



Project Customer Management Skills in Digitalizing B2B Markets

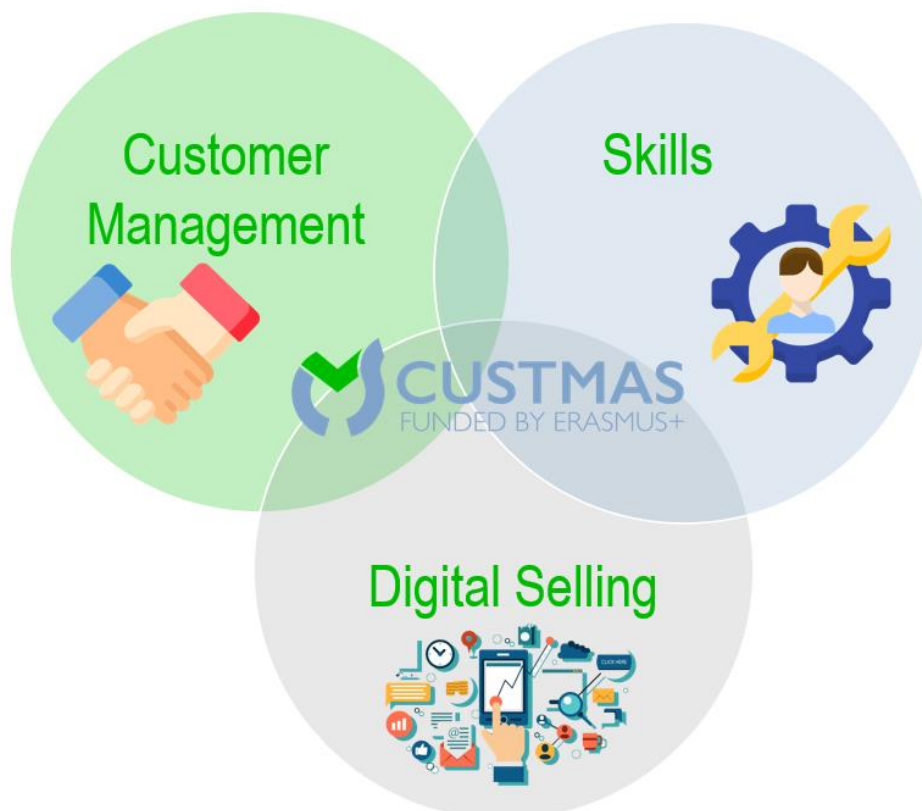
The CustMaS Consortium

Intellectual Output 1

## White paper

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# Theoretical Customer Management Skills Framework and Overview of Customer Management Education



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## 1. Introduction

Technology development and its ubiquitous presence in business-to-business (B2B) markets force pace on salespeople to reskill or upskill (Krafft et al., 2020; Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022; Theotokis et al., 2008). For instance, customers have favored digital self-service or remote human interactions over traditional interactions since the COVID-19 pandemic, leading sales organizations to embrace modern digital tools to communicate with customers (Cruz et al., 2022; Leszkiewicz et al., 2021). In addition, the success of new tools powered by artificial intelligence (AI), such as ChatGPT, is expected to create powerful assistive technology for marketing and sales, significantly affecting sales activities (Chui et al., 2022). The technology could become either a robust supporter to salespeople who adapt or a challenge to people who refuse to change (Ahearne et al., 2005; Blount, 2020). From a business perspective, almost all B2B sales organizations consider reskilling being top priority, especially regarding equipping their salesforce with sufficient digital capability. More than half of sales leaders believe their sales representatives lack the skills to succeed (Cruz et al., 2022). Hence, new sales skills, such as digital, analytical and quantitative skills, are increasing in demand (Cruz et al., 2022; Peesker et al., 2022).

Additionally, the selling process has become more customer-centric (Ahearne et al., 2022; Cruz et al., 2022). Due to digital transformation, customers now have access to more information about products, services, and competition. Furthermore, they contact sellers in the later stages of the selling process to assess the fit of the supplier organization rather than the total solution (Mantrala & Albers, 2012). Customers also seem to evaluate the relational processes that the firm provides more than the product's suitability (Kwiatek et al., 2020; Mantrala & Albers, 2012; Pulles et al., 2016). Therefore, salespeople's role has steered toward managing the customer relationship in digital transformation.

At the same time, within the context of a network economy, European industry has been confronted with an additional set of complex challenges, including intensified geopolitical global competition, the high volatility and susceptibility of global supply networks to crises, raising sustainability challenges and continuous demographic change (Von Der Leyen, 2019), all of which lead to fundamental changes in customer behavior. Fortunately, as part of the fourth industrial revolution (I4.0) new digital technologies have emerged that help towards addressing those challenges. However, digitalization also disrupts traditional buyer-seller interaction (Krafft et al., 2020). CustMaS will, thus, pay special attention to identifying not only current customer management success skills but also digitalization success skills needed as product and labor markets continue their digitization at an increasingly faster pace.

However, these developments, do not seem to be reflected in curricula at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nor in corporate skills development programs offered by professional providers of vocational education and training (Omazic & Zunk, 2021). A scientifically-based skills development programme in digital customer management is currently missing. The present project aims to fill this educational gap and contribute to increasing the competitiveness of the European economy by way of appropriate training of professional B2B sales personnel. Such training will reduce inefficiencies and frictions in the increasingly digitalising demand and supply networks.

The objective of the CustMaS project is to design an empirically validated skills model for B2B customer management skills, a (post-graduate level) curriculum and program guide for developing these skills. The curriculum will be offered as a Master's program and will foster cooperation between the participating universities concerning sales professionals' customer management skills in the context of increasingly digitalized B2B markets (e.g., setting up and selling in virtual showrooms, diagnosing customer needs online, text analytics useful in modeling the topics that B2B buyers prioritize on their web site, in e-mails, Twitter posts, etc). In particular, the project has the following objectives:

- a) Develop an up-to-date, comprehensive, and empirically validated model of skills in B2B customer management in a digitalising world.
- b) Develop a post-graduate level course curriculum and program guide, including program-intended learning outcomes, appropriate pedagogy, and evaluation strategies.
- c) Disseminate the results of the project for a broader community. The project will develop a self-assessment tool for customer management skill evaluation and prepare an introductory Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on upskilling and reskilling. The course can be used by students in electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, logistics, industrial engineering, life sciences (e.g., biology, biotechnology, pharmacology, zoology), and business administration, as well as by other learners. It will also help in promoting awareness and interest towards professional sales and selling career paths that appear to offer a bright outlook in the job market of the future.

Sales occupations (i.e., sales engineers, sales representatives of services, wholesale, and manufacturing) have been classified as occupations with a bright outlook “projected to grow faster than average” and “to have 100,000 or more job openings over the period 2019-2029 [only] for the US”. Importantly, market reports note insufficient talent as a key barrier for B2B sellers in Europe. It follows,

that for European B2B firms to compete for the markets of purchasing expenses they need sales professionals that will be skillful in accommodating changing B2B buying behaviour.

