Innovation Insight: Invest in AI-Led Sales Research to Unlock Buyer Insights

9 October 2024 - ID G00817936 - 11 min read

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Initiatives: Customer Acquisition and Retention; Sales and Revenue Technology

> AI tools are transforming buyer research for sellers, saving time and boosting productivity. With automation capabilities, AI is set to dominate seller research workflows. Investing in AI-led sales research is now essential for CSOs, as it provides instant access to valuable buyer insights.

Overview

Key Findings

- Sellers need comprehensive insights to effectively engage target buyers, but gathering buyer intelligence is labor-intensive and slows sellers down. Additionally, sellers often struggle to personalize their messaging and end up resorting to generic content that offers little value and fails to engage buyers.

- Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool for automating the synthesizing of data across a vast array of sources. This enables AI to generate concise summaries that Gartner calls "atomic insights." However, atomic insights are half the battle — AI is also converting atomic insights into sales value messaging using a process called "narrative automation" to provide sellers with ready-to-use outputs.

Recommendations

- Increase seller effectiveness by utilizing AI-led sales research to provide sellers with highly relevant atomic insights on demand.

- Enhance the actionability of atomic insights by leveraging AI to deliver narrative automation to sellers, instantly increasing the quality of messaging and other client-facing outputs.

Strategic Planning Assumption

By 2027, 95% of seller research workflows will begin with AI (whether they choose to or not), up from less than 20% in 2024.

Introduction

B2B buyers expect sellers to bring fresh insights and compelling stories, but sellers struggle to consistently develop relevant, buyer-specific perspectives. Chief sales officers (CSOs) prioritize data investments for sellers but neglect to help them connect insights to compelling narratives.

Gartner's research shows that sellers who spend more time gathering buyer intelligence increase account growth by 5%. [1] Sellers need to understand market trends, business priorities and how to position their solution for each buyer's needs. However, sellers lack efficient research tools.

AI solutions shift the focus from manual research to surfacing insights on behalf of sellers. Sellers with high AI partnership competency are 3.7 times more likely to meet quota. [2] CSOs must leverage AI-led sales research to enable sellers in applying AI-generated insights for better buyer engagement, pipeline and sales outcomes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: From Seller-Led to AI-Led Sales Research

