



FROM SALES MANAGER TO BUSINESS MANAGER

The study, conducted by the Commercial Excellence Lab at SDA Bocconi School of Management in collaboration with ManagerItalia, examined the perceptions of a sample of 504 managers regarding the role of commercial functions in the recent past, present, and near future. The aim was to identify the main evolutionary dynamics characterizing these critical organizational units.



The Commercial Excellence Lab (CEL) is the only Italian center dedicated to advancing commercial excellence through a strong integration of academic insight and business practice. Its mission is to foster research and continuous development of commercial capabilities in order to improve organizational performance, strengthen sales professionalism, and elevate the reputation of the commercial function. Through applied research projects, events, workshops, and partnerships with companies, CEL generates new knowledge, disseminates best practices, and promotes a culture of excellence in commercial management.

In recent years, the sales function has assumed an increasingly strategic role, contributing to corporate reputation, customer engagement, and overall value creation. Today, the integration of marketing and sales has become a priority: commercial networks are no longer simple executors, but central actors in anticipating market shifts and shaping a company's success. This evolution marks a transition from a predominantly tactical-operational perspective to a broader strategic vision in which commercial functions actively participate in the defining corporate strategy.

According to the research, nearly 62% of managers attribute a strategic role to the sales function, with an even stronger recognition among senior executives. At the same time, almost half of the

sample acknowledges that new business models require a profound transformation in sales units. The main areas of development are: organization, through stronger cross-functional integration and a redefinition of roles; technology, driven by digitization and the introduction of artificial intelligence in sales forces; processes, with an emphasis on improving performance management and incentive systems; and skills, through up-skilling and reskilling initiatives aimed at strengthening the capabilities of sales managers.

In summary, the sales function is evolving toward a business management model capable of aligning strategy, technology, processes, and people – ultimately becoming a decisive lever for innovation and competitiveness.

WHAT MANAGERS THINK ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE SALES FUNCTION IN COMPANIES



Sales and marketing functions need tight coordination and synergy to achieve omnichannel success

82.9%



Today, the sales function stands at the forefront of anticipating market change

57.3%



The sales function is the real engine powering a company's success

53.7%



Traditional features of classic sales outdated when compared to new business models

47.9%

WHAT MANAGERS THINK ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE SALES FUNCTION IN COMPANIES IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

