



# DOES ADAPTIVE SELLING INCREASE SALES PERFORMANCE?

Compelling Evidence for the Transformative  
Impact of an Adaptive Sales Approach





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# Introduction to Adaptive Selling

There's one question that all B2B revenue leaders, sales managers, and executives ask, and most of them would pay a hefty sum to get an accurate answer:

## ***“What makes a great sales rep?”***

We all want a list of the characteristics that predict consistent sales performance. It would certainly make hiring, training, and day-to-day coaching much easier.

Unfortunately, no such list exists. That's why our industry is plagued by high turnover (25% annually according to CSO Insights) and widespread underperformance (only

24.3% of salespeople exceeded their quota in the last year according to Sales Insights Lab).

In addition, B2B buyers suffer from a barrage of emails, direct messages, and calls from exasperated sales reps who are caught up in a soul-crushing *numbers* game, convinced that the only way to hit quota is to increase the raw volume of outreach.

In a challenging environment like this, how do the most efficient sales organizations maximize the effectiveness of every rep?

Here's the secret: they don't play the numbers game; *they adapt.*

Only **24%**  
of salespeople exceeded their  
quota in the last year.

*(according to Sales Insights Lab)*

**25%**  
is the average annual turnover  
rate for sales reps across all  
industries.

*(according to CSO Insights)*







Every sales rep has their own unique selling style. Some like to take a challenging and assertive approach while others tend to be more relational and consultative.

The best ones recognize a simple but profoundly important truth... the pitch that worked for one buyer may not work for another, even if they're in the same role or industry. With strong self-awareness and communication skills, top reps have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of their buyer and personalize the entire sales process—from outreach to close.

This technique is called **adaptive selling**, and sales professionals who master it often seem like they have a cheat sheet for every conversation.

Adaptive selling is the ability for sales reps to change their pitch, process, and communication style based on the needs and preferences of each buyer. It enables B2B sellers to be more effective communicators and that directly translates into stronger sales performance.

**Adaptive selling is the ability for sales reps to change their pitch, process, and communication style based on the needs and preferences of each buyer.**

Being mindful of how individuals are motivated, their behavioral tendencies and their buying process can be especially impactful when navigating difficult stages in the sales process, like objection handling or negotiations. It can also help with building trust and connecting with buyers which makes it a highly successful B2B sales strategy.

The concept of adaptive selling has been researched for decades with a countless number of studies conducted to support its validity. This eBook aggregates key findings from multiple studies, all of which points to **adaptive selling improving overall sales performance.**

# Who Benefits from Adaptive Selling?

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Adaptive selling not only enhances the buyer experience – it also improves the seller experience by encouraging sales teams to learn new communication skills that can be used throughout their career. Depending on where you fit into the sales organization, adaptive selling can provide many benefits.

## Sales Reps

### Key Benefits

- Get better at personalizing/communicating to individual buyers.
- Raise conversion and win rates.
- Avoid landmines in the sales process with specific personality types.
- Accelerate communication skills development.

Although many reps can find success utilizing a singular strategy or approach, the highest performers understand that each prospect is unique in their buying journey. By quickly identifying key differences among their buyers and adjusting their approach accordingly, sellers can personalize the sales process and maximize the chance of closing a deal.

For example, some buyers may appreciate a brief and strictly-business approach, while others may need more time to build trust and rapport before committing to the deal.



When you are able to know your prospect and adapt your selling approach to suit them, they are far more likely to continue the conversation.

Adaptive selling also enables sellers to be more effective when upselling because they've already developed a unique relationship with their buyers. Furthermore, learning adaptive selling techniques builds vital skills for any sales professional and serves as an excellent tool for accelerating careers.

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## Sales Managers

Adaptive selling benefits sales managers by improving their team's outcomes and by enabling managers to more effectively coach and train their reps.

### Key Benefits

- Spend time more efficiently (fewer email reviews, direct intervention, etc).
- Raise conversion and win rates.
- Reduce ramp-time for new reps.
- Provide more effective 1:1 coaching.

