

Building a high-performing sales team

An industry report on boosting the
top line for IT/ITeS.



welcome to brighter

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Introduction

The Indian Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) industry is breaking new ground every day. Its growing trajectory has fueled significant economic transformations that have altered the country's perception among the global ecosystem. Many pundits state that 400 of the Fortune 500 companies either have their centers in India or are currently outsourcing work to Indian technology companies.

But the industry is only as strong as the sales teams that drives it forward. After all, they are the face of the company within the sector, responsible for bringing, retaining and nurturing customers. And recently, amid all the churn and change in markets globally, sales processes have transformed considerably. Be it due to the evolving buyer personas, the onset of innovative technology or the growing complexity of products and processes, selling has become trickier and a more uphill task for sales teams of all sizes.

This scenario undoubtedly mandates recruiting high-performing, technology-empowered, revenue-generating, information-rich sales professionals itching to redefine traditional selling processes. It is not just about academic laurels or technical qualifications, but the ability to leverage skills and talent in times of uncertainty or unanticipated change and create a level playing field for the organization in a hyper-competitive business environment.

However, when building a sales team, many hiring managers either neglect such competencies or do not prioritize them. Either way, they need to refocus on competencies that are more important now in hiring the right talent, given the uncertain times.

Fortunately, there is an ideal way to find great sales talent and build high-performing teams.

The Mercer | Mettl playbook for the IT/ITeS industry identifies such sales-specific competencies vital for the success of an IT company. These are highly recommended, based on expert industry research and the assessments created by the company.

With substantial industry evidence, the report urges organizations of all sizes, from startups to Fortune 500 companies, to rigorously assess their sales hiring frameworks and adopt scientific methods to make appropriate and research-backed hiring decisions.

So the question remains, how to build a high-performing sales team?

Let's run-through a typical sales structure in an IT company. It may not be necessary for all companies to have the same anatomy.



An overview of the IT/ITeS industry

Given below is an overview of the IT/ITeS industry. It includes list of critical responsibilities expected from a sales representative, along with different types of IT sales that largely form the foundation of the IT industry.

Key roles and responsibilities of an IT sales professional

The role of a sales rep has evolved from creating traditional product pitches to delivering a more customized, highly tailored solution to its customers. For instance, the IT/ITeS sector witnesses a phenomenal flush of new products in the market every day. Thus, as a part of the job requirement, an IT sales professional is expected to keep pace with the market trends with technical and product knowledge to advise, guide and support customers when making purchases.

But, there's more to the tasks, duties, functions and responsibilities involved.

Listed below are a few dominant responsibilities recommended for an ideal IT sales role in an IT company. It is split into three vital categories for easy understanding:

1. Pre-sales

Involves identifying and sharing detailed information regarding technical specifications, often tailored to meet customer needs. Pre-sales is critical in winning prospective customers and renewing the existing ones.

2. Sales

Involves using technical and product knowledge to recommend an ideal hardware/software/service benefitting both the customer and company.

3. Post-sales (or after-sales)

Involves providing constant support related to hardware and software, enabling customers to get the most out of their purchase.



To deepen your knowledge about the role, below is a brief breakdown of an IT salesperson's job:

- An IT sales professional establishes and maintains positive customer relationships to identify and suggest the right technological hardware and software as per their needs and requirements. The role extends to maximizing product satisfaction and improving the experience by solving any issue promptly.
- Although it is not imperative to have advanced technical skills, it is beneficial if an IT salesperson has the basic technical knowledge and the enthusiasm to learn about new technologies and their uses to steer decision-making.
- Researching potential clients via deep data analysis and creating a lucrative package to meet customer requirements is also a part of a tech professional's job.
- The profile of an IT sales rep further includes conducting thorough product research that keeps it abreast of a particular technology and product updates.
- **Technology salespeople abide by two goals:**
 - 1) Promoting the products of their company
 - 2) Providing value propositions to the customers.

Three kinds of IT sales include:



Hardware sales

Hardware sales include computers, switches, routers, hubs, monitors, servers, racks, etc.

- The hardware sales industry is mature and competitive. However, this has created a selling environment that yields minimal profits.
- Hence, the IT industry is gradually moving away from hardware sales as computers and phones become more compact.



Software sales

Software is a program and other operating information used by a computer.