From Seller-Led to AI-Led Sales Research

Source: Gartner
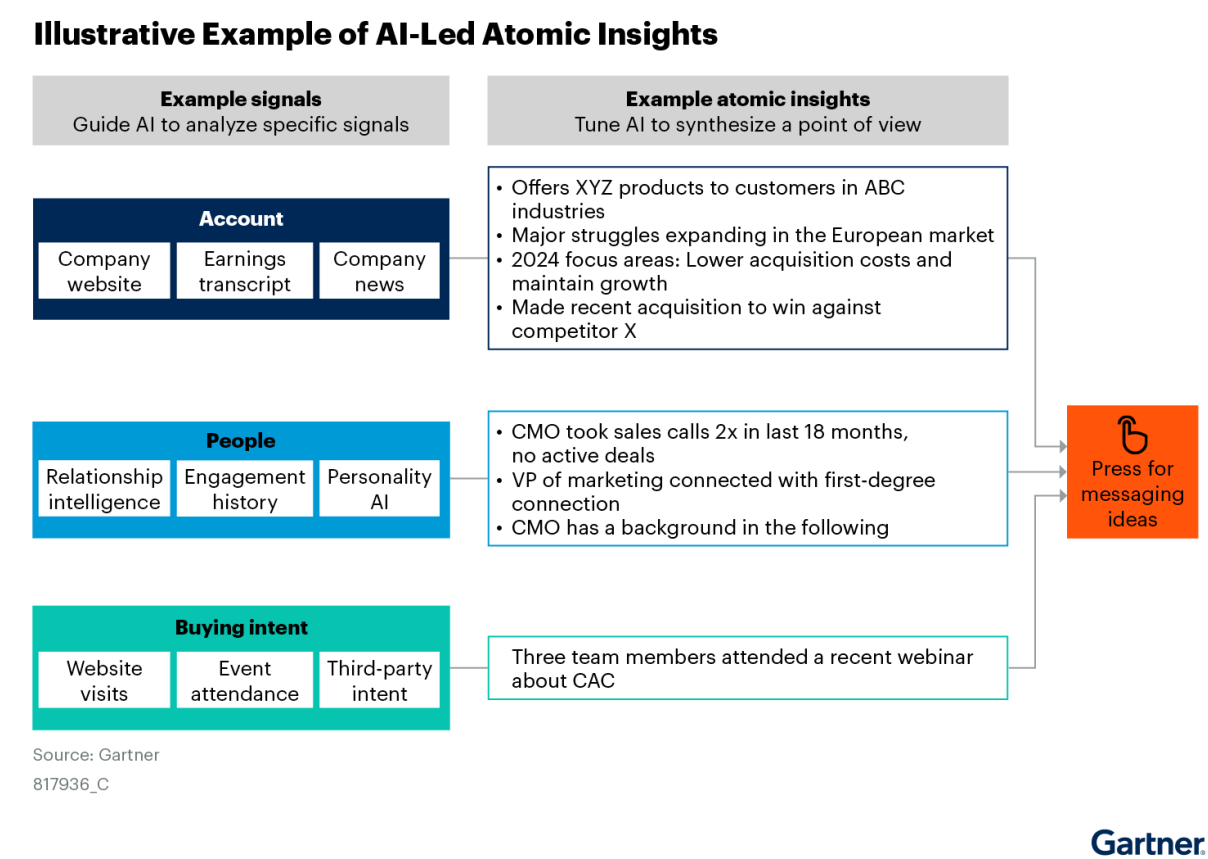817936_C
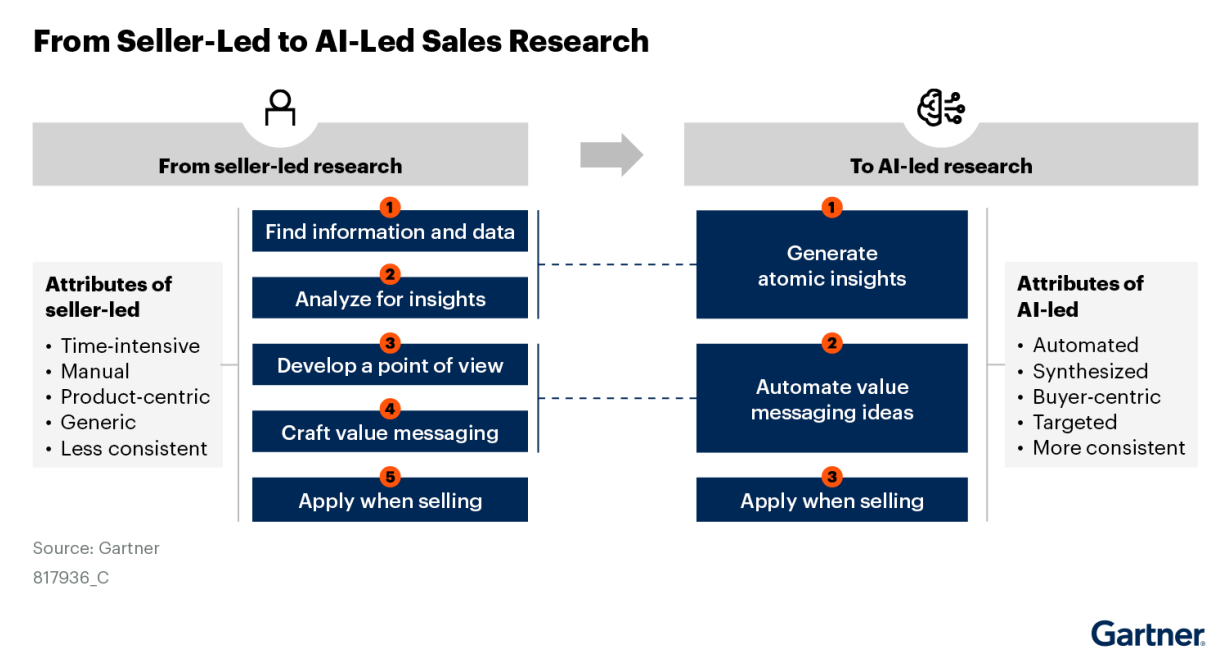
Description