Adaptive selling allows managers to spend less time reviewing communications and more time managing closable deals – which adds up to more efficient use of their time. This approach can also be used internally to help managers better understand and motivate their team; personality insights shed light on how sales reps prefer to work, communicate, meet, and more, facilitating more effective coaching and communication.





## Sales Executives

As organizations grow, adaptive selling helps maintain consistent performance amongst reps and allows managers to maximize the impact of their time– making it a great strategy both for external performance and internal alignment.

### Key Benefits

- Maintain consistent performance as the organization grows.
- Maintain a consistent buyer experience.
- Raise conversion and win rates.
- Help sales managers maximize the impact of their time.

Maintaining a consistently excellent buyer experience is paramount to building a loyal customer base. Because sales reps are the face of any company, they must be able to form genuine connections with prospects and understand how to communicate the value of their product to each buyer. Adaptive selling enables reps to consistently build trust, communicate effectively, and sell with more confidence – no matter who the customer is.

# The Research behind Adaptive Selling

## Study #1: Journal of Marketing Research & AMA (2006)

In 2006, authors George R. Franke and Jeong-Eun Park published a study in the Journal of Marketing Research titled *Salesperson Adaptive Selling Behavior and Customer Orientation: A Meta-Analysis*. The goal of the research was to complete a more thorough analysis on adaptive selling behaviors and how it affects both a sales rep's performance and overall job satisfaction.

### The method

This research combined articles from 33 different journals, 48 dissertations, and six conference proceedings which represented 155 different samples from over 31,000 salespeople. To create an accurate reading, researchers only used studies of native English-speaking sales forces.

The samples gathered were inclusive of various sales approaches such as telemarketing, organizational, retail sales, door-to-door, and more; they also represented different products and industries such as pharmaceuticals, financial services, computer services, real-estate, and advertising.

The research took into account both subjective and objective performance measures which included: self-rated performance, manager-rated performance, objective performance, and job satisfaction.



## The results

RELATIONSHIP	DIRECT EFFECT	T-SCORE	TOTAL EFFECT	T-SCORE	RESULT
Adaptive Selling Behavior > Self-rated Performance	0.20	6.26**	0.29	9.66**	Highly Statistically Significant
Adaptive Selling Behavior > Manager-rated Performance	0.04	1.28	0.08	2.50*	Statistically Significant
Adaptive Selling Behavior > Objective Performance	0.12	3.63**	0.14	4.65**	Highly Statistically Significant
Adaptive Selling Behavior > Job Satisfaction	0.25	7.85**	0.31	10.20**	Highly Statistically Significant
Job Satisfaction > Self-rated Performance	0.15	4.94	0.15	4.94**	Highly Statistically Significant
Job Satisfaction > Manager-rated Performance	0.16	4.91	0.16	4.91**	Highly Statistically Significant
Job Satisfaction > Objective Performance	0.12	3.72	0.12	3.72**	Highly Statistically Significant

\* =  $p < 0.05$  (which means the relationship is statistically significant)

\*\* =  $p < 0.01$  (which means the relationship is HIGHLY statistically significant)

## Adaptive selling increases all measurements of sales performance

Research shows that adaptive selling behaviors increased all performance measures: self-rated performance, manager-rated performance, and objective performance. Even the most simple adaptations during a sales interaction - like how a sales person reacts to questions, comments, body language, etc. - can improve rapport and reduce buyer objections.

## Adaptive selling increases a sales rep's job satisfaction

There are many theories around why job satisfaction improves when adaptive selling behaviors are implemented. Some think adaptive selling can be intellectually stimulating resulting in a better selling experience. Others think the effort to notice and respond to different buyers may give salespeople an inherent feeling of fulfillment. But whatever the reason, research reveals when adaptive selling behaviors are implemented, overall job satisfaction increases.



***“Research largely concludes that Adaptive Selling Behavior improves salesperson performance regardless of the circumstances.”***

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(According to Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey '98; Spiro and Weitz '90; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan '86).