- Software sales are a billion-dollar industry. Moreover, a software sales professional is responsible for selling one specific type of software, often to a particular industry.
- It is presumed that sales professionals know the software inside out to guide the customer efficiently.



Services

IT service sales focus on helping clients navigate their way through the world of IT.

- Services come in many forms. For example, it can be a simple service of running network cabling through a building or providing consulting services while virtualizing their data center.
- Services are the glue that holds the IT Sales world together. Those in IT Service Sales sell hardware solutions, coupled with software often bundled with installation services.

This section advocates an appropriate strategy that will come in handy when creating a sales department in tandem with the future roadmap. But all of this is incomplete without demystifying industry trends. Thus, the following section sheds light on some key findings on the current industry scenario.

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Key industry findings

There is no doubt that some IT/ITeS firms took a hit in the last two years owing to the COVID-19 disruption. But since then, experts have observed recovery signs with some mega competencies they can focus on when hiring for sales roles. It paints a lucrative picture for industry stakeholders.

The current section decodes [six impressive findings](#) related to the IT/ITeS industry's development. It is followed by some key sales competency recommendations to help build a more dynamic framework for organization success.

Key finding 1

As per the research done by [Gartner](#), new technology buyers outside the enterprise will occupy a larger share of the overall IT market. This will open large swathes of buyers and buying segments for technology and service providers. Business buyers in enterprises, consumers of all kinds, retailers and distributors, and many others will now look to use technology for various needs.

What does this mean?

- The IT industry is witnessing a digital transformation where the customers are no longer restricted to traditional technology buyers.
- There are new uses cases that need regular assessment.
- Product mixes and services to satisfy new needs have to be built.
- IT/ITeS organizations need to hire a sales force ready to be a part of this change and help organizations acquire and retain customers.



Recommendation for sales hiring

- IT companies should focus on assessing business acumen and market awareness to understand how aware candidates are of the changes happening in the industry.
- Along with this, openness to learning also becomes vital as sales professionals would need to constantly learn about new products and services offered by IT companies to service the new uses of various clients.

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Key finding 2

Technology use beyond the IT department into other business areas and consumers expands the scope of technology products, services and use cases they serve. These new users can have varying needs, consumption patterns, price sensitivity, engagement models, buying cycles and other nuances.

What does this mean?

- As the tech industry grows, it visualizes a new customer base and the use cases. This means the complexity of a sale has now increased manifold. The salesperson must understand how their products and services can fit rightly into the client's use case.

Recommendation for sales hiring

- To service the new use cases of clients and understand at what price they will purchase the product, organizations should hire candidates with good problem-solving skills and commercial acumen.



Key finding 3

As per the research done by [Gartner, by 2023](#), an "inside+" direct sales model using virtual interactions with prospects and customers will dominate sales strategies for 60% of vendors.

What does this mean?

- Going forward, customers would prefer virtual interactions. Sales leaders will need to embrace the new dynamics of virtual selling and lean on emerging technology. In addition, they would want the sales team to remain relevant in a rapidly shifting market while maintaining a competitive edge.

Recommendation for sales hiring

- Since it is crucial to have effective communication over virtual channels, organizations should hire candidates with excellent verbal and written communication skills. It will create impactful and smooth conversations with global clients over digital platforms. The focus should be on assessing email writing, and spoken English as these are prominent in ensuring that candidates have good communication skills.

Key finding 4

As per Mercer | Mettl data, a very small percentage of assessments created in the past for IT sales hiring assess competencies such as Creativity and Innovation and Adaptability.



What does this mean?

- Organizations are not emphasizing skills like innovation and adaptability when hiring salespeople, which can adversely affect the sales department in IT companies as they struggle to use innovative tactics to solve for their clients amidst increased competition. Such a situation will also result in a salesforce that is not open to change and is most likely to crumble under the constant change and pressure it creates.

Recommendation for sales hiring

- Organizations should focus on assessing creativity, innovation, and adaptability when hiring sales, ensuring that their sales force comes up with new and novel ideas to sell their products and services. It will also ensure that their IT sales force is open to changing circumstances and can perform well in ambiguous situations. As per research, these should become must-have competencies when testing for sales roles in the IT industry.

Key finding 5

Customers are delaying purchases because the pandemic has exacerbated an already uncertain global economy.

What does this mean?

