



**WHAT WORKS IN PROSPECTING:**

**RESEARCH-BACKED  
STRATEGIES FOR FILLING  
THE SALES FUNNEL**



THE BROOKS GROUP



There are many variables that impact the success or failure of a given sale. Among other things, connecting with decision makers, understanding their purchase requirements, navigating the prospect's decision process, negotiating a contract, and the ability to deliver a product or service on time can greatly impact a salesperson's odds of getting a win. Since there's so much at play and so much potential risk, making assumptions about prospects is the last thing a seller should do. Unfortunately, that's the name of the game for many of them today. In fact, this research paper demonstrates across the board a clear disparity between what buyers want and what sellers do.

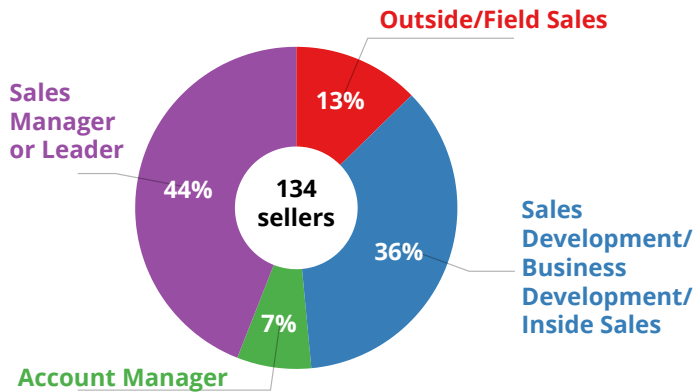
We surveyed 136 sellers and 199 buyers, from individual contributors to high-ranking CEOs, presidents and more. In this research paper, we'll articulate our findings and offer the top 6 recommendations that will enable sellers to improve their prospecting effectiveness.



## Sales Demographics

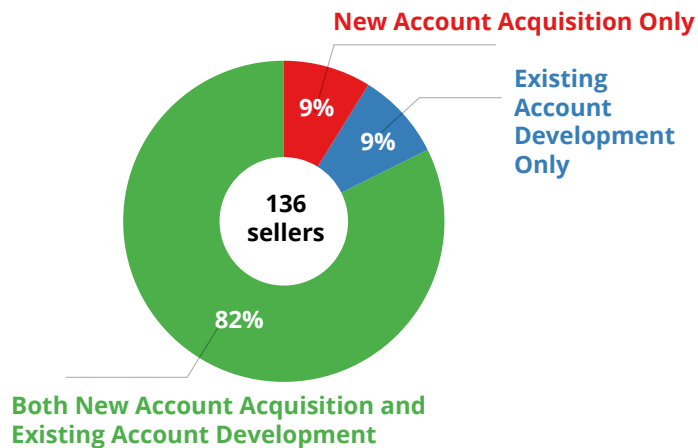
### Sales Roles

Which of the following most closely corresponds to your role?



### Sales Prospecting Responsibility

What is your area of responsibility relative to prospecting?



## Buyer Demographics

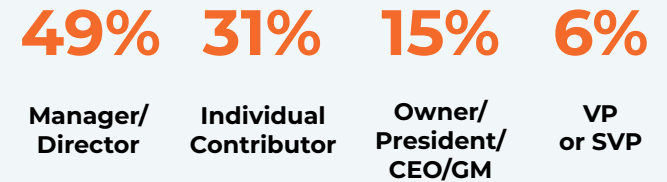
### Buyer Roles

Which best describes you?

