

eBook:  
**B2B Marketing  
and Sales Guide to  
Outcome-Focused  
Conversations**

*Value selling in a highly  
competitive tech market*



# Best Practices for Creating a Customer Value Story.



Focusing on business outcomes sounds straightforward, but it doesn't just happen naturally. Successful customer conversations hinge on identifying their pain points and proving how your solution can help them overcome their concerns. But the challenges for successfully marketing, and selling, your value proposition are led by the need for more value content, as well as the tools to deliver the story. Here are five best practices to help the process along.

## Best Practice #1: Focus on Business Outcomes

For business buyers, the key message they want to hear is about outcomes. They really don't care about what IT does. What they want to know is how IT can help their business. Buyers are seeking to understand the value of the vendor's solution to their company.

### What does this mean for Marketing?

Start the value conversation at the beginning of your customer journey, on your website. Buyers seek custom solutions that address their specific needs, a tendency that is directly attributable to internet purchasing. In effect, as consumers, we want what we want, when we want it. We know that we can find everything we need to know online. It is in this environment where marketing takes on heightened importance. Buyers eliminate nearly half of the potential vendors based on vendor marketing content alone, so it's critical to reach buyers online with compelling marketing messages. Considering digital transformation's promise to positively impact business outcomes, such as revenue growth, agility, innovation, and customer experience, IT buying has become more strategic. This makes the initial buying decisions larger and more significant. In light of this, buyers are increasingly wary of making mistakes—they are becoming more risk-adverse.

### What does this mean for Sales?

Most sales professionals find having value outcome-oriented conversations difficult. Often without such conversations, buyers cannot reach a decision. The sales pipeline then gets stalled, negotiations begin, and deal sizes decline—sure signs that sales professionals need the right content, and the ability to access buyers to have value conversations. In effect, there's a gap between buyer expectations for more value-focused conversations and proposals, and sales reps who still deliver traditional product-centric messaging.

# 70%

Leading organizations state they need more quantified content showing how customers have realized positive business outcomes with their solution.

## Best Practice #2: Quantify the Value

As businesses articulate their desired business outcomes, it is increasingly important that there is a dollar figure associated with those outcomes. If not, why would an organization invest in certain products or services? It's your job to quantify that value. But many companies are challenged by the inability to tie the value of their products and services, to improving the business outcomes of their customers.

Companies must pursue all the different kinds of initiatives that create new revenue sources and new business models. The new models enabled by digital transformation can deliver better business outcomes which, in turn, drive business performance—results that can be demonstrated when they are quantified. This is how your company proves its value.



**Digital transformation today has three touchstones:**

1. **Increasing agility**
2. **Customer experience**
3. **Innovation**

## Increasing Agility

Doing things faster than your competition should lead to increased revenue. Automation, which is one of the elements of increasing agility, may also lower operating costs as well.

## Customer Experience

And by customer, we mean anyone using an application to do work, to make buying decisions, to purchase, or to get information. Essentially, the application becomes the driver of business transformation, in that it generates new business and creates differentiating customer experiences. When it comes to customer experiences, we all must be consumer-focused. Think about customers like ourselves – we want products and services designed specifically for us and we want to enjoy purchasing and using them.

## Innovation


CEOs always talk about innovation—they praise the idea of doing new things, or doing familiar things better. Pursuing innovation requires using digital transformation to create new business models. These new models should enable organizations to move up and down the supply chain, offer different products, transition from a product sell to an as-a-services sell.

### Best Practice #3: Elevate the Customer Experience

A critical aspect of transforming business outcomes begins with elevating the customer experience. A traditional product-feature sales pitch involved talking at the buyer. In a business value mindset, the focus shifts to engage the customer in an interactive conversation. There's a lot of information available today, and customers have ample opportunity to educate themselves. An interactive conversation is different, in that it requires creating a compelling story that focuses on solving the buyer's problem.

When the buyer is the protagonist of your story, there is a higher probability the buyer will adopt your product or service. Interactive content inherently allows for a two-way conversation in which you both provide valuable information; you convey information to buyers and collect information from buyers. This mutual approach serves to inform better, targeted, and ongoing conversations.

Interactive content allows you to introduce third-party validation and customer testimonials to strengthen your story. It allows you to put a comprehensive story together, linking research to your products and services. This approach shows the decision maker that you can help them increase ROI, reduce costs, and improve business outcomes.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, is shown in profile from the waist up. She is holding a silver tablet computer with both hands and looking down at the screen. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Studies show that deep personalization can drive a 17% increase in revenue





When you begin any conversation with the customer, identify whom you're speaking to and their persona. Outline the relevant business goals and challenges that stand in the way of achieving those goals. It's these challenges you'll want to help the buyer resolve.

These conversations identify customer needs by crystallizing where they stand with their peers, and what they need to do, to compete effectively and accomplish their business goals. Here's when you describe what your solution does and how it's relevant to your customer's challenges. Since it's important to quantify the business value of your products and services wherever possible, helping customers answer these questions provides a foundation for determining value.

Take the time to assess the value from moving from a lower maturity level to a higher maturity level. How about the value of helping customers overcome the gap between where they are today and where their peers are? These benchmarks can, and should, be quantified in dollar terms to help customers clearly understand the ROI they can expect from your products and services.

Learn about their issues and problems firsthand, and then link how your products and services can resolve those issues.

## Best Practice #4: Automate the Sales Process

Interactive tools can help to automate the sales process, guide the sales conversation, and bring to light only that information which is most relevant to a particular stakeholder.