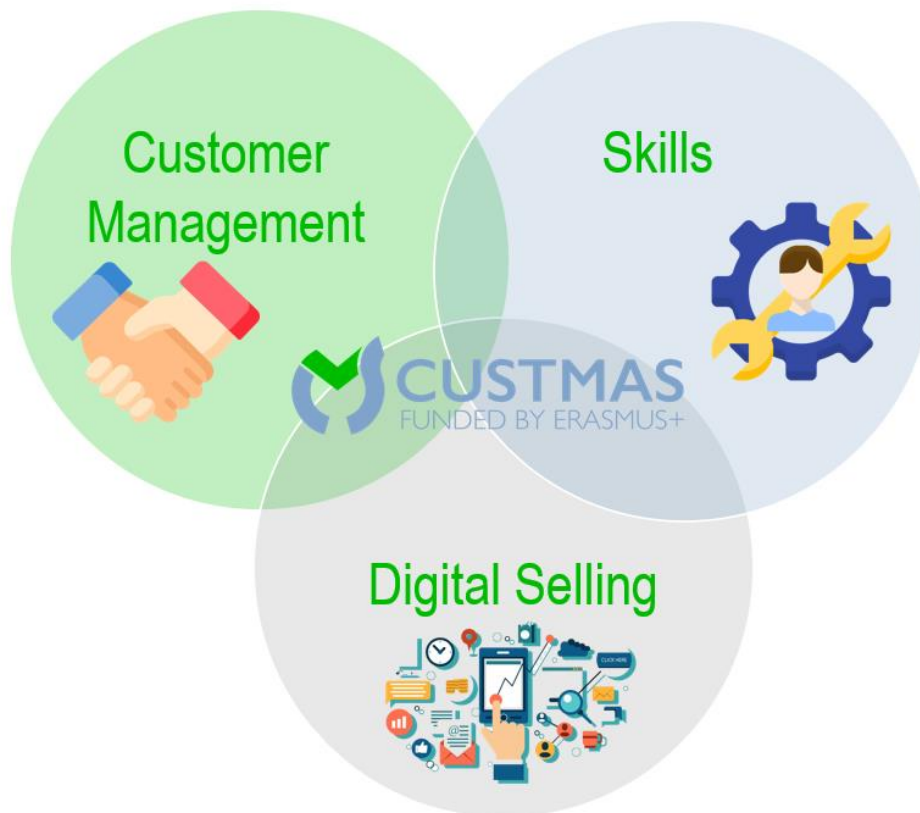
The CustMaS project comprises five research phases, corresponding to five intellectual outputs (IOs). The first phase contains the literature review of B2B sales, an analysis of current sales job advertisements, and digital marketing education (IO1). The later stages of this project will deliver a validated list of skills (IO2 and IO3), a tested and refined designed curriculum for higher education (IO4), and a Massive Open Online Course on digital customer management skills in B2B (IO5).

This whitepaper is a part of the Intellectual Output of the first phase of CustMaS project (IO1) and is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents the overview, aims, and research questions of the white paper. Chapter 3 discusses the current literature on sales management and salespeople skills. In Chapter 4, sales job advertisements are analyzed to build a list of contemporary sales skills. Chapter 5 looks at the higher education programs in digital marketing and sales. Chapter 6 summarizes the white paper and links its key insights with the next stage of the project.

## 2. Theoretical Customer Management Skills Framework

### 2.1 Overview and aims

This intellectual output aims to build an up-to-date and comprehensive customer management skills model in digitalizing business-to-business (B2B) markets. Three main pillars that constitute this research are (1) Customer Management, (2) Skills, and (3) Digital Selling (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Three main pillars of CustMaS*

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a company's strategic process of selecting customers and shaping its interaction with them to maximize customers' current and future value to the company (Kumar & Reinartz, 2006). The term CRM has been used widely by academia, practitioners, consultants, and IT vendors but with different definitions and concepts. This research focuses on the strategic CRM defined above and uses the term customer management (CM) to avoid confusion with customer management technological solutions.

A typical CM project team could include management, technical personnel, sales, marketing, service groups, financial staff, and external CRM experts (Kumar & Reinartz, 2006). In this project, we focus on management, sales, marketing, and service groups. These experts play vital roles in the buyer-seller relationship in that they lead the CM process and have the most contact with customers,. We study salespeople and sales managers' skills, which are their proficiency at performing their tasks and can change rapidly with learning and experience (Johnston & Marshall, 2016).

Digital selling means using digital assets to conduct synchronous and asynchronous exchange processes to generate customer value (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022). When implemented successfully, digital selling leads to a competitive advantage, generating higher revenue and profitability for firms. However, it puts a pressure on sales professionals to "digitally transform." Salespeople must integrate technologies into their daily tasks, such as video sales calls, video messaging, virtual presentations and demos, telephone prospecting, managing CRM systems, social selling, artificial intelligence, etc. At the same time, with the application of digital technologies to existing assets, managers are challenged to create new organizational processes involving customer relationships and sales processes and rethink the firm's value proposition (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022).

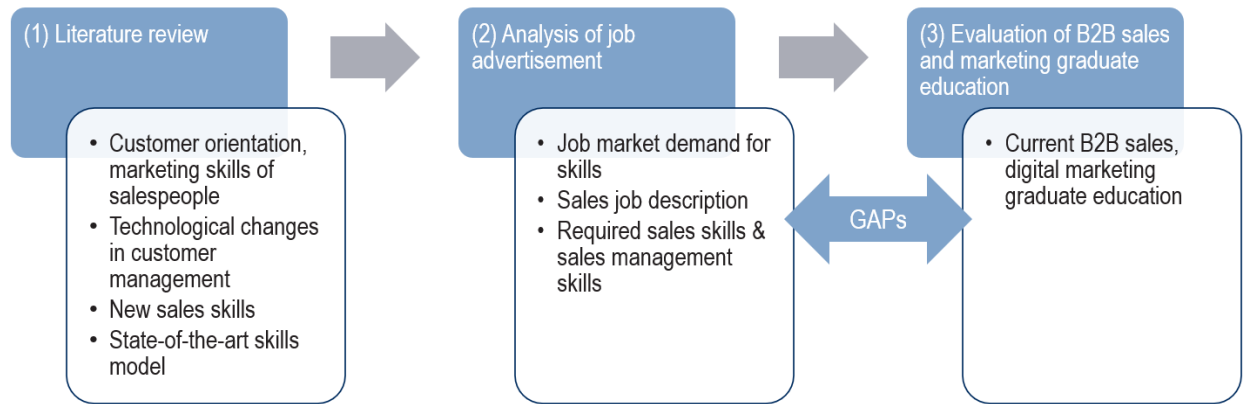
Digital selling requires salespeople and managers to undergo serious customer management reskilling and upskilling. This research provides the necessary skill framework as a basis for this purpose.

## 2.2 Research questions

To achieve the above-mentioned objective, this IO seeks to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. What is the state-of-the-art customer management skills model in B2B markets?
2. What do salespeople need to learn to upskill and reskill in a digitalizing context?
3. What is the skill gap between market demand and graduate education in B2B marketing and sales?

To answer these RQs, we conducted a literature review to obtain an academic overview of customer management skills and current digital selling technologies. Then we qualitatively validated the current scholarly knowledge by analysing B2B sales job advertisements. Following that, we evaluated top-level education programs in B2B marketing and sales to understand what skills are currently being taught at a Master's level. Finally, we looked for gaps between skills requested in job adverts and skills provided by education. Figure 2 summarizes the IO1 research strategy.



*Figure 2: IO1 research strategy*

Table 1 presents the contents of the white paper and how they answer RQs.

*Table 1: IO1 white paper structure*

	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Chapter 3: Literature review	✓	✓	
Chapter 4: Job adverts analysis	✓	✓	
Chapter 5: B2B courses			✓



### 3. Review of the Academic Literature about Customer Management Skills

We scanned nine top academic journals in marketing & sales (Appendix A) in 3 recent years 2022, 2021, and 2020. Based on titles and abstracts, we selected papers related to B2B sales management, technologies, customer management, and skills. This resulted in 110 articles. We studied these papers thoroughly to grasp the most recent knowledge in customer management skills in digitalizing B2B markets.