I participate in B2B purchases for my organization, either for a product or service

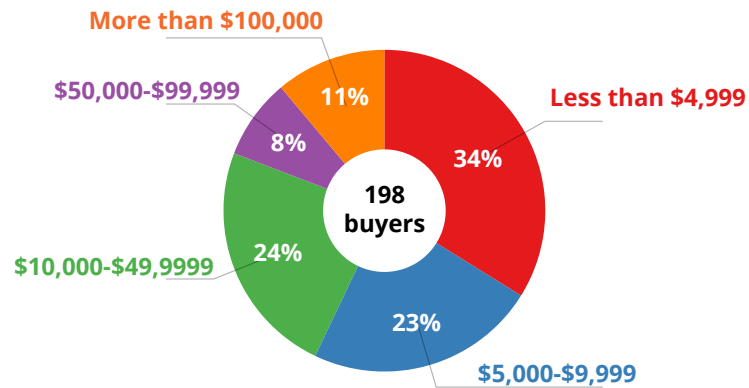
199 buyers

Which of the following most closely corresponds with your role?



### Purchase Ranges

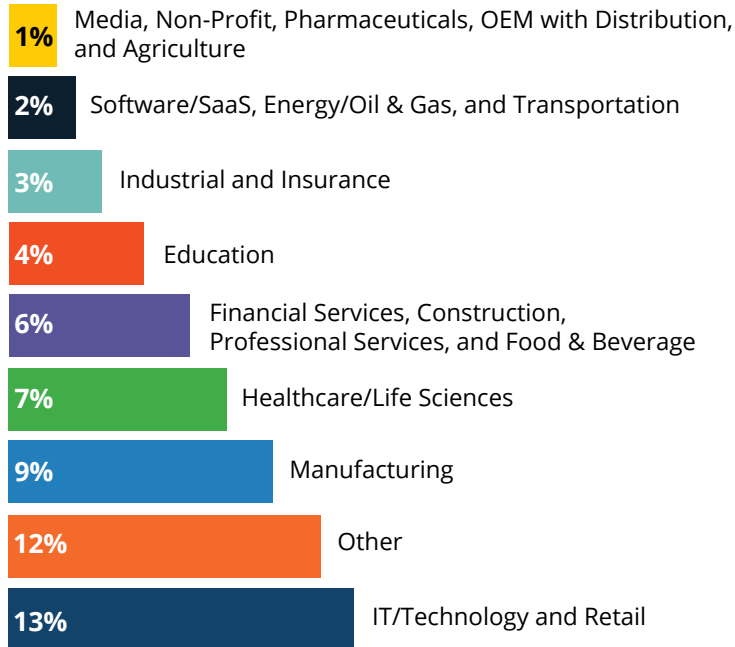
What is the average price range of the product/service purchases you participate in?



# Combined Demographics

## Industry

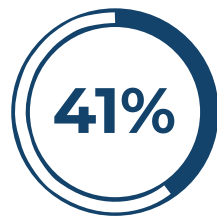
What is your industry?



Which best describes you?



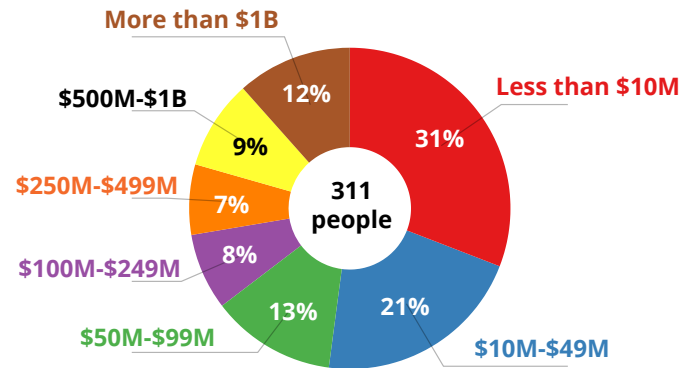
I participate in B2B purchases for my organization, either for a product or service



I am a B2B seller, sales manager, or sales leader, with responsibility for finding new leads and opportunities

## Company Revenue

What is your company's size in revenue?



## Location

Where are you located?