## Study #2: Journal of Marketing & AMA (2006)

Richard G. McFarland, Goutam N. Challagalla, & Tasadduq A. Shervani's 2006 research study titled Influence Tactics for Effective Adaptive Selling identifies six different influence tactics sales representatives use to persuade buyers and which of those tactics resonate best across three different buyer orientations.

While prior research on adaptive selling focused more on how prevalent sales reps change their sales tactics, it did not address whether the adaptations/tactics used are suitable. This research tests which influence tactics are most effective for different buyer orientations.

### The method

Researchers partnered with an industrial reseller (or dealer) of agricultural equipment for a Fortune 500 company. These dealers operate in a competitive environment in which customers can choose from multiple brands and the purchasing decision is most often made by an individual rather than by a committee.

The study consisted of two phases:

1. A questionnaire mailed to customers asking them to identify the sales representative they worked with and to respond to all questions about that sales representative. 459 valid responses were provided by customers.
2. A questionnaire mailed to all sales reps identified by customers in phase 1. The questionnaire asked sales reps to respond to all questions with that specific customer in mind. 193 valid responses were provided by sales reps.

The study used bi-directionally matched dyads meaning customers reported on the influence tactics that sales representatives used, and sales representatives reported on which buyer orientation best fit the customer.



## The 3 Buyer Orientations

### Task-Oriented Buyers

- Focuses on the task at hand
- Values efficiency throughout buying process
- Highly goal-oriented

### Interaction-Oriented Buyers

- Easy to talk to/enjoys engaging in conversation
- Enjoys building rapport during sales
- Interested in building connection with sales representatives

### Self-Oriented Buyers

- Cares more about what they have to say, rather than the seller
- Typically dominates the conversation
- Speaks highly of themselves constantly to impress the seller



## The 6 Seller Influence Tactics

### Information Exchange

- Provides relevant information based on buyer's purchase options and needs
  - Learns about buyer's long term goals
  - Addresses any concerns or issues
  - Ensures adequate product resources and training are available
- 

### Recommendations

- Highlights the benefits their product will provide
  - Provides evidence and logical arguments to back up any claims and recommendations
  - Paints a visual picture of positive impacts the product will have on buyer's business
  - Emphasized that any suggestions made were in the best interest of the buyer
- 

### Threats

- Informs buyer that preferential treatment will stop if proposals are ignored
- Threatens to stop doing business with buyer if requests aren't followed
- Threatens to become uncooperative if demands are not met
- Indicates that they can make things "more difficult" for the business if requests aren't met



## Promises

- Offers special treatment in exchange for new business
  - Offers additional benefits if buyer is reluctant
  - Offers incentives for business in exchange for agreeing to purchase request
  - Proposes a new/special offer for business to change their stance on an issue
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## Ingratiation

- Acts in a friendly manner prior to asking for what he or she wanted
  - Sympathizes with you about the added problems that his or her request caused
  - Makes you feel good about yourself through compliments and praises before making a sales pitch
  - Discusses shared interests and/or hobbies prior to discussing sales issues
- 

## Inspirational Appeal

- Motivates people to go beyond their personal interests for the greater good by appealing to a higher-order of psychological needs
- Tries to get you excited about what he or she was selling
- Describes the use of his or her products or services with enthusiasm and conviction
- Delivers a sales pitch which tries to attach emotional relevance to whatever is being sold



# The results

SELLER INFLUENCE TACTIC	BUYER ORIENTATION		
	TASK-ORIENTED	INTERACTION-ORIENTED	SELF-ORIENTED
Information Exchange	**Extremely statistically significant	**Extremely statistically significant	*Highly statistically significant
Recommendation	*Highly statistically significant	*Highly statistically significant	Statistically NOT significant
Threats	Statistically NOT significant	Statistically NOT significant	Statistically NOT significant
Promises	Statistically NOT significant	Statistically NOT significant	**Extremely statistically significant
Ingratiation	Statistically NOT significant	*Highly statistically significant	*Highly statistically significant
Inspirational Appeal	Statistically NOT significant	Statistically NOT significant	Statistically NOT significant