#### 3.1 The role of technology and skills in customer management

The salesforce management process from Johnston & Marshall (2016) serves as a road map for managers to formulate, implement, evaluate, and control a sales program, and is one of the most comprehensive models in salesforce management. With our research, we aim to extend the model and contribute to the sales literature by considering the role of digital technologies in different steps of salesforce management. Figure 3 illustrates our research proposal to update the salesforce management process in the context of digital transformation. Our contributions to the sales management process are shown in the blue textboxes, including (1) Technology, (2) Customer management, and (3) Skills dimension.

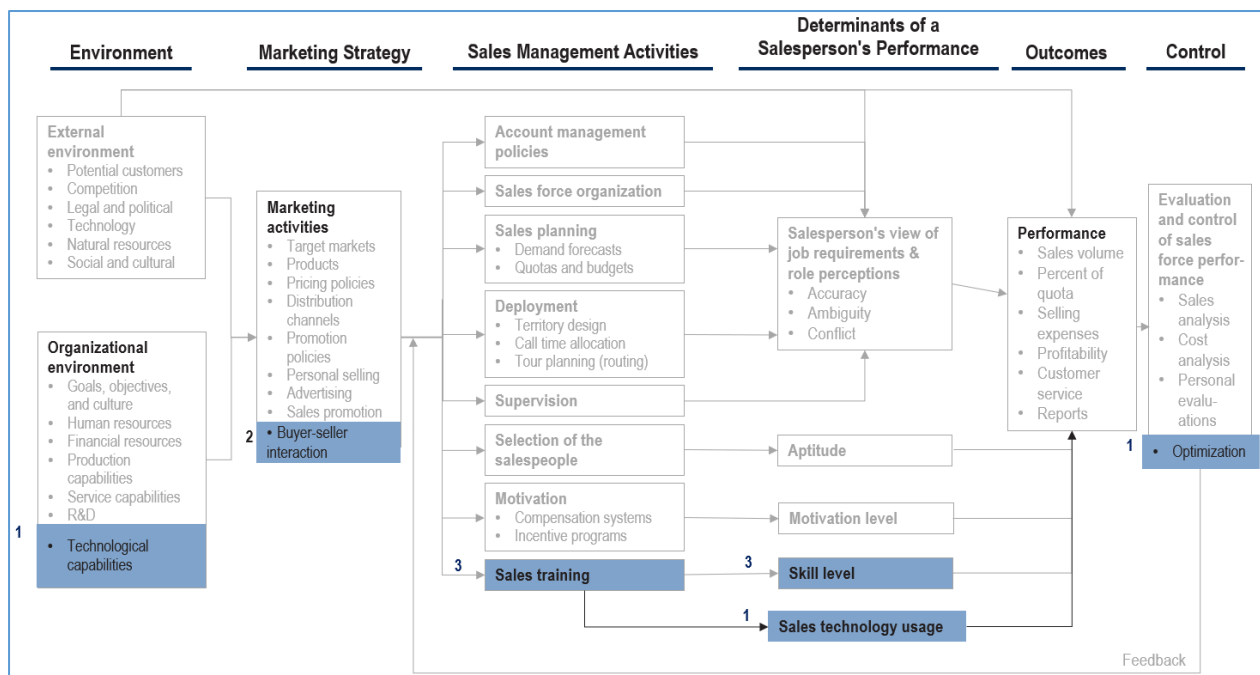


Figure 3: An updated overview of the salesforce management process in the digital transformation context

Nowadays, a sales manager formulating a sales program must consider the firm's technological capabilities, such as IT infrastructure, CRM system, chatbot, analytics tools, etc., since these technological solutions directly impact buyer-seller interaction (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022). When implementing a sales program, a manager must also make sure salespeople use technologies effectively by providing sufficient training (Ahearne et al., 2005) and ensuring salespeople's adequate technical skill level. At the end of the process, technology usage raises a new challenge of optimizing the process to make the best use of technological and human capabilities to deliver the best customer experience (Albers et al., 2015). Below we review the most recent literature on this topic, which is also summarized in Figure 4.

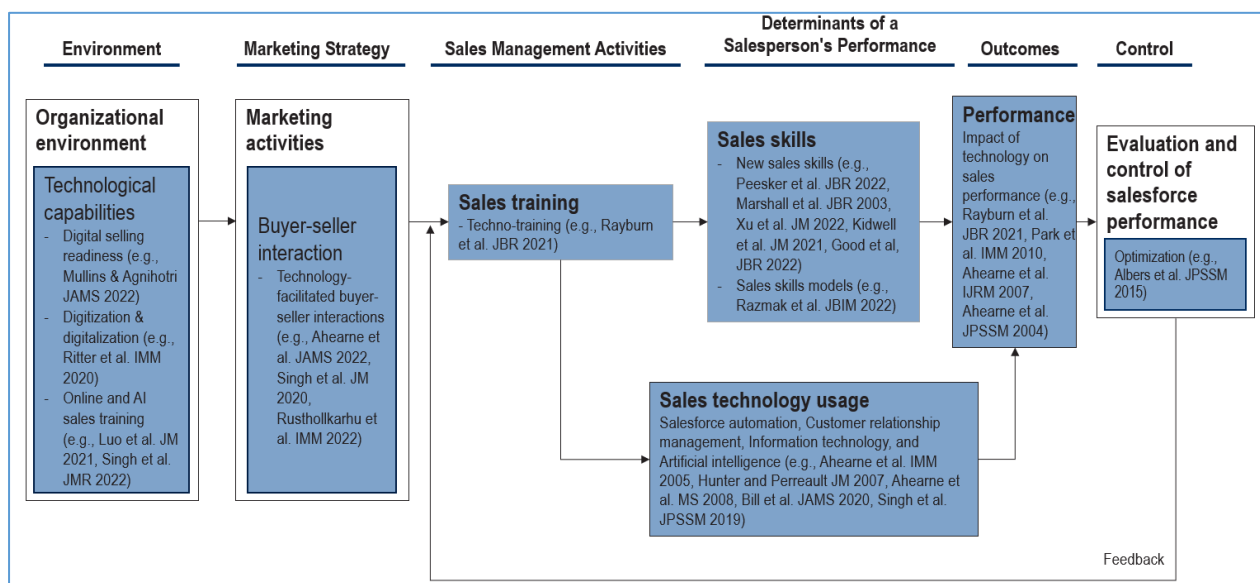


Figure 4: A literature review map on customer management skills in digitalizing B2B markets

## Technological capabilities

Companies are racing to build a digital-ready salesforce since digital technologies can be big competitive advantages (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022). The digital technologies for the salesforce encompass several technical solutions that cover a wide range of business needs. First, technology facilitates salespeople's communication and interaction with customers, such as video calls, video messaging, social media, email automation, etc. It helps salespeople quickly and conveniently serve customers, enhancing the buyer-seller relationship. Secondly, technology improves sales workflow and generates data for process optimization. For example, when a salesperson updates the CRM system regularly, they can keep track of their sales process with customers, know what to do, and not worry about missing a potential prospect.

Thirdly, training with the support of technology can reduce costs while increasing effectiveness. Research shows that a combination of AI and human coach can outperform either AI or human coach alone (Luo et al., 2021). Besides the advantages, technology could also bring disadvantages, especially when salespeople are not ready for it. A salesperson who is not comfortable with video call or consider CRM as a manager's controlling tool might be reluctant to using technology and may be left behind in the running.