- North America- **95%**
- Europe- **2%**
- Asia Pacific- **2%**
- Africa/Middle East- **1%**



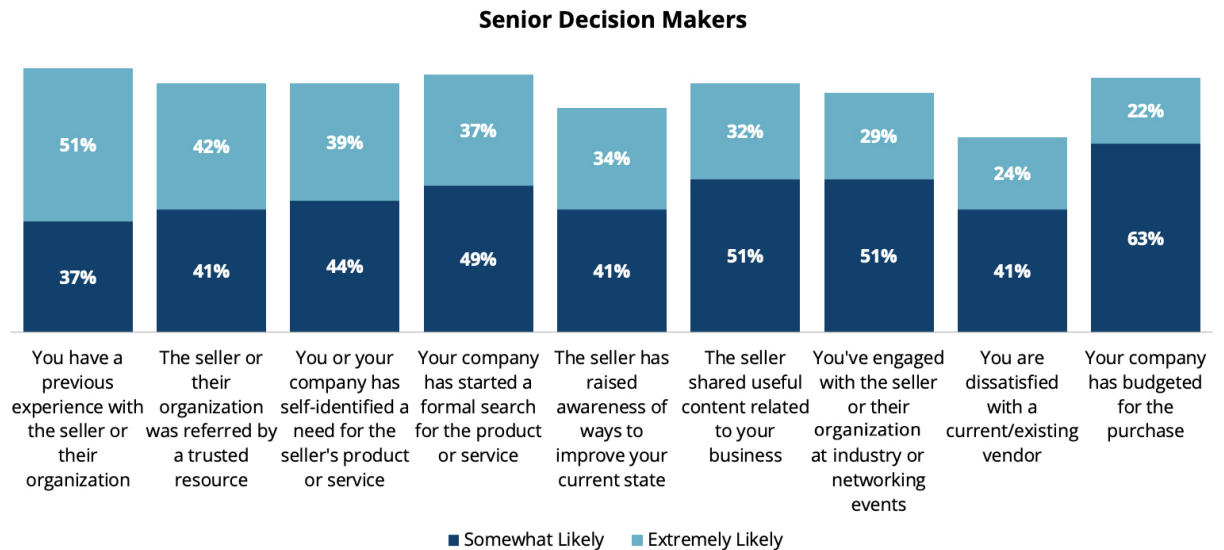
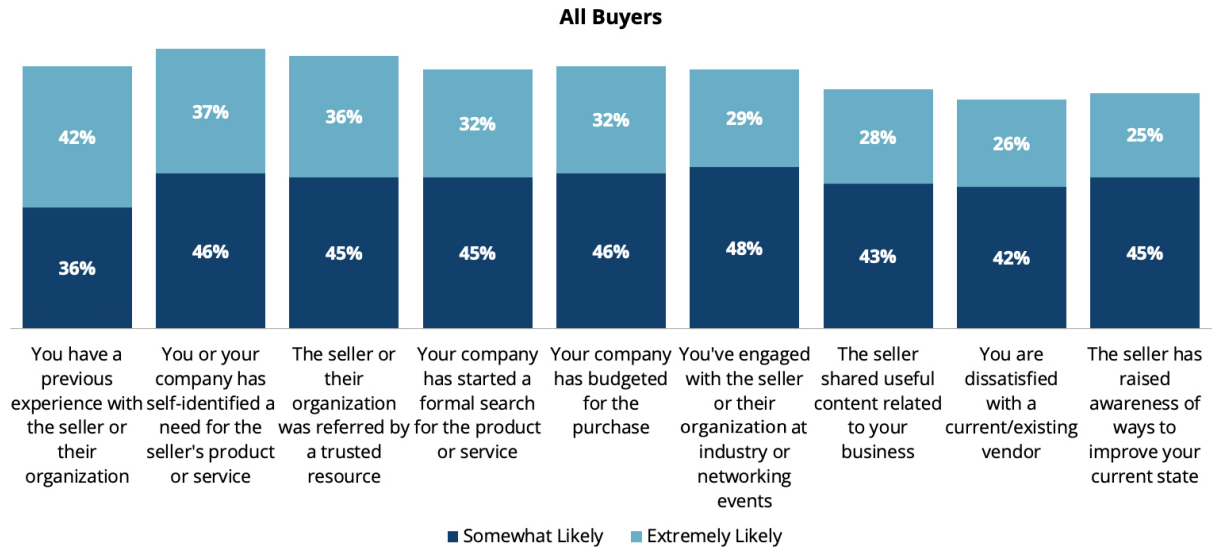
# How can sellers improve their overall prospecting outreach efficiency and effectiveness?