\* =  $p < 0.01$  (which means the relationship is HIGHLY statistically significant)

\*\* =  $p < 0.001$  (which means the relationship is EXTREMELY statistically significant)

## **The influence tactic that offers near-universal appeal is *information exchange***

While the study explicitly states that buyers are more complex than previously believed, one influence tactic reported statistical significance across the 3 different buyer orientations. That seller influence tactic is information exchange. Recommendation was close in offering universal appeal across different buyer orientations but showed statistical insignificance with self-oriented buyers.

## **Sales representatives find greater success when combining multiple influence tactics**

Overall, when buyers have several orientations (like the findings in this research), sales reps are better off using a combination of tactics rather than only one or two tactics. The encouraging news for sales managers is that sales reps already adapt their influence tactics based on a buyers' orientation, even when a buyer aligns along multiple orientations. This suggests that if sellers can correctly identify buyer cues, they are likely to utilize that information to maximize their chance for closing a sale.



***Adapting sales tactics to different buyers is important for superior performance.”***

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(According to Spiro and Weitz 1990; Sujan 1986; Weitz 1981)

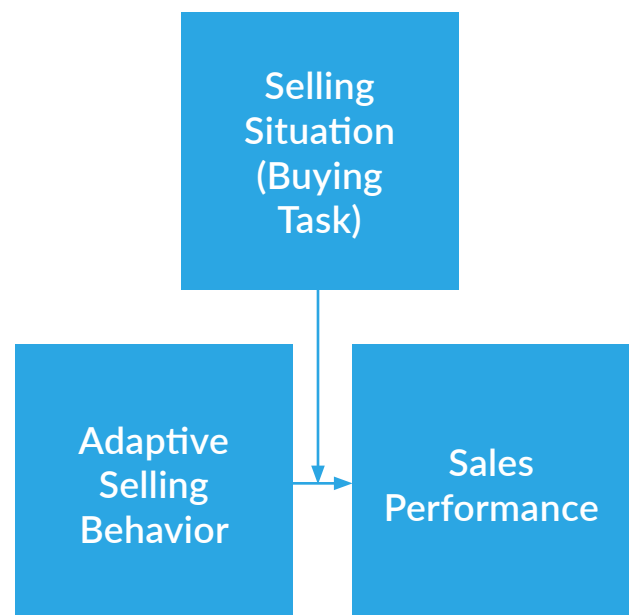
# Study #3: Journal of Business Research (2003)

Stephen S. Porter, Joshua L. Wiener, Gary L. Frankwick conducted a study titled The moderating effect of selling situation on the adaptive selling strategy-selling effectiveness relationship. This study aims to provide valuable insights into how different selling situations affect the relationship between an adaptive selling strategy and sales performance.

While previous studies focused on linking an adaptive selling strategy to a sales rep's effectiveness, they did not take into consideration the various selling situations a sales rep may face.



This study investigates the effect certain selling situations have on the relationship between an adaptive selling strategy and selling effectiveness outcomes. Results of the study suggest that an adaptive selling strategy enhances sales performance outcomes, and that this relationship is strongest in modified rebuy and new buy situations.





