good sales pitches do you hear in a week? I'm sure you're pitched to constantly, or at least you see your folks, not a lot of them.

There's a lot of mistakes to be made in selling, so I think these platforms can help get rid of the marbles in your mouth, if you will, to use a crude example. Help you fumble through these things. It's no different than when you hire a new salesperson, and you intentionally give them terrible leads to call. It's not so they can close that business, it's so that they can get used to the talk track. I think a sales learning platform drastically reduces that, it gives you a safe place to educate, learn, and train, and practice, and get real-time coaching and feedback.

Greg: I think when we first met, we talked about how people have practice field. Athletes have practice fields, musicians have the studio, all this stuff, but the seller doesn't have it. The ratio of practice to doing is completely the opposite of other disciplines.

Chris: Right. You just wouldn't put somebody in a formula one car and say, "Good luck in Monaco." It doesn't work like that, but we'll take people, we'll give them two weeks onboarding, hand them a laptop and say, "I need you to go sell something to the largest X, Y, Z company in X, Y, Z industry." It blows my mind and we've obviously discussed this ad nauseam, but every time we talk about it, I think back, I don't understand how people will put ineffective, inefficient, uneducated folks against C-level decision-makers.

Doesn't that seem like a terrible investment? Doesn't that seem like a gamble? Forrester put out a report on SDRs, why they're ineffective and it's because it's your least educated, most not immature, but newest to selling associate going after the person who is so deeply educated on their challenges, where's the connection there? What conversation are they going to have? Unless you have somebody, who can talk and identify and practice and have some way to navigate a conversation with somebody like that, I think you're setting them all up for failure. A learning platform for sales is arguably a necessary investment these days.

Greg: With technology comes data, which is the next trend here. I call it big data, short story. The idea is that I think we're coming from a world of where get it. There's lots of data and it's spreadsheets and dashboard and all this. I think people now want the, so what. We're inundated with data, but something then needs to happen. I've been reading on this and found this phrase, decision intelligence, which I quite like. It actually goes right back to the point you made at the start of this, in the learning and in the flow of work segment about your deal based on historic data is heading south. You need to do these things. I'll be interested to see where that goes.

It's the area for me personally, whether it's the biggest question mark. I've talked to mutual friends of you and I. People go to the same conferences that you and I do; about AI and the role it will play machine learning. In some ways it's anyone's guess, I don't personally think salespeople can be replaced by robots anytime soon, but I'd be interested to see what your take is on the role of data and decision intelligence in selling moving forward.

Chris: If you want to talk about what I think the biggest game-changer will be for sales organizations, it's the utilization of data to drive the activity. Your CRM and this is agnostic of the CRM. Some are better than others, but your CRM is arguably limitless in terms of what you can collect. It's the question of how do you collect it and what do you do with it in terms of data? We can do an entire podcast on just what I think we need to look at from a data perspective and maybe how you get there. I have a team of folks who are just redefining a data strategy for us.

When I took the position that I have now, I had them not only look at CRM, but compare every tool that we have, let's understand what data comes out of them, and then let's mash them together, mash all the data together to see what it tells us. The best thing that we could come up with between a CRM and we have conversational intelligence with people who have better sales calls, typically outperform their peers in terms of pipelines. No doubt. If you're better on the phone, you're probably going to sell more. It's nice that we can get there, but it's a very rude awakening of, "You know what you really don't know what's going on out there."

In your sales organizations, there's going to be an abundance of data generated. How you collect that data is one thing that you need to figure out. Conversational intelligence tools are great, call transcription is awesome. Have something that spits out raw data that you can then either put into another third-party platform like Adomo, or you've got data scientists who can mine it and look for things.

Every tool that you use is going to provide you with some level of data or insights and you should understand what that is. You should also go back to that vendor and say, "Can I get this in a raw format for our own analysis?" Then what we're doing is, we catalog everything that we have, all of our systems here's all of the reports, the data, this is what it tells us.

We compiled a list of things that we want to know. "Does call time impact opportunities success, are shorter calls tied to better deals, or longer calls tied to better deals?" The flow of the conversation compared to closing ratios. It is a rabbit hole where you can look. Where I would suggest people look is we're good at pipelines, everybody's good at looking at a pipeline and it asking, "Where's this? What is it going to take?" I would say go a level deeper and understand what are the activities that are contributing to pipeline success or failure? What are the behaviors that folks are doing? How are sales interactions affecting pipeline progress? What buyers are involved? What are their concerns? What business challenges do you have? It's a little bit deeper than this buyer, this industry, and this product.