> **AI-Led Sales Research**
>
> AI-led sales research uses generative AI (GenAI), such as large language models (LLMs), to analyze diverse data and information about accounts, people and buying intent into atomic insights. Then it automates the work of actioning those insights to craft value narratives that sellers can use to engage their prospects and customers.

Atomic Insights Provide Sellers With a Compelling Point of View

Great research results in a point of view about a prospect or customer in the context of the supplier product, expressed as atomic insights. By investing in atomic insights, CSOs enable sellers to focus more on delivering customer value rather than spending excessive time on manual research.

Atomic insights are synthesized and easy-to-consume perspectives that AI extracts from analyzing different sources of information and data points (see Figure 2). Sales organizations configure what data or information to analyze and how AI should analyze it from the perspective of a seller representing a specific product or company.

Figure 2: Illustrative Example of Atomic Insights

Illustrative Example of AI-Led Atomic Insights

Example signals Guide AI to analyze specific signals	Example atomic insights Tune AI to synthesize a point of view

Account
Company website | Earnings transcript | Company news

- Offers XYZ products to customers in ABC industries
- Major struggles expanding in the European market
- 2024 focus areas: Lower acquisition costs and maintain growth
- Made recent acquisition to win against competitor X

People
Relationship intelligence | Engagement history | Personality AI

- CMO took sales calls 2x in last 18 months, no active deals
- VP of marketing connected with first-degree connection
- CMO has a background in the following

Buying intent
Website visits | Event attendance | Third-party intent

Three team members attended a recent webinar about CAC

Press for messaging ideas

Source: Gartner
817936_C

Gartner.

CSOs should recognize the huge enablement potential for their teams to use AI in capturing atomic insights from unstructured data signals. These signals can include sources such as earnings transcripts from public companies, a company's website or board minutes from local governments, which now act as sources of intelligence.

Narrative Automation Turns Insights Into Value Messaging

Turning research into contextualized messages is where high-performing sellers excel. Sellers achieve results when contextualizing their point of view into value messaging that resonates with buyers' needs and expectations; when AI does this on behalf of the seller, it is called narrative automation.

Figure 3 illustrates the process of AI converting atomic insights into hypertargeted value messaging ideas. To generate ideas, sellers will ground AI applications in company product, persona and competitive differentiation messaging. Grounding enables AI to contextualize value messaging with atomic insights.