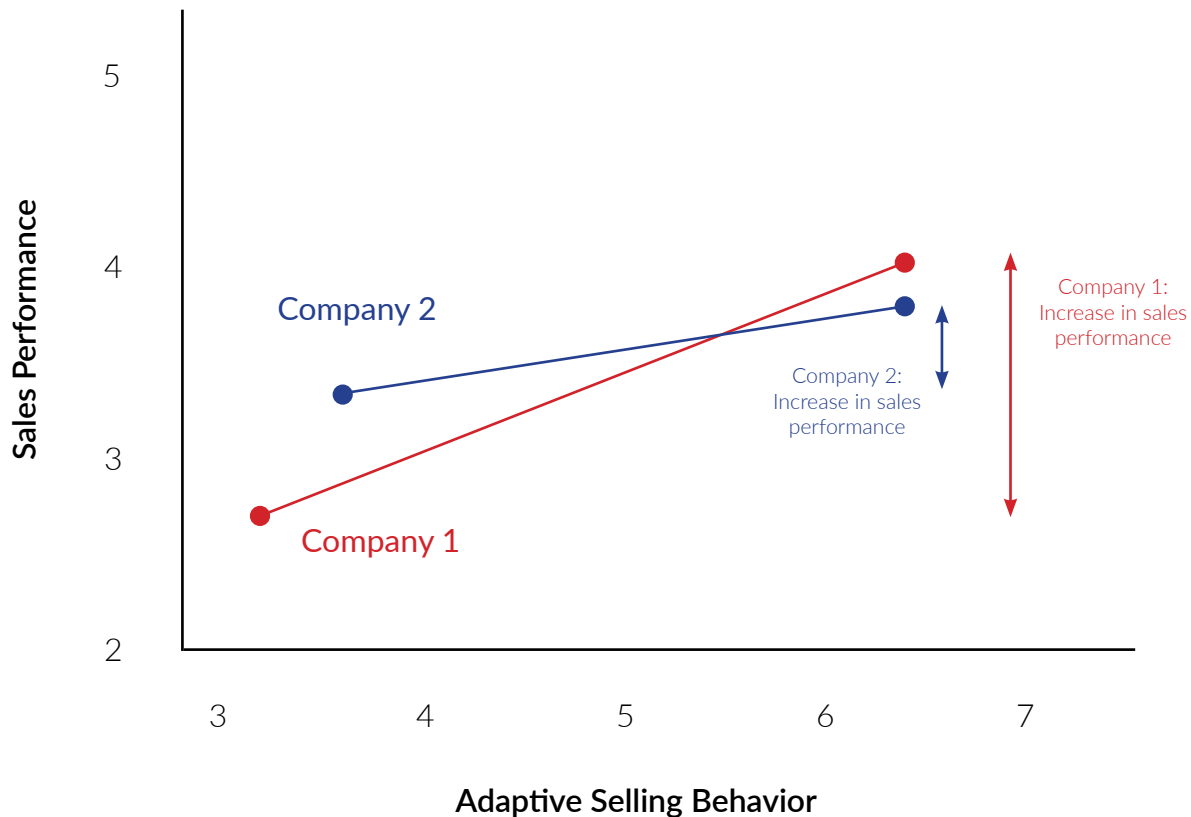
Researchers worked with two companies representing maximally dissimilar selling situations. The first company produces industrial and computerized electric motors and the typical selling situation reflects modified rebuy or new task buying situations. The second company sells primarily to large home improvement centers and independently owned hardware outlets. The typical selling situation reflects straight rebuy.

A sample of salespeople from each of the two companies was administered a paper-and-pencil questionnaire designed to measure their performance and predisposition to practice adaptive selling using self-reported evaluations. Overall, valid responses from 168 completed surveys were used in the analysis.



Selling Situation	Description
Straight Rebuy	A customer has purchased an item in the past and in all likelihood will reorder from the supplier in the future. This routine decision involves low levels of perceived risk and low information needs.
Modified Rebuy	A customer purchased similar items in the past; however, some aspects of the buying task has changed. For example, an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) may have redesigned a product for which the item is a component part. As a result, new information is required to reevaluate previous decisions regarding the component. New solutions may be considered during this process.
New Task Purchase	A customer is buying for the first time. Since buyers may have little experience with new vendors, and because they have little or no experience with the product/service itself, their information needs are very high.

## The results



### Sales teams focused on winning new customers will benefit most with adaptive selling training

Not all people possess adaptive selling skills, and sales training is most likely needed to improve and reinforce those skills. However, sales training is expensive and sales executives may need to identify which reps (when trained) will have the biggest positive impact on sales performance when trained.

