Seismic

Preparing for AI-Guided Selling: A Roadmap for Forward-Thinking Businesses

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Executive summary

As discussed in our paper, The Next Era of Sales: AI-Guided Selling, the future is one where AI systems "guide" sellers, making specific and timely recommendations to them to accelerate sales. These AI-guided sales enablement solutions will provide proactive, in-the-moment, and detailed advice to sales representatives and marketers, and execute the tedious tasks to implement those recommendations, upon human approval.

AI-guided selling has enormous potential. Businesses who use these selling systems will be at a competitive advantage. But, transitioning to AI- guided selling will not be easy. Organizations must prepare now in order to be in a position to effectively deploy and use this transformational technology in the future.

To get to AI-guided selling, organizations must implement sales enablement solutions, now, with a plan to leverage content analytics. That plan should ensure development of organizational maturity to create a data-driven mindset across revenue-generating teams as well as build in data-driven go-to-market processes.

Following this roadmap will normalize data analysis and data use as a part of business decision-making. It will build user trust in intelligent recommendations and automated processes. And it will lay the IT groundwork for the sales and marketing tech stack and integrations that will be necessary when it comes time to deploy AI-guided selling solutions mid- decade.

Why content analytics provides a path to AI-guided selling

In B2B selling, content is the fuel that feeds the marketing and sales machine. From internal content, like sales playbooks and battlecards, to customer- facing content like white papers, web pages, and pitch decks, content is consumed and leveraged for generating leads, building pipeline, and closing deals.

Content analytics is key to keeping the revenue- generating engine running. With content a central component of selling, teams must be able to measure its performance, gather signals from its use, and optimize content and sellers' use of content in order to maximize revenue.

Measuring content allows organizations to measure everything from marketing effectiveness to seller best practices to buyer engagement and deal risks. That's why sales enablement solutions, which may encompass marketing enablement systems, surface analytics that include:

• Content performance (both external and internal)

• Effectiveness of content across different channels

• Efficiency of content production (cost in time and money)

By managing content end-to-end and tracking the data from creation to close, sales enablement solutions can give a complete picture of content use, performance, and value, enabling continuous revenue optimization.

Thus, when AI-guided selling comes to fruition, content analytics will be a key factor that, combined with conversational analytics, social signals, web analytics, will feed AI tools. Content recommendations will also be one of the outputs from AI systems as they guide sellers in seeding conversations, accelerating the customer journey, and winning sales.

> **Knowing that people are having conversations is great, but if you don't have the content platform to back up the conversation platform, you're not having the right conversations. You've got to tell them the right things."**
>
> **Tom Strader**
> *VP Product Management, Seismic*

A three-step roadmap to prepare for AI-guided selling

Using content analytics as the stepping stones, there are three steps to get to AI-guided selling. Organizations beginning the content analytics journey traditionally follow this trajectory:

1. Shed light through basic visibility

2. Make data-driven decisions via real-time insights

3. Optimize outcomes by managing the full go-to-market motion through intelligent, holistic data views

AI- GUIDED SELLING

OPTIMIZE OUTCOMES

DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

SHED LIGHT
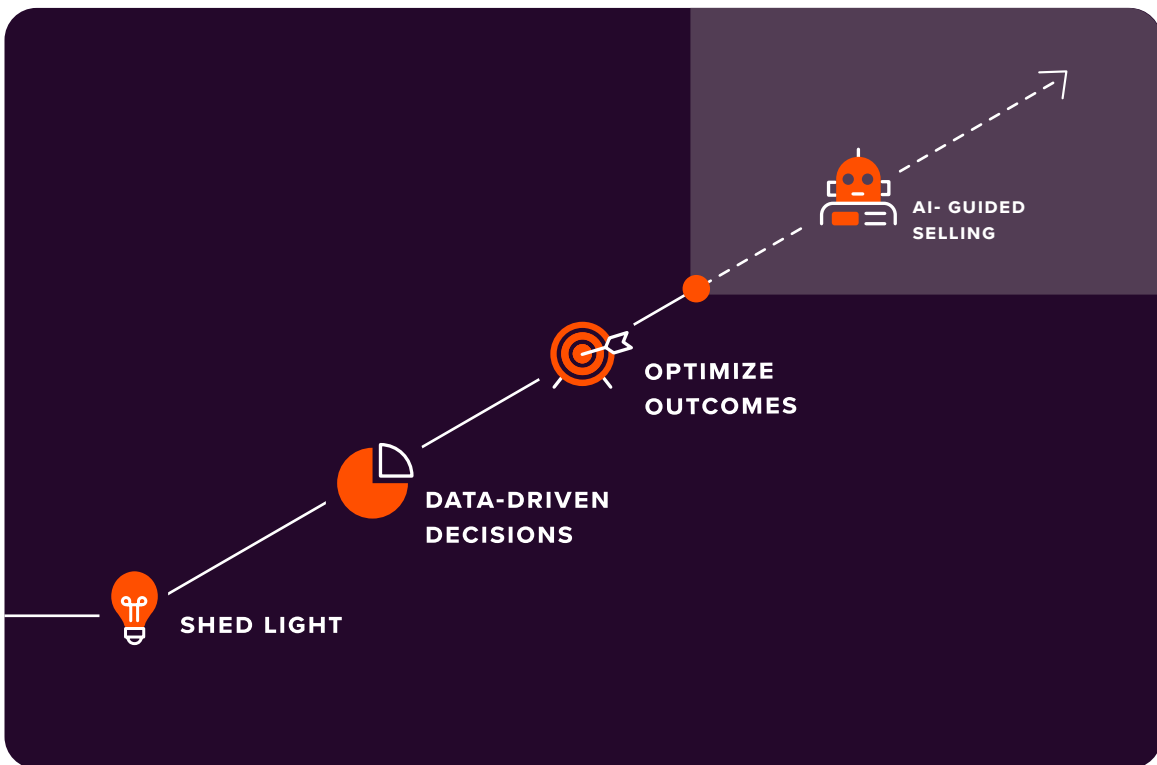
Different groups and roles in your revenue-generating teams have different needs when it comes to content analytics. To foster a data-driven mindset, your teams must look to data for answers to their business questions:

Marketing

- What content and messages are working and which aren't?
- Where are there content gaps we need to fill?
- How is content contributing to revenue?

Enablement

- What content are our top reps using so we can scale those best practices?
- What's the payoff for our enablement and content activation work?
- How well is the platform being adopted?
- Are sellers able to discover the content they need efficiently?

Sales Marketing

- What deals should we strategize with reps on?
- How can I scale best practices across my team?
- Which reps might need coaching?

Individual Sellers

- Which of my buyers are the most/least engaged?
- How can I follow up with them to engage them?
- What content should I use with which buyer at which stage?

What will AI-guided selling look like?

Read our complimentary white paper,
The Next Era of Sales: AI-Guided Selling

to learn what factors are shaping the future of selling and what AI-guided selling will look like.

Step 1: Shed light

Organizations that have little experience with content analytics usually start with in- application reports and out-of-box dashboards that provide a snapshot in time, i.e. basic views of historical data. Despite its limitations, businesses that haven't had this kind of data before can find it extremely valuable. Historical information about what content was used by sellers and how buyers engaged with it can be analyzed to improve future performance.

Metrics and measures to implement

Marketing	Enablement	Sales Management	Individual Sellers
• Content saved, shared or personalized by sellers	• Log-ins into the sales enablement platform	• Amount of content sent by sales reps to buyers *(to evaluate platform engagement)*	• Targeted content for a particular persona at a particular stage in the sales cycle
• Content activated by channel	• Percent of content being viewed by reps	• Top performing content being sent by sellers *(by open rate and views)*	• Content buyers opened/ didn't open
• Content views and downloads by type, channel, and campaign	• Percent of reps sending content	• Amount of content being personalized for individual buyers *(to evaluate platform engagement)*	• Time spent engaging with the content, including the best content for follow-up with a particular persona at a particular stage in the sales cycle
• Unused content		• Open rates for seller-sent content	

Organizational changes for increased content analytics maturity

Culture	Processes	Sales Management
• Gain executive sponsorship for content analytics	• Include a review of historical data when planning for the future	• Make out-of-the-box reports and/or dashboards visible and available on-demand to individual contributors
• Have teams regularly present data-based reports in team meetings	• Establish high-level KPIs	• Measure use of platform analytics features by teams
• Encourage individual users to back up suggestions with data	• Ask teams to report monthly against their KPIs	

Step 2: Make data-driven decisions

Once teams use data on a regular basis and begin to see the value of it, you can move to more sophisticated insights that can drive real-time decisions. Through customized dashboards and reports that focus on specific teams, industries, segments, or stages of the customer journey, your team members are able to see what's happening with specific segments of customers. This detailed and up-to-date information enables them to pivot more quickly to make tactical or strategic changes that bring tangible results.