### **Buyer-seller interaction**

Advances in interaction technologies and abundant information availability have changed buyer-seller interaction significantly by increasing buyer-seller information symmetry and virtual buyer-seller communication (Ahearne et al., 2022). These new phenomena, then, affects the buyer-seller interactional process and outcomes, making changes to (1) buyer's attitudes and behaviors, (2) seller's effectiveness in interacting with buyers, and (3) buyer-seller interactional process (Ahearne et al., 2022). For example, negotiations via chat or emails could make customers feel a lack of control, more vulnerable, and insecure since they cannot see the seller and thus are not able to judge their underlying motives (Yang et al., 2009). On the other hand, technology like video conferencing also limits salespeople's effectiveness, such as not being able to use eye contact to build customer rapport (Ahearne et al., 2022). Though one technology alone is not as effective as face-to-face in building buyer-seller relationships, combining multiple channels could enhance customer loyalty (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005; Steinhoff et al., 2019). In effect, salespeople and managers must select and decide the most effective technology or combination of technologies to interact with customers.

### **Sales technology usage**

Sales professionals' digital assets can be grouped into five categories: Salesforce Automation, Customer Relationship Management, Information Technology, Social Media, and Artificial Intelligence (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022). Digital assets have changed how salespeople manage customer relationships, such as using video calls and social media to contact customers. These changes require salespeople to develop new skills to adapt to the latest tools. Table 2 provides examples of technology developments and their effect on customer management and salesperson skills.

*Table 2: Examples of changing customer management skills in digitalizing B2B markets*

Type of Technology Changes	Internet	Big Data & Analytics	Social Networks	Cloud
<b>Customer management changes</b>	The use of email, Teams, Zoom in buyer-seller communication	CRM systems like Hubspot	Social media like LinkedIn, Twitter	Cloud-based CRM
<b>Skill changes</b>	New eNegotiation skills, eMeeting skills (Singh et al., 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New analytical skills in analyzing customer data from CRM system (Elhajjar et al., 2023; Peesker et al., 2022)</li> <li>- More data-driven decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social media skills</li> <li>- Social selling, relationship selling skills (Agnihotri et al., 2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Innovation skills and vision</li> <li>- Technical proficiency (McKendrick, 2013)</li> </ul>

Sales technology usage aims to reduce costs and increase sales performance. Ahearne et al., (2005) find that technology usage can improve a salesperson's efficiency and effectiveness. Salespeople's use of social media can also affect their information communication practices, which enhances their responsiveness and customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Despite technology's benefit in reducing costs and increasing performance, sometimes sales professionals cannot guarantee a successful application of technology in the sales program because they lack the necessary condition, such as skills, training, and managers' support (Ahearne et al., 2005; Blount, 2020; Cruz et al., 2022).

## Sales training

Changes in technology and buyer-seller interaction require companies to train their salesforce to adapt to the new situation. Sales professionals must learn, unlearn, and relearn skills to embrace new technologies (Rayburn et al., 2021; Mattila et al., 2021). However, salespeople tend to resist new technology because they do not tangibly see the value it adds to their jobs. Therefore, companies need technology training to update salespeople's knowledge, skills, ability, and promote positive attitudes toward technology. Continuous technology training is influential in technology-related and sales-related outcomes as it enhances salespeople's (perceptions of) technology efficacy, raises their expectations, and reduces their stress when working with technology (Rayburn et al., 2021). In contrast, with insufficient technology

training and support, technology usage can reduce salesperson efficiency and effectiveness (Ahearne et al., 2005).

### **Skill level**

Salesperson skills, including technical skills, selling-related knowledge, and adaptiveness, are significant drivers of salesperson performance (Verbeke et al., 2011). With the advancement of technology and the growth of relationship selling, the salesperson's skill set for success has changed. When hiring salespeople, managers emphasize analytical skills, adaptability skills, collaboration skills, customer engagement skills, learning skills, and technology skills.

### **Sales performance**

Research has empirically demonstrated the impact of technology usage on sales performance. Ahearne et al. (2004) find a curvilinear relationship between salesperson's (CRM) technology usage and performance, meaning spending more time using technology will increase outcomes until a certain point when the effect will reverse. On the other hand, other factors influence the impact of technology usage on sales performance, such as training, support, and adaptive selling behavior (Ahearne et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010).

Salesperson performance measurements historically were activity-based (number of calls, meetings, etc.) and outcome-based (units sold, revenue, market share, etc.). However, the rise of relationship selling adds a new, relationship-based measurement, including renewals, cross/up-selling, net promoter score, and customer satisfaction (Bolander et al., 2021).

### **Optimization**

Optimization is an important task that both managers and researchers have neglected. The sales-force management model's evaluation and control stage considers sales analysis, cost analysis, and personal evaluation. Technology development offers many opportunities for managers to optimize those analyses and evaluations. For example, the rise of big data, data mining, and much data available from sales technologies makes room for sales managers to optimize call planning, sales force size, territory design, sales force compensation, etc., using algorithms (Albers et al., 2015). It would require managers to advance their analytical skills and quantitative planning. Another area for optimization is the combination of technical and human capability, such as the time salespeople should allocate to using the CRM system, the

optimal number of calls to a prospect, or when to delegate a customer from an AI chatbot to a salesperson. Technology offers tracking data and objective measurements so managers can model all those activities to find the best suggestion for the sales force.

### 3.2 Customer management skills from the literature

Recent literature attempts to build a list of salespeople's essential skills and attributes based on comprehensive research using various methods, including text mining, interview, and survey (Razmak et al., 2022; Peesker et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2003). The results vary due to different research objectives. We combine these results to build up-to-date literature-based holistic list of sales skills (Table 3). The skills are grouped into three categories: conceptual, human/interpersonal, and technical (Razmak et al., 2022).

*Table 3: List of sales skills*

Conceptual	Human/ Interpersonal	Technical
Account management/strategic selling	Adaptiveness	Business case development
Business and financial acumen	Analytical skills	Closing
Business ethics	Collaboration	Follow-up
Challenging sales skills	Communication	Implementation
		planning/project management
Consultative sales skills	Coping with stress	Internal systems literacy
Customer engagement	Creativity	Negotiation
Entrepreneurial skills	Emotional intelligence	Presentation
Funnel management	First impression/initial impact	Prospecting
Industry research and value development	Interpersonal skills/relationship management	Social Selling
Objection handling	Leadership (formal and informal)	Technology
Orchestration	Learning	Writing skills and reading literacy
Product knowledge training	Listening	
Solution selling	Personal skills	
	Personality identification and communication impact	
	Questioning	

## 4. Analysis of Job Advertisements for Sales Positions

### 4.1 Data collection

We collected 38 job advertisements on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com>) from September to November 2022 (Appendix B). They recruited positions in sales in the Netherlands. These positions included different positions, industries, and experience levels (Table 4, 5, 6).

*Table 4: Collected job advertisements by position*

Position	Quantity
Sales Representative/ Sales Consultant	5
Account Management	4
Sales Engineer	4
Customer Success Management	3
Inside Sales Representative	3
Sales Support Representative	3
Chief Sales/ Revenue Officer	2
Lead Generator Specialist	2
Outside Sales Representative	2
Sales Director	2
Sales Manager	2
Sales Operation Manager	2
Vice President of Sales	2
Head of Sales Enablement	1
Sales Development/ Business Development	1

*Table 5: Collected job advertisements by industry*

Industry	Quantity
Information Technology	10
Consultancy Services	4
Industrial Machinery	4
Consumer Goods / Retail	3
Pharma / Healthcare / Biotech	3
Automotive / Transportation	2
Financial Services / Banking	2
Manufacturing	2
Software Development	2
Media; Culture; Graphical	2
Logistics	1
Real Estate/Construction	1

Industry	Quantity
Forestry; wood; pulp and paper	1
Mechanical and electrical engineering	1

*Table 6: Collected job advertisements by experience level*

Experience level	Quantity
Associate	10
Mid-Senior Level	9
N/A	6
Entry-Level	5
Director	4
Chief Revenue Officer	2
Vice President of Sales	2

We read the job advertisements and performed textual analysis using Atlas.ti. Keywords about required skills were tracked and counted. We then compared keywords from the job ads with the list from the literature to pick out new skills missing from the theory. We also compare keyword frequency among positions to have a glimpse of sales positions' differences.