Our research shows that sellers expect an average of 5 touches before a prospect will respond, while buyers (the entire survey population) report responding after an average of 3 touches. When we filter out the buyers who are extremely likely or somewhat likely to speak with a seller based on need and budget (specifically, when they've self-identified a need for a product or service, started a formal search for a product or service, or have budgeted for the purchase), the number of average connection attempts goes up to 4. Further, 27% of this group required more than 4 connection attempts from a seller before responding.

This data suggests that once buyers self-identify or budget for a needed purchase, they may be more likely to speak to a seller (assuming effective outreach messaging) and require fewer prospecting touches.

**Recommendation #1: Sellers should identify and monitor relevant trigger events, indicators which signal a potential buyer's need for their product or service. For instance, someone who sells construction equipment could track building permits as a trigger event, which will help direct their prospecting process toward greater efficiency and effectiveness.**

How likely are you to speak with a salesperson under the following circumstances?



Anecdotally, we also know that senior-level decision makers, such as owners, presidents, CEOs and General Managers (GMs), have many competing factors for their time. This subgroup also maintains a different focus than managers and individual contributors. So it seems likely that alongside messaging that resonates, this target requires more outreach to stimulate a response.

Nevertheless, what complicates matters from the seller's perspective is that they generally take silence as a "no," especially sellers solely focused on maintaining and building existing accounts. This subgroup reports terminating their outreach after an average of only 4 attempts, while those responsible for a mix of new and existing accounts give up after 5. In contrast, sellers working solely toward new account acquisition give up after 9-10 attempts.

This data means that all seller groups are well within range to garner responses from a large portion of top-level prospects. But by terminating outreach so soon, existing account and mixed account seller groups virtually eliminate 11% of buyers (the entire survey population), those who require more touches than the group average before responding. In short, sellers usually give up too soon.

**Recommendation #2: All sellers should match the self-imposed standards of the new business development group and increase to 9-10 prospecting touches before moving on.**

Although the quantity of outreach attempts is crucial to get right, it accounts for only half of the equation.

## What else can sellers do to create a more successful sales sequence?

While sellers and buyers seem to be mostly on the same page with reference to connection attempts, that alignment begins to unravel when we hover the magnifying glass over seller messaging. When reaching out with their final contact attempt, for example, seller messaging varies widely, and many sellers admit to using pressure tactics. They often warn prospects using phrases like "this is our final attempt," "this is your final [opportunity] to respond back" (emphasis added), or this is your "last chance to take advantage of this great deal."

Meanwhile, a few sellers repeat their value proposition during their final attempt, but only one respondent mentions offering a demo and another free relevant content. For the most part, seller messaging during the final attempt fails to underscore their product/service's value, a mistake that keeps buyers in a state of disinterest.



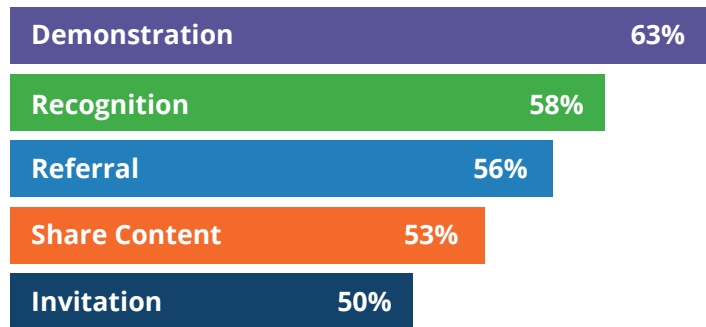
In fact, buyers unequivocally rail against pressure and overwhelmingly prefer honest, straightforward communication that encourages trust and indicates that a meeting with the seller will bring value. Furthermore, according to buyers, several contributing factors elicit feelings of trust, including brand recognition, sharing relevant content, and referrals from common connections. Especially pertinent is that these factors imply that buyers give sellers a tremendous amount of influence over the success of their sales process.