In the last year, we have talked to over 100 salespeople, and we have learned three things.

1. All assets must be designed for sales enablement. When we've talked to sales reps, they use whatever they can get their hands on, that's going to help them close business. Typically, these assets run the gamut from case studies to business value white papers. All such assets should be designed with sales enablement in mind.
2. Salespeople know they need to change the level of their conversation and they're eager for something to help them do this.
3. Salespeople have a fairly low opinion of many of the tools made available to them because traditional sales tools are Excel-based, complex, and they often create more questions rather than provide answers.



**73%**  
***of Leaders are  
using a value  
platform***

An interactive tool gives salespeople the ability to customize the assessment based on these roles, but it doesn't stop there. You can customize an assessment based on business priorities and vertical market. Sales tools should also consider the persona of your sales team. Which of your sales teams are going to use these tools? Will it be a sales specialist? A technical specialist? Or will it be a generalist? One group of salespeople may only engage in 30-minute conversations. Another group of salespeople may regularly sit down in full day intensive workshops. Any tool should be designed to handle these different personas.

Another important element is the use of calculators throughout the assessment. By having calculators throughout the assessment, the tool facilitates interactive, engaging conversations validated by numbers that are understandable and relevant. These tools are designed to help salespeople ask a few questions, provide the results, and introduce some research that reinforces the results.

*Would you like to have a look at IDC's Business Value Interactive Sales Tool?*  
*[Contact us today.](#)*



For the customer, these tools are important in that they allow modification of variables to fit a specific case. Customers can see the benefits and cost savings in real time as they go through the assessment. At the end, both the customer and the salesperson are comfortable in knowing where all the numbers came from.

Reports generated from sales tools are usually designed to be a business case, and thus they offer a lot of information. While the reports can be anywhere from 20 to 40 pages long, salespeople can also customize views, quickly producing an easy-to-read summary of the value that they deliver. In effect, automation can help sales certainly be more efficient – which in turn will help them close business.



## Best Practice #5: Integrate Business Value Tools into Sales

You have focused on business outcomes. You have quantified your value. You have elevated the customer experience. And finally, you've automated the sales process.

Now it's time to integrate all these activities into your sales program.

The end goal of this integration is straightforward. You want to take third-party customer research and repurpose it for use in multiple assets along the buyer's journey. In practical terms, this means utilizing research for all types of lead campaigns, whether in social media or content marketing campaigns. It means supporting campaigns with lead-gen tools.

Inside sales can get involved with very actionable follow-up, based on lead-gen tools and activities—an interactive process that can glean more valuable information to the sales team. In turn, the sales team can use this information for very targeted conversations that further nurture the leads.



The sales tools that help bring automation to the conversation can be utilized to support workshops and events. Should you have a strong partner channel, interactive tools can enable your partners to have engaging two-way conversations with their partners as well.

As for quantifying the value, develop your unique compelling value story. While every tech company has a case to make in support of digital transformation, you want to create a campaign that demonstrates how your company and solutions are different from your competitor's, when it comes to helping your customers achieve their business goals. This is your compelling value story.

Elevating the customer experience involves developing assets that reach all buyer personas, IT, line of business, and procurement. Engage your customers in a way that makes them feel like they're having a conversation that's going to help their company. In this vein, you will be seen as a trusted advisor, not as someone making a sales pitch.

During this conversation, your customer should recognize that whatever problems they have today, your company has the products and solutions to help overcome them. This discovery takes place in an automated way, which helps sales think of itself as a problem solver as well as demystifies the process for the customer. And then finally, integrate everything together by developing end-to-end digital programs to exploit assets.

It is often helpful to engage in a bit of “reverse engineering:” Begin by asking your customers about the target market, the specifics about whom they are trying to reach and what exactly they are trying to convince the target audience to do. Then work backwards from that—a process which will inform all the research and assets you’ll present to your customers. As you change the selling process, you will also change the way customers think about you. And ultimately, this will drive new customers, more agility, better innovation and more revenue.



**A successful Value Management Platform must be based on credible 3rd party data and scale to meet the needs of your sales teams and customers.**

IDC has exclusive tools to help teams establish and connect the value of their solutions to their customer's desired business outcomes.

## Lead Generation Tool

This self-service experience is a custom, web-based tool that engages your prospects in a quick assessment and is based on IDC research that ties in your solution's benefits through an interactive experience. This tool effectively captures leads, enables sales to have a targeted conversation with prospects and provides the user an immediate view into benefits and savings.



## Business Value Snapshot

IDC's web-based and self-service business value calculator provides your buyers with a business value assessment for investing with your solution, based on IDC business value research. The user experience concludes with a personalized Business Value Snapshot report and results in an interactive asset that generates real time leads.



In effect, all of these shifts in thinking come down to changing your conversation. Use data to create compelling content – quantify ROI, business outcomes and business performance. The goal in doing so is to elevate your customers' perception of you and ultimately position yourself as a strategic partner. These are key elements that you want to think about from the beginning – focus on how you can talk to your customer in a different way, and how to translate the tech performance of your products and services into how they impact your customer's business outcomes.

If you haven't thought about how your products and services can drive results for the business, now is the time to do so. Find a link between what your products do and the outcomes your customers are looking for—this is critical to drive your own business going forward.



IDC's Business Value practice uses our custom research to provide you with the marketing assets and interactive tools to help you prove your compelling customer value story.

[Learn more](#) about IDC's value selling lead generation tools:

<https://www.idc.com/custom-solutions/business-value>