### 4.2 B2B sales jobs and their responsibilities

Technology development impacts sales force structure (Mantrala & Albers, 2012). Sales positions become more specialized in different stages of the selling process, such as lead generators focusing on early stages and sales support representatives focusing on later stages. The difference between inside salespeople (who work in the office and contact customers digitally) and outside salespeople (who meet customers face-to-face) is also changing. Since customers now embrace online communication, outside salespeople have to adopt online communication channels. As a results, these two sales positions seem to be converging (Figure 5).



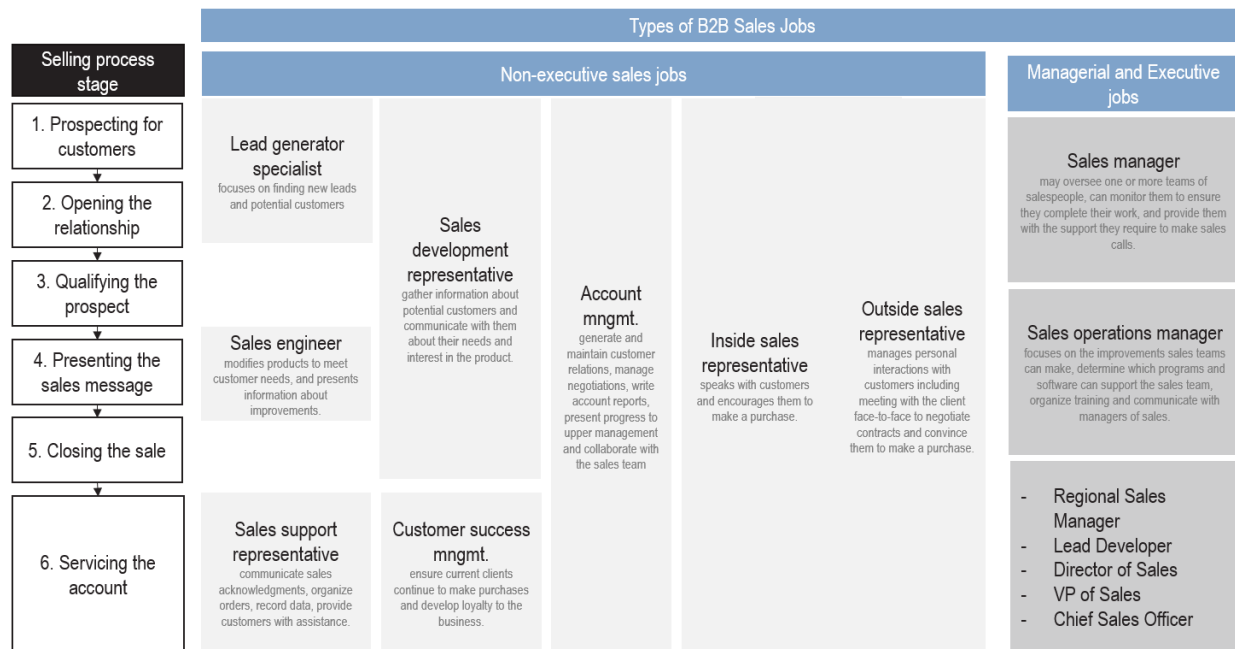


Figure 5: B2B sales positions and responsibilities (Indeed, 2022)

## 4.3 Customer management skills framework from job adverts

Three new skills are emerging from the job ads, including customer success management, prioritization, and process improvement/problem-solving. We collect skills definitions from research and practitioner websites to build a list of salespeople's skills with definitions (Table 7).

Table 7: List of skills with definitions

Groups	Skills	Definition
Conceptual	Account management/ strategic selling	Proficiency in building long-term, strategic partnerships with customers.
Conceptual	Business and financial acumen	Keenness and quickness in understanding and dealing with a business/financial situation (risks and opportunities) in a manner that is likely to lead to a good outcome.
Conceptual	Business ethics	Ability to make the right business decisions and abide by moral values or corporate standards, even if such decisions are not covered by the legal guidelines.

Groups	Skills	Definition
Conceptual	Challenging sales skills	Proficiency in challenging customers and disrupting their current thinking to teach them something new.
Conceptual	Consultative sales skills	Proficiency in building relationship, creating value and trust with a prospect, and exploring their needs before offering a solution.
Conceptual	Customer engagement	Proficiency in delivering connected experiences to customers through various channels to strengthen your relationship.
Conceptual	Customer success management	Ability to increase customers' satisfaction while using a product or service, and to make the customer as successful as possible, improving customer lifetime value for the company.
Conceptual	Entrepreneurial skills	Ability to promote innovation, business growth, and competitiveness.
Conceptual	Funnel management	Proficiency in monitoring, analyzing, and optimizing the sales funnel as needed on a regular basis.
Conceptual	Industry research and value development	Proficiency in researching and investigating knowledge in the industry, aiming at developing new or improving products, processes, or services.
Conceptual	Objection handling	Proficiency in responding to prospect's concerns in a way that alleviates those concerns and allows the deal to move forward.
Conceptual	Orchestration	Ability of forward-looking external and internal management of the sequence and interplay of different customer touchpoints to advance buyers on their purchase journey while providing them with a superior buying experience.
Conceptual	Product knowledge training	Full understanding and ability to effectively communicate with customers about a product/service, its features, benefits, uses, and support needs.

Groups	Skills	Definition
Conceptual	Solution selling	Proficiency in holistically considering a prospect's needs to recommend specific products or services that will best accommodate their individual problems and concerns.
Human/ interpersonal	Adaptiveness	Ability to adjust to changing circumstances at work, such as process updates, moving priorities, projects, clients, and technology.
Human/ interpersonal	Analytical skills	Ability to break down and manipulate selling-related information into smaller data elements to solve day-to-day sales problems
Human/ interpersonal	Collaboration	Ability to work with others to produce or create something or achieve a common goal.
Human/ interpersonal	Communication	Ability to effectively achieve communicative goals verbally or non-verbally.
Human/ interpersonal	Coping with stress	Ability to deal with stress.
Human/ interpersonal	Creativity	Ability to think about a task or a problem in a new or different way, or the ability to use the imagination to generate new ideas.
Human/ interpersonal	Emotional intelligence	Ability to manage your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you.
Human/ interpersonal	First impression/initial impact	Ability to create a good first impression with customers.
Human/ interpersonal	Interpersonal skills/relationship management	Ability to communicate or interact well with other people.
Human/ interpersonal	Leadership (formal and informal)	Ability to lead, influence or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations.
Human/ interpersonal	Learning	Ability to acquire new knowledge, such as new product knowledge, processes, or technologies.