Unfortunately, sellers generally struggle with effectively taking advantage of this influence. For instance, when asked to describe their most effective strategies for connecting with new leads, a large portion of sellers simply missed the boat. While some articulated the importance of offering value with things like case studies (3 respondents), using referrals (14 respondents) or speaking to the prospect's pain points (3 respondents), many of them reported that their top "strategies" included emails (14 respondents), phone calls (13 respondents), and using social media (9 respondents). However, at best, these are tactics. Few of the seller responses actually give the impression that sellers are leveraging a fully fleshed out prospecting strategy.

**Recommendation #3: Sellers should tailor messaging to the role and needs of the buyer, and design it with the central goal of building trust. This focus is especially important in new business development.**

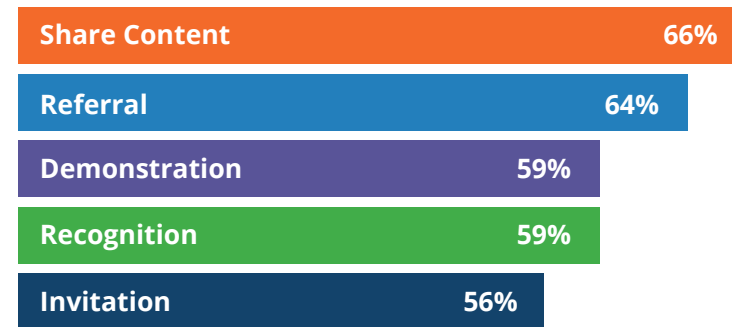
**So, what's the most effective sales messaging or content that prompts buyers to accept a meeting? Here are the top 5 from our research that respondents identified as "extremely effective" or "very effective:"**

**For the entire survey population**



1. Offer a product demonstration (63%)
2. Brand recognition; you've heard of the vendor's name or reputation (58%)
3. Referral or common connection (56%)
4. Share content related to your business, industry, market trends (53%)
5. Invitation to an educational event (webinar, lunch & learn, forum, etc.) (50%)

**For senior level buyers (CEOs, Presidents, Owners, GMs, VPs and SVPs)**



1. Share content related to your business, industry, market trends (66%)
2. Referral or common connection (64%)
3. Offer a product demonstration (59%)
4. Brand recognition; you know the vendor's name or reputation (59%)
5. Invitation to an educational event (webinar, lunch & learn, forum, etc.) (56%)





Although product demonstrations ranked high with buyers, this ranking comes with an important caveat:

**Our research indicates that this messaging is most effective only when the buyer has either self-identified a need for the product or service, started a search for the product or service, or budgeted for the purchase.**

Sellers who are unsure of whether these conditions are in place would be better served with different messaging designed to establish credibility and trust, especially when attempting to connect with senior-level buyers.

The key takeaway here is that in order to tailor messaging to the buyer's role and needs, the seller must have a clear picture of who their audience is. Simply put, boilerplate messaging is doomed to fail.

**Recommendation #4: Each touchpoint should help establish credibility or offer value to the customer, which sellers can accomplish by considering common connections and referrals, or through insights they can share.**

Remember the buyer's preferences here. Although it can be tempting to offer product/service information and call it a day, buyers ranked this as one of the least effective strategies to prompt them to accept a meeting. Instead, zero in on what they care about to maximize your messaging impact.