Based on this research, sales teams that focus on winning new customers require the most amount of adaptability, and therefore, require the most training. What's more interesting is this group (when trained) has the capability to increase sales performance more than any other group.

Selling Situation	Adaptive Selling Requirements
Straight Rebuy	Requires a sales representative to be <b>MINIMALLY</b> adaptive.
Modified Rebuy	Requires a sales representative to be <b>MODERATELY</b> adaptive.
New Task Purchase	Requires a sales representative to be <b>HIGHLY</b> adaptive.

## Adaptive selling increases sales performance across selling situations

Regardless of whether the selling situation is a straight rebuy, modified rebuy, or new purchase, adaptive selling increased overall performance regardless of the selling situation. However, the selling situations that benefit most when adaptive selling is used are modified rebuys and new purchases. Although straight rebuy selling situations may not require adaptive selling skills, salespeople must still be able to develop cooperative relationships with buyers– which still may require some level of adaptiveness.

This shows that a one-size-fits-all selling strategy does not yield optimal sales performance, and sellers should instead learn to adapt their behavior to meet their customer’s needs.



*When organizations understand the importance of the relationship between adaptiveness and sales performance, sales training will emphasize information-gathering skills, proposing creative solutions, and aiding the customer after the sale by answering questions and providing technical support.”*

(According to Boorum et al.'98)

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

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Sales reps who put adaptive selling into daily practice can turn into better communicators, convert deals at a higher rate, and accelerate their sales careers.

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**1** Adaptive selling increases all measures of sales performance.

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**2** Adaptive selling increases sales performance across selling situations.

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**3** Adaptive selling increases a sales representative's job satisfaction.

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**4** *Information exchange* is the seller influence tactic that offers near-universal appeal.

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**5** Sales reps will find greater success when combining multiple influence tactics.

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**6** Sales teams focused on winning new customers will benefit most with adaptive selling training.

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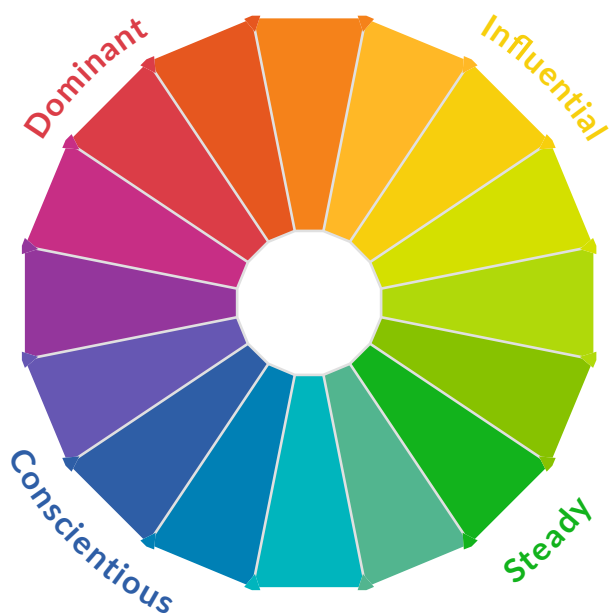
# Overview of Crystal

Crystal, the *adaptive selling* platform, gives sales teams a turn-key solution for implementing, reinforcing, and scaling an adaptive sales organization.