Figure 3: Illustrative Example of Value Narrative Automation

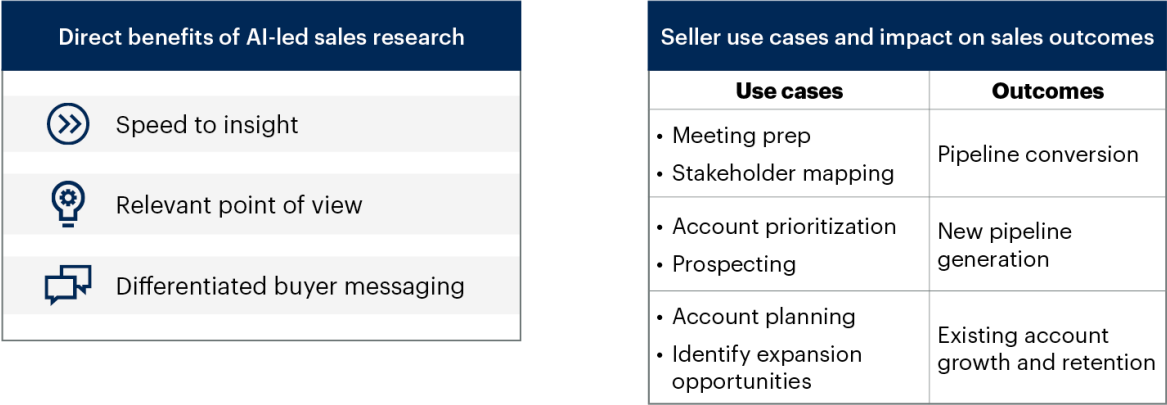**Illustrative Example of Value Narrative Automation**
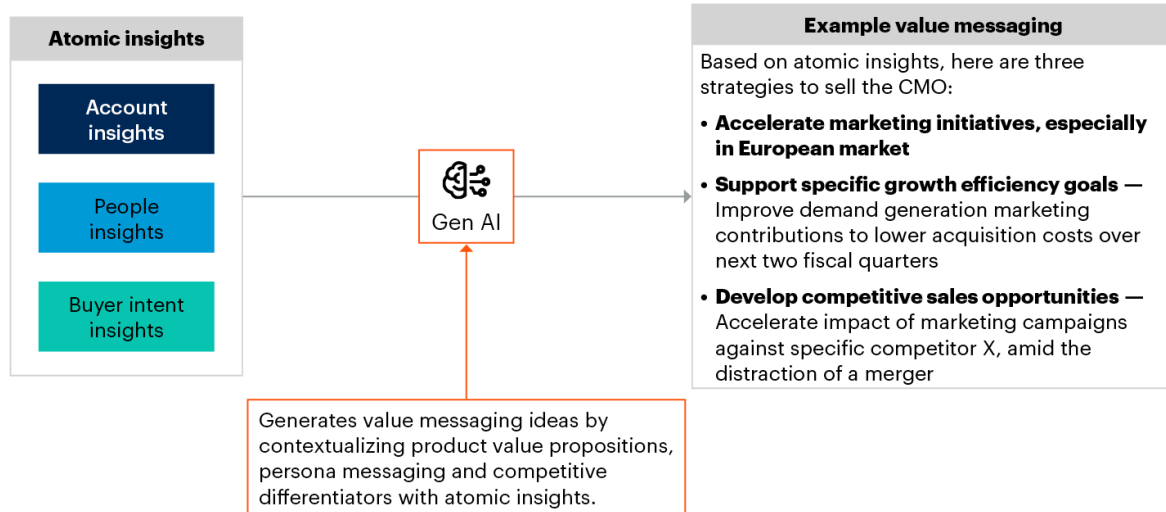
Source: Gartner
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Benefits and Uses

AI-led sales research presents an opportunity to scale the tradecraft of effective research, especially for core performers.

CSOs looking to leverage AI-led sales research should initially focus on productivity gains (see Figure 4) rather than direct revenue growth. AI-led sales research can only go as far as producing messaging ideas; therefore, its direct benefits presented in Figure 4 are limited to time saving and quality messaging. Given buyer volatility, deriving impact on sales outcomes requires sellers to activate the message and use it in their customer interactions.

Figure 4: AI-Led Sales Research Frees Up Time to Focus on Selling

AI-Led Sales Research Benefits and Impact

Direct benefits of AI-led sales research
⏩ Speed to insight
💡 Relevant point of view
💬 Differentiated buyer messaging

Seller use cases and impact on sales outcomes	
Use cases	**Outcomes**
• Meeting prep • Stakeholder mapping	Pipeline conversion
• Account prioritization • Prospecting	New pipeline generation
• Account planning • Identify expansion opportunities	Existing account growth and retention

Source: Gartner
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Gartner

The three direct benefits of AI-led sales research are:

- **Speed to Insight:** Top performers may only find speed as the primary benefit, since they've been effective at building meaningful buyer insights. Core performers, however, may find the insights available in this model game-changing, since they hadn't been able to effectively incorporate insights with their messaging to buyers.

- **Develop Hyper-Relevant Buyer Point of View:** AI-led sales research enables a small team of sales operations folks to scale best practice research behaviors. Specifically, this includes analyzing research findings, adopting the perspective of buyers, applying market knowledge and arriving at a point of view or hypothesis that engages buyers in meaningful conversations.