Groups	Skills	Definition
Human/ interpersonal	Listening	Ability to listen to prospects and customers with complete attention and intent to understand what they say, what their pain points are, what problem they are looking to solve, etc.
Human/ interpersonal	Personal skills	Ability to perform well in the workplace, including how they manage themselves, perform their work and interact with coworkers, and management.
Human/ interpersonal	Personality identification and communication impact	Ability to identify customer's personalities and make impactful communication.
Human/ interpersonal	Prioritization	Ability to determine the most important and urgent tasks and how much time to allocate to each task.
Human/ interpersonal	Process improvement/problem solving	Ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems or improve existing business processes to optimize performance, meet best practice standards or improve quality and the user experience.
Human/ interpersonal	Questioning	Ability to ask questions to engage the prospect, build rapport, discover needs, agree on those needs, manage the sales conversation and gain commitment.
Technical	Business case development	Ability to develop a business case to lift the quality of discussions with customers, as it quantifies how solution will impact the customer's business, showing investment, benefits, and risks.
Technical	Closing	Ability to convince a prospect to accept the offer, usually taking place during the final stage of the sales or negotiation process.
Technical	Follow-up	Ability to communicate to prospects and customers that you are actively interested and involved in ensuring that their needs can be met to convert leads and make satisfied customers more loyal.

Groups	Skills	Definition
Technical	Implementation planning/project management	Ability to create and implement sales strategies with the purpose of growing a company's customer base and improving its revenue numbers.
Technical	Internal systems literacy	Knowledge and understanding of internal systems, processes, and infrastructure.
Technical	Negotiation	Ability to conduct strategic discussions (or series of discussions) with customers that ideally lead to a deal being closed, reaching an acceptable agreement to everyone.
Technical	Presentation	Ability to tell a compelling story, highlight your value proposition, and align with your audience's needs and desires.
Technical	Prospecting	Ability to initiate and develop new revenues (business) by searching for potential customers, moving prospects through the sales funnel until they convert to revenue generating customers.
Technical	Social Selling	Ability to research, connect, and interact with prospects and customers on social media network to build relationships with them.
Technical	Technology	Ability to handle digital assets to perform specific job tasks efficiently and independently.
Technical	Writing skills and reading literacy	

## 5. Overview of B2B Customer Management Education

### 5.1 Top Master's programs in B2B sales in Europe

We used the Sales Education Foundation's list of Top Universities for Professional Sales Education in 2022. This list features university programs that (1) offer at least three sales-specific courses, (2) receive external accreditation, and (3) have university recognition of the program. There are 156 North American and 18 European universities on the list. Among these, we select only European universities with Master's programs based on the scope of the CustMas project. The final list consists of eight universities (Appendix C).

### 5.2 Customer management skills taught in Top Master's programs

We downloaded and investigated the top European sales education programs' curriculums and courses' content (Appendix D). From the courses' content, keywords about skills are extracted. They are classified into three categories (Table 8). As can be seen from Table 8, these sales programs already covered a wide variety of necessary salespeople's skills. There are many analytical and technical skills to help students quickly adapt to the jobs' requirements later. For example, big data, sales metrics, and business intelligence courses equip students with an analytical mindset and tool knowledge to derive insights from data to assist decision-making.

*Table 8: List of skills from top European universities in Sales Education*

Conceptual	Human/ Interpersonal	Technical
Business acumen	Analytical skills	Big data
Career management	Communications	Business modeling
Change management	Critical thinking	Contract preparing
Cross-cultural Marketing and Selling	Decision-making	CRM software
Customer experience management	Influencing	Data science
Customer journey management	Intercultural	Digital technologies management
Customer relationship management	Interpersonal	Digitalisation
Customer segmentation	Leadership	IT trends knowledge
Customer-orientation	Learning agility	Market research
Entrepreneurial	Listening	Negotiation
Financial acumen	Personal branding	Performance Measurement

Conceptual	Human/ Interpersonal	Technical
Incentivising	Problem-solving	Presentation
Innovation	Questioning	Pricing policy design
Lean management	Teaching	Project management
Marketing	Teamwork	Prospecting
Opportunity identification	Time management	Sales performance management
Personality analysis		Social media
Planning		Specific industry technical
Relationship selling		
Sales channels		
Sales enablement		
Sales management		
Sales methods		
Sales process		
Sales strategy		
Social selling		
Strategic management		
Strategic sourcing knowledge		
Value co-creation		

### 5.3 Preliminary evaluation of gaps in customer management education

Though top sales education programs consider the impact of technology on the sales force, they do not fully reflect all the necessary modifications that digital transformation brought to sales. Specifically, sales activities have been shifted online, from lead generation to negotiation to customer support. Sales students should be taught how to use digital tools to find and approach leads (Gross et al., 2021). They should master e-negotiation skills, which means negotiating using emails or other online channels (Singh et al., 2020). Students should also know how to use automation tools to follow up with customers effectively (Park et al., 2010). These contents seem to be missing from the current curriculums.

On the other hand, technology also impacts the sales force on an individual level. For example, using information and communication technology could increase salespeople's stress (Kramer & Krafft,

2023). Therefore, sales students should be prepared to deal with potential stress from using technology. Another emerging need of salespeople is learning agility. With the rapid digital transformation of the sales force, they must quickly learn and unlearn (Mattila et al., 2021), raising the importance of salespeople's learning skills. It then requires research projects like CustMaS to investigate and design suitable education and training to develop these skills.



## 6. Summarizing and Linking to Intellectual Output 2

This white paper aimed to explore the state-of-the-art knowledge of customer management skills in digitalizing B2B markets. From a thorough literature review and job advertisement analysis, we delivered a list of current B2B customer management skills with definitions (Table 7). These are necessary skills that have been studied and mentioned either by researchers or practitioners. Additionally, this white paper provided a list of skills that are being taught in top graduate programs in Europe (Table 8). This output represented a basis for future stages of the CustMaS project.

This white paper highlights the lack of a comprehensive programme of study of B2B customer management skills in digital transformation. Besides, though a wide range of B2B sales skills has been covered in European graduate education, there are still missing skills that are found important in this digital transformation era, such as learning agility, e-negotiation, or stress management. Therefore, the upcoming stages of CustMaS projects are important in that they will offer a qualitatively and quantitatively validated list of skills and an effective program to teach those skills in higher education in Europe.

The second phase of this project will build on the list of customer management skills and run interviews with salespeople from best practice B2B companies. The objective of the interviews will be to explore (1) currently important skills that have not been mentioned in the previous phase and (2) future skills that are predicted to be crucial in digital transformation by practitioners. The research questions of the IO2 include:

1. What is the state-of-the-art customer management skills model in B2B markets?
2. What are the future customer management skills in B2B markets?
3. What do salespeople need to learn to upskill or reskill in a digitalizing context?

After the second phase, the final list of skills will be delivered and used as input for the third phase to quantitatively validate the skill model by a survey. Later, a curriculum to educate customer management skills will be developed, tested, and refined. Finally, a Massive Open Online Course will be implemented.