# How do sellers describe a successful prospecting sequence, and what do buyers actually prefer?

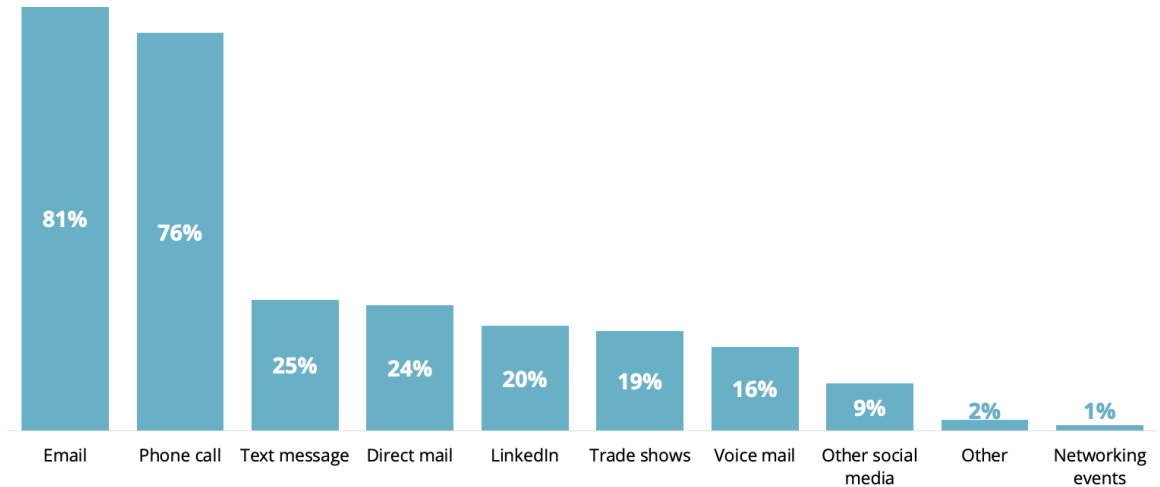
Despite the power sellers hold, most unknowingly fail to leverage key strategic points of influence. On the one hand, they indicate clear understanding that referrals from current customers carry considerable weight in any given sales process. On the other hand, when describing what a successful prospecting sequence looks like in practice, only 2 of the 136 respondents make referrals a point even worth noting. Instead, they place greater practical importance on emails (53%), LinkedIn (18%) and phone calls (just under 18%).

Sellers are not fully aligned with buyer preferences in their methods of contact, and they may not be taking advantage of available opportunities when buyers initiate their own vendor search.

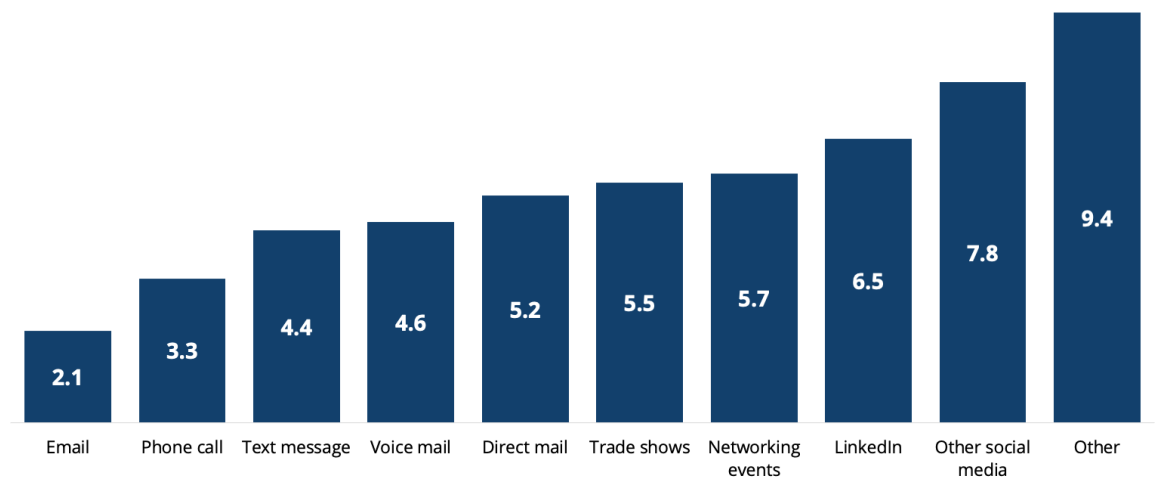
When asked their preferred methods of contacts or outreach from a seller, buyers ranked their top 3 as email, phone call and text message. Here, LinkedIn was ranked as a lower option, a point sellers need to keep top of mind if using LinkedIn to reach out to prospects. Given these preferences, a successful prospecting sequence likely includes a combination of outreach methods, with messaging tailored to buyer roles and designed to establish credibility and trust.