- **Differentiated Buyer Messaging:** Building competitive insights can be challenging, as the buying landscape is constantly changing, making it difficult for sellers to always stay up-to-date with the most relevant insights that capture the nuance for buyers. AI-led sales research can validate that sellers are building differentiated messaging that aligns with buyers' needs and expectations.

CSOs need to have a higher tolerance for these indirect benefits over immediate ROI at the start. These productivity improvements can serve as leading indicators of ROI, such as net new pipeline, pipeline conversion and account retention. Just investing in AI-led sales research is not going to directly lead to these outcomes.

CSO investments in narrative automation enable all sellers in the organization to benefit from the process of top performers and frees them up to spend more time getting the attention of a buyer, overcoming an objection and articulating compelling differentiation.

AI-Led Sales Research Use Cases

Table 1 outlines some of the benefits of AI-led sales research across six critical use cases. Each example demonstrates how AI can elevate these use cases, providing actionable insights and enhancing the overall effectiveness of your sales process and strategy.

Table 1: Analysis of AI-Led Sales Research Use Cases

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

Use case	Analysis
Account prioritization	Analyze earnings call transcripts to identify companies that have recently announced strategic initiatives or budget increases, flagging them as high-potential accounts for targeted outreach.
Account planning	Use recent press releases, earnings calls and industry reports to quickly identify a top account's strategic initiatives, such as a digital transformation project, allowing sales to demonstrate a deep understanding of the account's unique situation.
Identify expansion opportunities	Identify growth opportunities by analyzing existing customer data and usage patterns. AI can reveal insights like what a current customer using one product line is likely to benefit from another complementary product, enabling the sales team to craft messaging that highlights the synergy and added value of the additional product.
Stakeholder mapping	Identify and map out multiple stakeholders within the buying group quickly by analyzing social media profiles, company hierarchies and professional networks.
Prospecting	Enhance prospecting efforts by having AI analyze a prospect's recent behavioral activities, such as articles they've read, events they've attended or sites they have visited in their digital research, and aggregate it to enable the sales team to craft highly personalized and relevant outreach messages.
Meeting prep	Generate more comprehensive briefings on a customer. External insights come from recent news, financial performance and competitive landscape. Internal sources come from CRM, or other systems, allowing the sales team to prepare messaging that highlights their unique advantages as it relates to the customer's current situation.

Source: Gartner

Risks

Table 2 outlines some of the risks to the success of AI-led sales research and offers some recommended actions to mitigate these risks.

Table 2: Risks and Recommended Actions

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

Risks to success	Risk description	Recommended actions
Insufficient seller trust and adoption	AI may miss the nuanced understanding of data points, or worse, hallucinate, unless the prompt engineering properly trains the LLM how to evaluate or look at a data point. If the product is not adequately trained to analyze data sources, or if sellers have to invest excessive effort to understand the product, the resulting poor quality of atomic insights can undermine the entire investment. This lack of trust in the AI's ability to provide specific and analytical insights leads to generic value narratives that offer little value.	Couple AI-led sales research rollout with AI literacy education. Treat AI literacy as an important corporate certification, similar to phishing awareness and sexual harassment training.
Lack of AI governance leads to eroded buyer trust	Improper or unskilled use of AI-led sales research can lead to undesirable (trust) consequences, such as spamming buyers with a high volume of inaccurate, AI-generated messages.	Supervise and iterate on prompt engineering in order to prevent AI hallucinations.
Compliance and regulatory challenges	Sellers may accidentally use copyrighted data to generate insights. Early experiences with generative AI prove that the technology can produce off-brand and inappropriate content. Frontline sellers are the last line of defense protecting the organization from a compliance violation, and they cannot prevent every infraction.	Exercise AI compliance caution if operating in highly regulated industries. Prioritize vendors capable of supporting complex approval workflows.
Expectation for immediate ROI	CSOs that expect immediate direct ROI (e.g., increase in revenue performance) instead of productivity gains from time savings and increased messaging quality.	Focus on productivity gains (see Figure 4) rather than direct revenue growth.