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## 8. Appendix

### A. List of Journals

1. Journal of Marketing
2. Journal of Marketing Research
3. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science
4. Journal of Business Research
5. Industrial Marketing Management
6. Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management
7. Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management
8. Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing
9. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing

B. List of Job Advertisements

No.	Position	Company	Industry	Management level	Time
1	Sales Support Representative	Jansen AG	Real Estate/Construction	Entry-Level	Sep-22
2	Sales Support Representative	Invue	Consumer Goods / Retail	Associate	Sep-22
3	Sales Support Representative	Laborie	Pharma / Healthcare / Biotech	Entry-Level	Sep-22
4	Sales Representative/ Sales Executive/ Sales Consultant	Dalux	Information Technology	N/A	Sep-22
5	Sales Representative/ Sales Executive/ Sales Consultant	Allema	Industrial Machinery	N/A	Sep-22
6	Sales Representative/ Sales Executive/ Sales Consultant	NielsenIQ	Consultancy Services	Associate	Sep-22
7	Consultant	PaymentGenes	Information Technology	Entry-Level	Sep-22
8	Account Manager	Resideo	Consumer Goods / Retail	Mid-Senior Level	Sep-22
9	Lead Generator Specialist	Consulink	Information Technology	Entry-Level	Sep-22
10	Lead Generator Specialist	Kerridge	Information Technology	Entry-Level	Sep-22
11	Sales Development/ Business Development	Kerridge	Information Technology	Mid-Senior Level	Sep-22
12	Sales Representative/ Sales Executive/ Sales Consultant	Bleckmann	Automotive / Transportation	Associate	Sep-22
13	Sales Engineer	HBK	Consultancy Services	N/A	Sep-22
14	Sales Engineer	TATA Steel	Mid-Senior Level	Industrial Machinery	Sep-22
15	Sales Engineer	Dilute	Associate	Industrial Machinery	Sep-22
16	Sales Engineer	Biothane	Pharma / Healthcare / Biotech	Associate	Sep-22

No.	Position	Company	Industry	Management level	Time
17	Customer Success Management	Microsoft	Information Technology	Mid-Senior Level	Sep-22
18	Account Manager	Jamf	Information Technology	Mid-Senior Level	Sep-22
19	Account Manager	GlobalBlue_IT	Consumer Goods / Retail	Associate	Sep-22
20	Customer Success Management	NATO	Consultancy Services	Associate	Sep-22
21	Customer Success Management	Pleo	Financial Services / Banking	Mid-Senior Level	Sep-22
22	Inside Sales Representative	Agilent	Industrial Machinery	N/A	Sep-22
23	Inside Sales Representative	Sappi	Forestry; wood; pulp and paper	Associate	Sep-22
24	Inside Sales Representative	FedEx	Automotive / Transportation	N/A	Sep-22
25	Outside sales Representative	Grabowski	Information Technology	Associate	Sep-22
26	Outside sales Representative	Jordex	Logistics	Associate	Sep-22
27	Account Manager	NCAB	Mechanical and electrical engineering	Associate	Sep-22
28	Sales Manager	Greif	Manufacturing	Mid-Senior Level	Nov-22
29	Sales Manager	Accenture	Consultancy Services	Mid-Senior Level	Nov-22
30	Sales Operations Manager	Hubbado	Information Technology	Level	Nov-22
31	Sales Operations Manager	Navico	Software Development	Director level	Nov-22
32	Head of Sales Enablement	Personio	Information Technology	Director	Nov-22
33	Sales Director	Wipro	Software Development	Director	Nov-22
34	Sales Director	Splunk	Information Technology	Director	Nov-22

No.	Position	Company	Industry	Management level	Time
35	Vice President of Sales	10x Geonomics	Pharma / Healthcare / Biotech	Vice President of Sales	Nov-22
36	Vice President of Sales	Billtrust	Financial Services / Banking	Vice President of Sales	Nov-22
37	Chief Revenue Officer	N/A	Media; culture; graphical	Chief Revenue Officer	Nov-22
38	Chief Revenue Officer	IndaHash	Media; culture; graphical	Chief Revenue Officer	Nov-22



### C. List of University Programs

No.	University	Program's name	Program's type	Length (years)	Overview	Link
1	Aalborg University Business School	MSc in Economics and Business Administration (Marketing)	Master of Science	2	The program is designed around the two core topics of value creation and value capture, with a specific focus on the marketing-sales interface. Creating superior customer value, and capturing part of this value, is the primary goal of sales and a means of attaining a competitive edge. Thus, maximization of customer value is seen as a critical goal for firms.	<a href="https://studieordninger.aau.dk/2020/23/1723">https://studieordninger.aau.dk/2020/23/1723</a>
2	Aalen University of Applied Sciences	Master of Engineering Leadership in Industrial Sales and Technology	Master of Engineering	1.5	The institution provides Interdisciplinary (Techno-Commercial know-how) that is unique in Europe. Also, a Bachelor Program (B. Eng.) as well as Master Program (M. Eng.) is offered. Hidden Champions provides a Strong Practical as well as Research Orientation.	<a href="https://www.hs-aalen.de/en/courses/25/info">https://www.hs-aalen.de/en/courses/25/info</a>
3	Copenhagen Business School	MSc in Economics and Business Administration - Sales Management	Master of Science	2	By combining tools and theories from customer insights and data analytics with knowledge of digital platforms and business model innovation students will learn to strategically position digitally based marketing and sales functions. Working with this omni channel management focus will enable students to develop and optimize integrated marketing and sales functions to create customer	<a href="https://www.cbs.dk/uddannelse/kandidat/msc-in-economic-s-and-business-administration-sales">https://www.cbs.dk/uddannelse/kandidat/msc-in-economic-s-and-business-administration-sales</a>

No.	University	Program's name	Program's type	Length (years)	Overview	Link
					value, increase business performance and implement commercial excellence.	<a href="#">managem ent</a>
4	Cranfield University	Strategic Marketing MSc	Master of Science	1	Cranfield offers sales modules on several postgraduate programs, both full-time, part-time Masters courses and executive education. Cranfield has a long history of research in key account management and sales, and our executive education programs for key account managers have been running for over thirty years. We are also known for teaching negotiation skills. The sales module on our MSc Strategic Marketing includes a live client case, and many students have gone on to become successful key account managers.	<a href="https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/som/masters-courses/strategic-marketing">https://w ww.cranfi eld.ac.uk/ som/mast ers- courses/s trategic- marketing</a>
5	ESB Business School	Master of Arts in Strategic Sales Management	Master of Arts	2	The program is an integrated, dual 90 ECTS Master of Arts. All participants must be employed in a sales role with a time-reduced contract (75% of regular working hours). The courses are offered exclusively to the 21 participants (max capacity) and have to be completed within a 2-year period. The partner companies are primarily from the IT, automotive and mechanical engineering sectors.	<a href="https://www.esb-business-school.de/fileadmin/user_upload/ESB_Business_School_20210731_CSH_SS_M_2021_final_LL_20930.pdf">https://w ww.esb- business- school.de /fileadmi n/user_u pload/ESB _Business _School _20210731 _CSH_SS _M_2021 _final_LL_2 0930.pdf</a>

No.	University	Program's name	Program's type	Length (years)	Overview	Link
6	Euridis Business School	Master's in Business Engineering and Business Developer	Work-study program	2	All students follow a work-study program organized by the school where they spend 1 week in school and then 3 weeks working in a sales role within a company that in turn pays for the tuition. Most of the faculty staff are experienced B2B sales professionals.	<a href="https://www.euridis-ecole.com/master-professionnel/">https://www.euridis-ecole.com/master-professionnel/</a>
7	Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences	Master of Business Administration Leading Business Transformation	Master of Business Administration	1.5	Students pursue a Degree Programme in Sales, Bachelor of Business Administration. The focus of the studies is on solution sales and on the business to business environment. The content is taught by combining theory and practice. As free choice studies students can take a class in which they are coached for the national sales competition. Haaga-Helia organizes the Best Seller Competition every other year.	<a href="https://opas.haaga-helia.fi/en/13338/en/97514/LEBUM21/426/year/2020">https://opas.haaga-helia.fi/en/13338/en/97514/LEBUM21/426/year/2020</a>
8	University of Applied Science in Wiener Neustadt	Master of Arts Business Development & Sales Management	Master of Arts	2	The Master programme 'Business Development & Sales Management' deals with selling processes in the business-to-business market area. It further develops analytical skills, leadership practices and negotiation competencies. Additional focus areas are the digitalization of the selling processes, the identification of market potentials and an analysis of the structure from selling organizations. Sales	<a href="https://www.fhwn.ac.at/studiengang/business-development-und-sales-management#top">https://www.fhwn.ac.at/studiengang/business-development-und-sales-management#top</a>