When proactively sourcing potential vendors for a purchase, buyers rank self-directed online searches and referrals from colleagues as their top two preferred methods, followed by email outreach from a seller. Buyers rank LinkedIn lower in preference to these other sourcing methods, meaning that they are less likely to use the site to actively seek potential vendors.

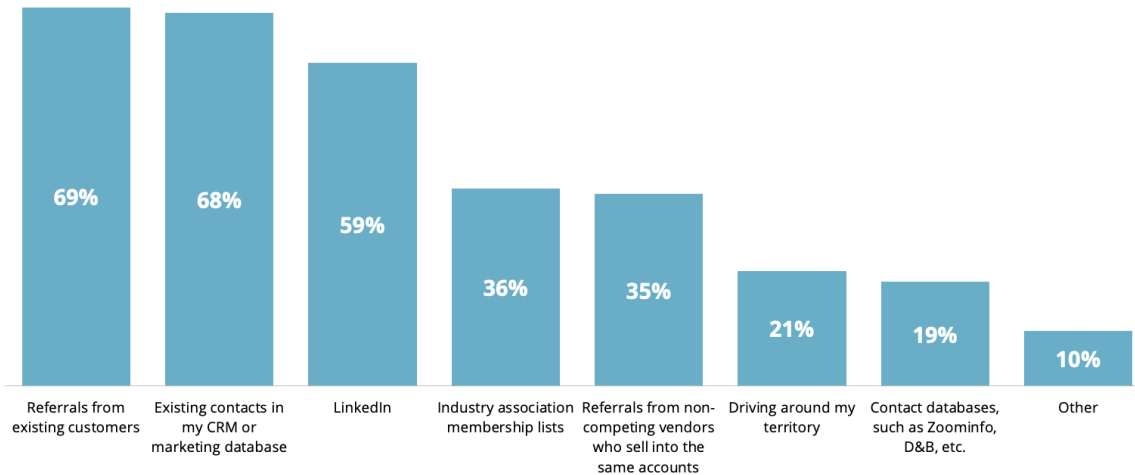
How Do Salespeople Most Commonly Reach Out to Buyers?