Source: Gartner

Adoption Rate

According to the 2024 Gartner Seller Skills Survey, [2] sellers are already leveraging generative AI (GenAI) solutions for market and buyer research, including the following GenAI use cases:

- Gathering competitive market data/information (55% of respondents)

- Summarizing sales reports for internal stakeholders (48% of respondents)

- Gathering buyer intelligence (44% of respondents)

Recommendations

Increase seller effectiveness by utilizing AI-led sales research to provide sellers with highly relevant atomic insights on demand.

- **Establish AI use cases.**

  - Task sales enablement to facilitate a workshop to discover how your top performing sellers conduct research, and use that knowledge to prioritize use cases.

- **Build a team and evaluate application options.**

  - Identify sales operations and enablement talent to lead the effort.

  - Task the team to examine the AI-led sales research capabilities of your existing sales tech providers.

  - Explore go-to-market (GTM) data applications (see Market Guide for GTM Data Applications) or LLM platform models (see Innovation Guide for Generative AI in Sales) for additional options.

- **Pilot and refine for wider rollout.**

  - Secure enablement resources to invest in AI literacy to help sellers learn the technology (see Adopt a GenAI Literacy Framework to Unlock Sales' Potential).

  - Provide sellers with applications that they can use to generate atomic insights and value narratives on their own.

Enhance the actionability of atomic insights by leveraging AI to deliver narrative automation to sellers, instantly increasing the quality of messaging and other client-facing outputs.

- **Assemble a generative value messaging team.**

  - Evaluate which resources have the required skills or will need to design data enrichment workflows and prompt engineering that yield atomic insights.

  - The team should be composed of messaging strategists, revenue operations and high-performing frontline sellers.

- **Automate value narratives on behalf of sellers.**

  - Task generative value messaging team to develop value narrative automation workflows on behalf of sellers (see Innovation Insight for Generative Value Messaging).

- **Supervise the management of GenAI technologies and develop the necessary skills to extract value.**

  - Gain the support and assistance of revenue technology (RevTech) stack management, frontline sellers, first- and second-line sales managers, and content creators in sales enablement and marketing.

  - Supervise controlled experiments within existing value-based messaging workflows.

  - Combine the use of generative AI with other programs, such as value management or interactive demonstrations, to improve B2B buyer decision guidance.

  - Use agile methods to prioritize experiments and document findings; share findings often.

Representative Providers

- Anthropic Claude

- Clay

- Copy.ai

- Databook

- LinkedIn Sales Navigator

- OpenAI ChatGPT

- Perplexity

- Poggio

- Rule 5

- Salesmotion.io

- ZoomInfo

Evidence

[1] **Gartner Seller Time Spend Assessment**: This assessment is deployed directly to the sales force to evaluate how and where sellers are spending time across the sales process. The assessment uses a comprehensive list of 56 selling and nonselling activities to produce a holistic analysis of how sellers manage their time on a weekly basis. Additionally, the assessment includes open-response questions to capture seller sentiment (the reasons why they spend their time on activities) and seller perceptions of how your organization's technologies, support tools and processes impact their productivity. The survey is conducted on an ongoing basis (originally started from 14 July 2022 to present) with a benchmark that is refreshed annually. Respondents are required to be quota-carrying sellers from B2B sales organizations.

[2] **2024 Gartner Seller Skills Survey:** This survey was conducted to understand what seller skills are needed to excel in a changing B2B sales world, where buyers prefer digital; data and technology usage are expected; and the relationship with technology becomes more that of being teammates. The survey was held from January through March 2024. The online sample included 1,026 B2B sellers across North America (n = 696), Western Europe (n = 182) and Asia/Pacific (n = 148). Industry segments included banking and financial services, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, business services, and telecommunications. Qualifying respondents had at least one year in the role at an organization with at least 50 sellers and enterprisewide annual revenue in 2023 of at least $25 million or equivalent. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

Innovation Insight: Generative Value Messaging Empowers B2B Sales With Words That Win

Innovation Guide for Generative AI in Sales

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