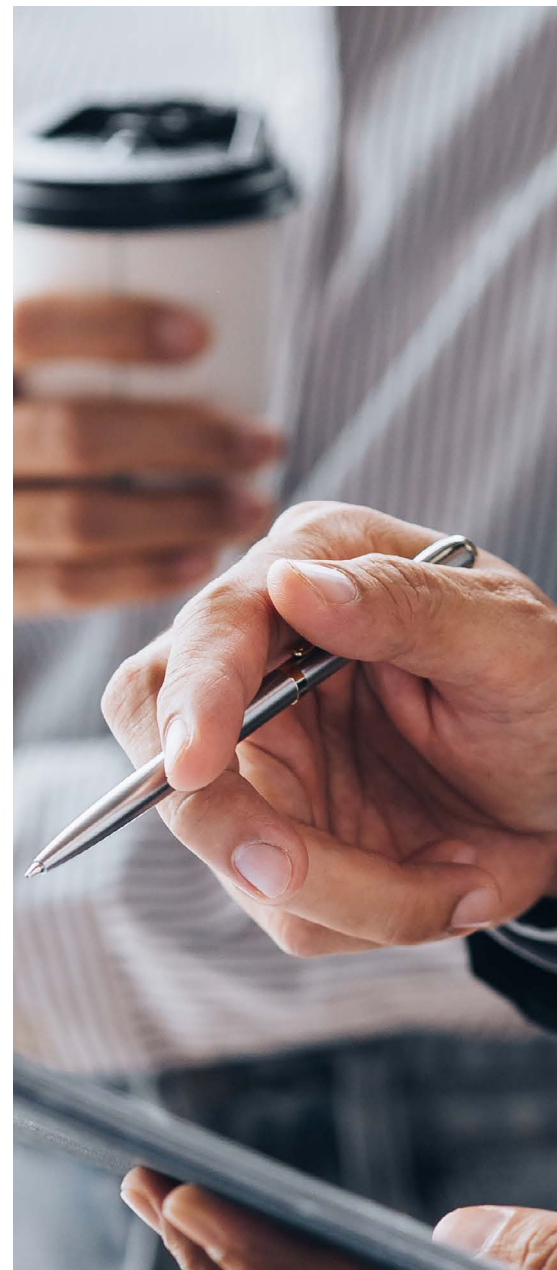
Using the proven-personality framework DISC, Crystal leverages machine learning to analyze publicly available information on any prospect. Our software then shares unique tips for how to best communicate with your prospect, especially if they're a stranger and you've never met them.

By categorizing an individual into different DISC types: D (dominance), I (influence), S (steadiness), and C (conscientiousness), sellers can more easily understand their buyer's natural behavior and sell to them accordingly.

**You can see the 4 overarching DISC types on this model:**



- D** Dominant (D-type) personalities are direct, persuasive, and decisive.
- I** Influential (I-type) personalities are adventurous, visionary, and outgoing.
- S** Steady (S-type) personalities are steady, accepting, and agreeable.
- C** Conscientious (C-type) personalities are objective, collected, and reserved.





In the early stages of the sales process, Crystal's software predicts any prospect's DISC types so reps can more effectively start sales conversations. In the later stages, reps can combine their own observations with Crystal's insights to craft their own personalized approach. It looks like this:

**Erin Maker**  
Predicted profile

**HOW TO COMMUNICATE**

Create a stable, reliable, and cooperative space to communicate with each other.

**DO**

- ✓ Put her concerns and risks at the forefront over building rapport
- ✓ Take additional time to highlight the stability and security of the product

**DON'T**

- ✗ Don't use a demanding or pushy tone; stay calm and supportive
- ✗ Don't push for a conclusion too quickly without taking time to build trust

**Noor Elarbi**  
Predicted Profile

**Cd (Skeptic)**

**QUICK TIPS**

I need to...  
Call Noor

So I can...  
Make a sales pitch

- Make a sales pitch
- Negotiate
- Make a good impression
- Persuade to take action
- Schedule a meeting
- Discuss pricing
- Gather Information
- Set Expectations

Our platform is purposefully built to benefit all members of the sales organization while unlocking adaptive selling across all stages of the selling process. By using Crystal, sales teams truly get a turn-key solution that implements, reinforces, and scales adaptive selling.

# Meet Crystal, *the adaptive selling platform*

Give your sales team personality insights and advice for their clients, so they can adapt to any type of prospect.



LIKES COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

LIKES STABILITY AND SECURITY



LEARN WHY TOP B2B SALES TEAMS ALREADY USE CRYSTAL

SCHEDULE DEMO

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