No.	University	Program's name	Program's type	Length (years)	Overview	Link
					<p>trainings are conducted in Sales Science Lab of the University. This facility combines sales psychology with a digital training infrastructure.</p>	

#### D. List of Courses from Top Sales Education Programs

No	Group	Course
1	Analytics Courses	Applied Data Science and Machine Learning
2		Big Data Commercial Strategies
3		Big Data, Insight and Analytics
4		Business analysis of companies
5		Business Analytics
6		Business Consulting Analytics
7		Business Intelligence and Customer Insight
8		Data Analytics
9		Data Science and Analytics
10		Deep Learning and Artificial Intelligence for Analytics
11		Futures Research
12		Introduction to Data Science
13		Market & industry analyzes
14		Network Analysis and Natural Language Processing
15	Business Management Courses	Acting as Coach and Facilitator
16		Business Creation
17		Business Design
18		Business Models for Digital Platform Ecosystems
19		Business plan and provisional budget
20		Business Strategy
21		Business Strategy, Entrepreneurship
22		Change Management
23		Company Insight
24		Conscious Leader
25		Critical thinking
26		Digital commercial law
27		Diversity and Inclusion in Global Organisations
28		Economics of Strategy & Competitiveness
29		Economy and globalization
30		Employee Experience and Employer Brand
31		Evolving Organizations
32		Experimental and Engaging Strategy
33		From Opportunities to Business
34		Growth Through Entrepreneurial Resources and Networks
35		International Strategic Sourcing
36		Leadership Clinic
37		Leadership strategies

No	Group	Course
38		Lean Sales and Distribution
39		Learning Culture in Organizations
40		Management of human resources, commercial team
41		Mergers and Acquisitions
		MNCs and Ecosystems. Innovation and Value Co-creation for
42		Sustainable Development
43		New Venture Creation/Corporate Entrepreneurship
44		Price & Value Management
45		Project Management
46		Reflective Leadership
47		Responsible Business and Sharing Economy
48		Strategic Human Resources Management
49		Strategic Management
50		Strategic Thinking and Growth Strategies
51		Strategy in Practice
52		Sustainability in Organisations
53	Customer Management Courses	Business Model Development
54		Customer Orientation & Service Excellence
55		Customer touch point management
56		Design Service Systems and Value Networks
57		Development of Customer Journey and Leading Customer Experience
58		Digital Service Design
59		Digital Smart Selling, Indirect Selling, Differentiation Selling
60		From Services to Experiences and Transformations
61		Imagineering with Lego Serious Play Methodology
62		Influence Strategy and Lobbying
63		Interpersonal Communication, Insight Selling
64		Opportunity & Relationship Management
65		Service Design
66		Strategic Business Review, Professional Writings
67	Finance Courses	Accounting and Finance for Strategic Marketing
68		Accounting Information Systems
69		Customer and Firm Profitability
70		Financial Accounting
71		International Finance
72		Portfolio Theory and Financial Applications
73		Principles of Finance
74		Strategic Financial Management
75		Topics in Asset Management

No	Group	Course
76	Innovation Courses	Advanced Innovation Management
77		Contemporary Issues in Innovation and Entrepreneurship
78		Creating Innovation and Customer Value
79		Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship
80	Internationalization Courses	Global Environmental Dynamics and Firm Responses
81		Internationalisation in Emerging Product and Geographic Markets
82		Intercultural Management
83		Internationalisation of Diverse Organisational Forms
84	Marketing and Sales Courses	Leadership and Intercultural Skills
85		Advanced Principles of Marketing
86		Advanced Principles of Marketing Strategy
87		Advanced Sales Skills
88		Appearance & visualization in sales
89		Applied Sales Management in Technology Companies
90		B2B Marketing/Growth Hacking
91		Best prospecting techniques 2.0
92		Brand Experience Development
93		Business Development Challenge
94		Change Management in Sales
95		Commercial action plan
96		Complex sales applied to concrete cases
97		Complex Sales Methods
98		Consumer Behaviour
99		Contemporary Issues in Marketing
100		CRM and Customer Experience
101		Customer Experience Management and Value Co-creation
102		Customer Value, Marketing Strategy, and Sales Management
103		Developing and Incentivizing Sales and Marketing
104		Developing Sales Oriented Organization
105		Digital Marketing
106		Digital Marketing and Social Media Marketing
107		Digital Marketing Technologies
108		Employee Development in Sales
109		Foundations of Customer Buying Behavior
110		Global Sales Development
111		H2H Communication
112		Integrated Marketing Communications
113		International Negotiation Skills
114		Leading and Structuring International Sales Teams

No	Group	Course
115		Leading Creative Planning and Production
116		Legal aspects in sales and business development
117		Legal Topics in Sales
118		Managing Brands
119		Negotiation & Game Theory
120		Offer & portfolio management
121		Online Store as Sales Channel
122		Performance Management
123		Performance Measurement and Rewarding
124		Presentation Skills & Techniques
125		Problem Structuring & Communication
126		Processes and Strategic Development of Sales
127		Professional Selling
128		Prospecting & social selling
129		Retailing and Omnichannel Management
130		Sale of digital solutions, IT Business Game
131		Sales & Marketing Fundamentals
132		Sales Concept
133		Sales controlling & forecasting
134		Sales Enablement
135		Sales in Technology Organizations
136		Sales Management & Leadership
137		Sales Psychology
138		Strategic Brand Management
139		Strategic Marketing and Planning
140		Strategic Sales
141		Strategic Sales Management in Technology Companies
142		Structuring, supporting and negotiating an offer by value
143	Technology	Advanced Digital Technologies
144	Courses	Artificial Intelligence in Modern Business
145		Cloud Services
146		Design and Assessment of Technical Systems
147		Digital Engineering and Technology
148		Digital Product Development
149		Digital solutions and technologies for the company
		Digital solutions for companies Network/Telecom, Big Data,
150		Cybersecurity
151		Digital Technology Essentials
152		Digital transformation and the company in 2030



No	Group	Course
153		Emerging Technology Opportunities
154		Enterprise ICT Architecture
155		ERP, MES and PLM solutions
156		Fundamentals of the digital sector
157		Fundamentals of the High Technologies sector
158		ICT Management Best Practices
159		ICT Security Basics from Trust to Blockchain
160		ICT Sourcing
161		Industry 4.0 and industrial innovations
		Innovative digital technologies SMAC (Social, Mobile, Analytics, Cloud),
162		Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, IOT, Mobility
163		Lean Production
164		Management of Digital Service Development
165		Production Technology
166		Robotic Automation
167		Technology Literacy and Digitalisation in Organisations
168	Projects	Applied Social Data Science Capstone Project
169		Business Cooperation
170		Commercial Business Project
171		Commodity Economics
172		Foundations of Marketing, Value Creation and Sales Management
173		Innovation and Societal Challenges
174		International Business Theory. Trade, Investment and the MNE
175		International Entrepreneurship
176		International Management Functions
177		International Strategic Management
178		Marketing Consultancy Project
179		Pricing, Sales Metrics and the Marketing Ecosystems
180		Quantitative Methods in Finance
181		Research and practice-based seminar

## E. Glossary

B2B	Business to Business
CustMaS	Project Customer Management Skills in Digitalizing B2B Markets
IO	Intellect Output in Project CustMaS