You need to go farther than that to say, "It's this industry. Here's the top three things the customer needs our platform for. Here's all the title in a buying committee. Here's the critical business issues that we're solving, this is why they're buying it," and then you need to look at holistically go back and look at all of your deals and say, "Okay, here is the solution, customer problem mix."

Customers who have this problem are probably going to need to use the solution for these sets of things and here's typically who you need to go talk to." Scrape that against your database and see everybody you didn't do that with and then there's a whole list of people you can call. On the inverse of that is, you can see how much activity it takes to close a deal.

How many touches it takes to move a deal along? How many individual conversations does it take to move a deal along? Do you need to meet them in person? Does that move the needle? It's an endless amount of questions and there's also an endless amount of data that you could technically collect but you have to find that balance between the salesperson who is going to enter as much as they're going to enter into the CRM. Too much and you're going to drive people away, they're going to complain too little, and you won't be able to tell what's going on.

That's where you need to consider, maybe we need AI to auto-populate things, or maybe we need an interface change to speed up things. Maybe we need a copy-paste button, whatever it manifests itself as, and then however you augment your data strategy, and how the capture of that manifests in insights because all the data in the world if you can't derive an insight from it, it's largely useless.

You then need to use that to inform how your folks are doing it or using that information. Like some of the sales engagement platforms will tell you there's a point of diminishing returns after the 13th outreach attempt, I think. It's what the research I saw last week was. That means that for all of your SDRs, for all of your outbound folks, there need to be 13 attempts to contact the person unless they get to no.

It needs to now become policy or rule. If you get rid of a lead, and it's like, "Oh yes, the guy didn't answer my emails and he didn't pick up the phone." Well, where are all the voicemails that we told you to send, where are all of the emails?" The data suggests that at the 14th attempt is where you should quit. "You quit at the fifth. What are you doing?" It needs to feed back into it.

You need to actually incorporate it and make changes. It's a really hard cycle to start, and it's a hard cycle to get into but even if you just start with small things like the average number of interactions with a customer or capturing customer solutions, critical business issues mixes, that data can easily change. It can easily drive revenue, it could easily change output and then you get all of the precipitating effects like if your sellers recognize that you have done something that makes their job easier or better, they're even more engaged to contribute to how that can further their careers.

Greg: Yes, really interesting stuff. I think the data bit is fascinating. When I was a sales guy, in the past life. The company I was working at did such a good job of collecting all that data. You could look at your deals, and I think I worked out that I was something like 40% more likely to close a deal if I had identified it in the first place, versus it being an inbound lead, for example.

Which I found really interesting. More so attached to it or something but no, to your point, it takes a lot of effort to set that up. That particular company had built into their DNA that they use Salesforce, they log every call, every email, everything in there, because, without that, there's just nothing to look at. It was a heck of an undertaking. That was actually the seventh in our list of seven there but were there any that you wanted to close with here? A 7.1 or even an 8?

Chris: A technology prediction. I think what I said it earlier, I think less is more. Years ago, one of my tech predictions was massive platform consolidation and that didn't explode as much as I thought it would be, but you still see it. I think what you're going to see over the next few years is larger platforms will present a series of offerings and show you how Bigtincan calls it ideal seller profile.

"This is what an AM is supposed to do." I think they're going to package these tools up to say, "This is the tech stack for the AM, and here's why." I don't like multiple interfaces, I don't like a crowded screen, on a CRM, I don't think everything needs to be an object that's viewable on every screen. I think things have their place and some of these larger providers, I think, recognize that and they'll have platforms that says, "Okay if you're going to do prospecting, you click a button and now you're in the prospecting screen," and you're just going to do prospecting stuff.

You need to manage your opportunities, you click on a button, now you're just an opportunity mode and it's all you're going to do. I think there's going to be a lot of streamlining and then I think there'll be, I don't want to say more moves to mobile, but interactions should and can be simplified.

If you have to take a sales call while you're getting groceries or something like that, there's ways to still be productive and not sit at a desk or be stuck in a chair from 9:00 to 5:00. I don't think that was ever a direct indication of success, but it used to be necessary to have everybody in one room to make sure that they're working. I think the future is going to be giving people the right technology so they can achieve the level of work that they need on their own schedule.

Greg: Absolutely. I couldn't agree with that more and also with the former point about consolidation. I think will absolutely see that point solutions being kind of swallowed up by larger platforms. I just hope the service stays up par. I think a lot of VC backed service can fall by the wayside in the interest of growth and I hope that isn't the case. I hope it doesn't get sacrificed, but we'll see and perhaps that's another podcast, but anyway, we're coming up on time here, but it's been really fantastic. Thank you so much for joining here and I hope our listeners got some value out today. I know I did. We'll hopefully do it again, Chris.

Chris: Sounds good, Greg. Thanks for having me.