- The uncertainty in customers will influence the sales cycle and duration in which a typical sale would be completed. This will then affect the revenue generated and many companies might lose clients.

Recommendation for sales hiring

- IT companies should hire salespeople who have excellent analytical and problem-solving skills. A salesforce that possesses these qualities will close deals faster and solve client issues quicker than others.



Key finding 6

As per Mercer | Mettl data, a majority of the assessments delivered for IT sales have tested candidates on Cognitive competencies and skills.

What does this mean?

- Organizations believe that Cognitive competencies are essential for their salesforce.

Recommendation for sales hiring

- IT companies should continue emphasizing cognitive ability as competencies like commercial acumen, verbal and written communication and analytical ability and problem-solving are extremely relevant cog competencies for sales roles.

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Does this section get you thinking about how well a candidate you hire knows about the current and emerging best practices associated with IT sales? Are they aligned with the company's overall sales strategy? Then it would be best if you headed over to the next section.

The above insights, along with Mercer | Mettl's stellar industry experience, intrigued the psychometric experts to deep-dive into the top competencies needed by top-performing IT sales professionals to deliver business goals while adapting to changing industry and customer needs. The following section is a sneak peek into the kind of position-specific competencies leaders need to look for when hiring high-performing salespeople.

Top sales competencies as per Mercer | Mettl experts

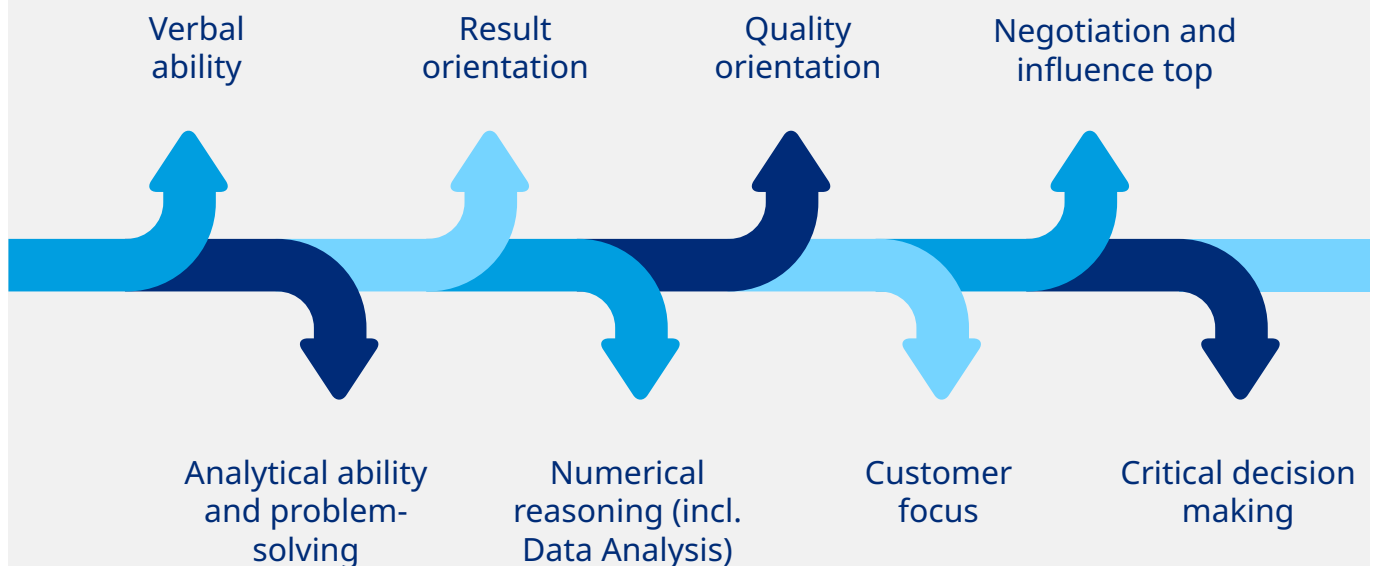
Leaders in the IT/ITeS must implement strategies and practices that perhaps no one else is enforcing to be ahead in the race or to lead the pack. This begins with paying specialized attention to the key competencies that are a “must-have” when evaluating prospective talent. As a result, companies can gain mission-critical professionals that have the potential to regain and sustain their competitive footing. For instance, one of the few critical competencies expected in an IT salesperson is ‘customer focus.’ It means demonstrating expertise in reorienting offerings as per the modern consumer’s demands.