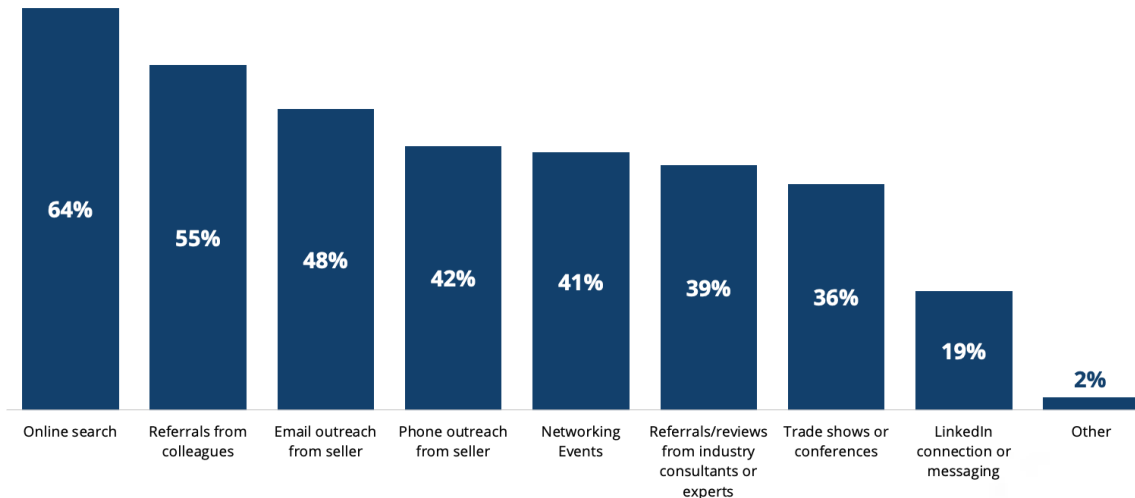
What Are Buyers Preferred Methods of Contact or Outreach from a Salesperson? (Ranked in Average Order of Preference)



### Where Do Sellers Find Prospects to Target in Lead Generation Efforts?



### How Do Buyers Typically Find Potential Vendors for a Purchase?



**Recommendation #5: Since buyers are engaging in more self-guided online research, organizations need to ensure they make the right digital content available to help buyers in their decision journey. Sellers must optimize their own online presence as well.**

For example, how have they positioned themselves on their LinkedIn profile? Does it establish or reinforce the seller's credibility, or does it look like they're job seeking?

**Recommendation #6: Sellers need to devote far more attention to mining referrals.**

According to sales legend Dale Carnegie, 91% of customers say they'd give referrals, but only 11% of salespeople ask for them. Using referrals works. But its success depends on the seller's ability to consistently maintain relationships with their customers and their pool of contacts, especially contacts who have moved to other organizations. It's also clear from this research that top-level buyers (including owners, presidents, CEOs, GMs, VPs and SVPs) are very likely to speak with a seller when they've had prior experience with them or their organization. That's good news for account managers who work existing accounts. But it can also prove helpful to those developing new business, that is, if sellers can mine resources such as existing CRM contacts, former contacts who've moved to new companies, industry association networking, and referrals from non-competing vendors who sell into the same accounts. Doing this work supports the seller's need for individual positioning in addition to the organization's brand positioning.

Ultimately, as buyers want to do their own homework and deploy their network to find new vendors, it's also apparent that sellers know this to be true. While sellers articulate a clear understanding of the value of using referrals, there may be additional opportunities to fully leverage their potential in practice.





## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that many sellers view the sales process as purely a numbers game. That is, they equate more prospecting outreaches with a higher probability of wins. There is certainly truth to that, so much so that we suggest sellers not take silence as an automatic “no.”

But for sellers to maximize ROI, they also need to prioritize establishing trust with potential buyers and accomplishing this task with buyer preferences in mind. That means placing greater weight on asking current customers for referrals and leveraging network connections. It also means expending the extra effort to effectively design and revise messaging. Buyers want to see seller differentiation and value without having to burn many calories in the process. And all seller messaging must meet that basic expectation.

Furthermore, since buyers are using online resources to research their purchases AND they value brand recognition alongside other messaging preferences, sales organizations would be wise to make these resources available for salespeople. This could amount to an opportunity for sales and marketing teams to assess their content and messaging in support of prospecting or lead generation efforts.

Ultimately, this more conscientious, and indeed holistic, sales approach gives sellers and organizations a diverse toolkit and improves the odds of generating better returns for their efforts.



## About The Brooks Group

At The Brooks Group, we deliver insights relevant for today, powered by data and results collected by our team of researchers, and informed by more than four decades of experience in fueling sales success.

With nearly 40 years of industry experience, The Brooks Group achieves sustainable sales culture transformation for clients by delivering targeted training that becomes operationalized by threading into an organization's existing systems.

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