But how does an IT organization or a hiring manager know what sales competencies to identify?

Mercer | Mettl’s team of psychometric experts has found the last piece of the puzzle.

With assessment technology applied on primary, investigative research on a performance bell curve of employees and strong secondary analysis from the subject matter and industry experts, following competencies and sub-competencies have been found to influence job performance and impact business success.

Must-have competencies in an IT sales professional seem to be:



This means that scouting for a sales professional's behavioral competencies in the IT industry is insignificant. Competencies that focus on evaluating how comfortable candidates would be with change and how they would perform under ambiguous circumstances are not being tested enough as a consequence.

Recommendation for sales hiring

However, the three pillars organizations should focus on when evaluating behavioral competencies include:

- Creativity and innovation
- Adaptability
- Openness to learning

By focusing on behavioral competencies, hiring managers can gain a much clearer picture of the applicant's suitability for the role, regardless of the length of their resume or experience.

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Mercer | Mettl's IT sales hiring framework

Armed with insights using Mercer | Mettl assessment, leaders can develop and initiate appropriate sales hiring strategies to drive revenue, sales and business performance – creating a genuine competitive advantage in the industry.

Mentioned below is a suggestive IT sales framework recommended by the Mercer | Mettl team-

Recommended IT Sales Framework

Competencies	Definition	Tools
Creativity and innovation	Identifying innovative solutions and trying new approaches to deal with challenges to ensure the organization stays relevant with changing times of doing tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Profiler • Cognitive Ability
Analytical ability and problem-solving	The ability to analyze the given information from different perspectives by breaking it down into simple components and structuring the information in a logical manner to arrive at a solution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Ability
Verbal ability and effective communication	Being able to put across one's thoughts and ideas clearly and succinctly by listening attentively and using appropriate language to engage the audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Simulator • Speaking Simulator • Personality Profiler
Customer focus	Being able to meet customer expectations and requirements in a manner that provides customer satisfaction and leads to further opportunities to grow and develop the relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Profiler • Situational Judgment Test
Commercial acumen	The ability to work with information in number based format to make important business decisions and analyzing its impact on how good a decision is commercially.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive Ability • Functional Assessment
Business acumen	The ability to understand the workings and structure of the organization as well as the marketplace to take important business decisions and advance organization's goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Profiler • Cognitive Ability • Functional Assessment • Behavioural Competency Interview
Adaptability	Being open to change and being able to adjust and adapt one's behavior or approach to changing circumstances and situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Profiler • Cognitive Ability
Openness to learning	Demonstrating a commitment to learning by proactively seeking out new information and opportunities to develop one's skills and knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Profiler

How Mercer | Mettl can help solidify your sales hiring process

Mercer | Mettl's proprietary tool, [Mettl Sales Profiler](#), provides a competency-based framework to build winning sales teams. It is a one-of-its-kind profiler and identifies the critical behavioral and cognitive competencies based on organization's unique requirements. Mettl Sales Profiler is a complete package combining assessments that help measure personality, core sales skills, aptitude, learning agility, communication, motivation, etc. In addition, Mercer | Mettl's subject matter experts can help create a sales context for any organization and even help design a competency framework suited to specific needs.

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Conclusion

There is a significant difference between the way most companies think and how high-growth companies think about success. The IT sales framework is the critical differentiating factor that shapes how a high-growth company maps its succession in a fast-paced world. Interestingly, the talent canvas of the IT/ITeS industry is evolving with the sector. Hence, the profound insights in this handbook are set to empower forward-thinking leaders to focus intensely on specific competencies that can help build mission-critical IT sales teams in no time.

It's not rocket science to gauge that if companies utilize these insights to select the right sales rep, they can substantially increase the probability of retaining the right talent, too. And if industry stalwarts learn from the scientifically validated projections and revise their competency framework, there is no denying that they can lead a company to new heights. Little do we mention usher in a wave of change by navigating through any crisis as well.



About us

At Mercer | Mettl, our mission is to enable organizations to make better people decisions across two key areas: acquisition and development. Since our inception in 2010, we have partnered with more than 4,000 corporates, 31 sector skills councils/government departments and 15+ educational institutions across more than 90 countries.

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