Metrics and measures to implement

Marketing	Enablement	Sales Management	Individual Sellers
• Opens and downloads of content by persona, industry, buyer journey stage, segment	• Ratio of content recommended versus sent	• Implement engagement scores to show recipient engagement levels (opens and time reading)	• Content engagement by specific buyer roles
• Time spent viewing content by persona, industry, journey stage, segment	• Teams and leaders personalizing and sending the most content	• Active promotion of content that is used by most successful reps	• Content engagement analytics across prospects
• Common content changes being made by sellers	• The most common/ preferred channels for sellers to get information	• Content scoring formula that surfaces best performing content to sellers	
• Seller content searches without matching content			
• Time to market for content			
• Content contribution to pipeline			

Organizational changes for increased content analytics maturity

Culture	Processes	Sales Management
• Require reports in cross- team meetings such as pipeline reviews or quarterly business reviews	• Ensure common KPIs across teams	• Integrate with email messaging tools (Outlook, Gmail)
• Teach all users to "fish" for data; Help users understand the meaning of data	• Measure sales managers' and team members' use of the sales enablement platform, content and content analytics	• Integrate sales enablement with the CRM at the opportunity level
• Drive adoption of sales enablement platform across all teams	• Include content analytics use in performance goals	• Adopt advanced capabilities including centralizing news and seller information, enabling platform capabilities on mobile apps, and automating content personalization
• Train "data advocates" on each team to customize reports	• Require sellers to keep account records in CRM updated at all times, not just when needing a quote for a deal	

Step 3: Optimize outcomes via improved go-to-market motions

At this stage, you're ready to start firing on all cylinders. That means taking advantage of the full intelligence (AI) capabilities of your sales enablement platform to enable your revenue-generating teams. Silos should be broken down by now with marketing, sales, sales enablement, customer success and other teams aligned. This enables you to leverage data from all sources, integrate it with the data in your sales enablement platform through APIs, and use BI tools to answer even very specific business questions.

Metrics and measures to implement

Marketing	Enablement	Sales Management	Individual Sellers
• Cost and ROI of content by individual asset, campaign, content type • Content contribution to revenue/closed deals • Content effectiveness by sales stage • Content gaps by sales stage, persona, industry, etc.	• Expected sales outcomes based on engagement with content (open rate, volume consumed, etc.) • Feature/platform usage that correlates with positive business outcomes such as quota attainment, representative ramp time, sales velocity • Content engagement rates correlated to win rates • Content most attributed to wins	• Identify team members to coach based on platform usage behaviors that drive most/ least successful outcomes • Content effectiveness by sales stage specific for team	• Implement processes and tools (via APIs) to automate content- related actions, proactively surface data in existing systems at the record level, and make simple recommendations with the ability for sellers to choose appropriate actions

Organizational changes for increased content analytics maturity

Culture	Processes	Sales Management
• Verify that the value of data analytics is fully appreciated. • Dedicate partial or full resources to content analytics reporting and analysis	• Use revenue- based data to set targets with the now proven ability to incrementally improve them	• Integrate the sales enablement platform fully with other core sales engagement solutions (Outreach, Salesloft, etc.) and CRM systems (Salesforce, CRM Dynamics, etc.) • Integrate sales enablement platform fully with email and calendar systems and online meeting platforms to add conversational intelligence • Join the sales enablement platform data with other data sets and BI tools via pre-built integrations, data lakes, or APIs

Conclusion

Companies that have reached step three of this roadmap will be well positioned to take advantage of AI-guided selling platforms as they emerge. These AI- guided sales enablement solutions will be able to ingest different types of data—CRM records, conversational intelligence, content management platform insights, social and digital signals, etc. By combining these data elements with native content analytics and continuously analyzing, these solutions will go beyond simply identifying patterns and become powerful recommendation engines. They will propose specific, granular actions for individuals, teams, and organizations to take. And then over time, they will initiate downstream workflows and actions through APIs and out-of-the-box integrations.

As AI-guided selling becomes actualized, it will usher in a new era. The very nature of selling will change. Sellers will have to adapt to a changing role that involves partnering with AI solutions. Those that do adapt will be far more successful and bring greater revenue to their companies, while increasing satisfaction among buyers who will have true, effective guides on the path to purchase.

The shift to AI-guided selling is inevitable. It may be a smooth transition or one that introduces great disruption. Which type of change your organization experiences and how effectively you are able to implement this transformative technology will depend on the choices your organization makes today to pave the way.

Ready to implement the roadmap?

Get a demonstration of Seismic's Sales Enablement platform and see how you can use Seismic's Content Analytics for your roadmap to AI-guided selling.
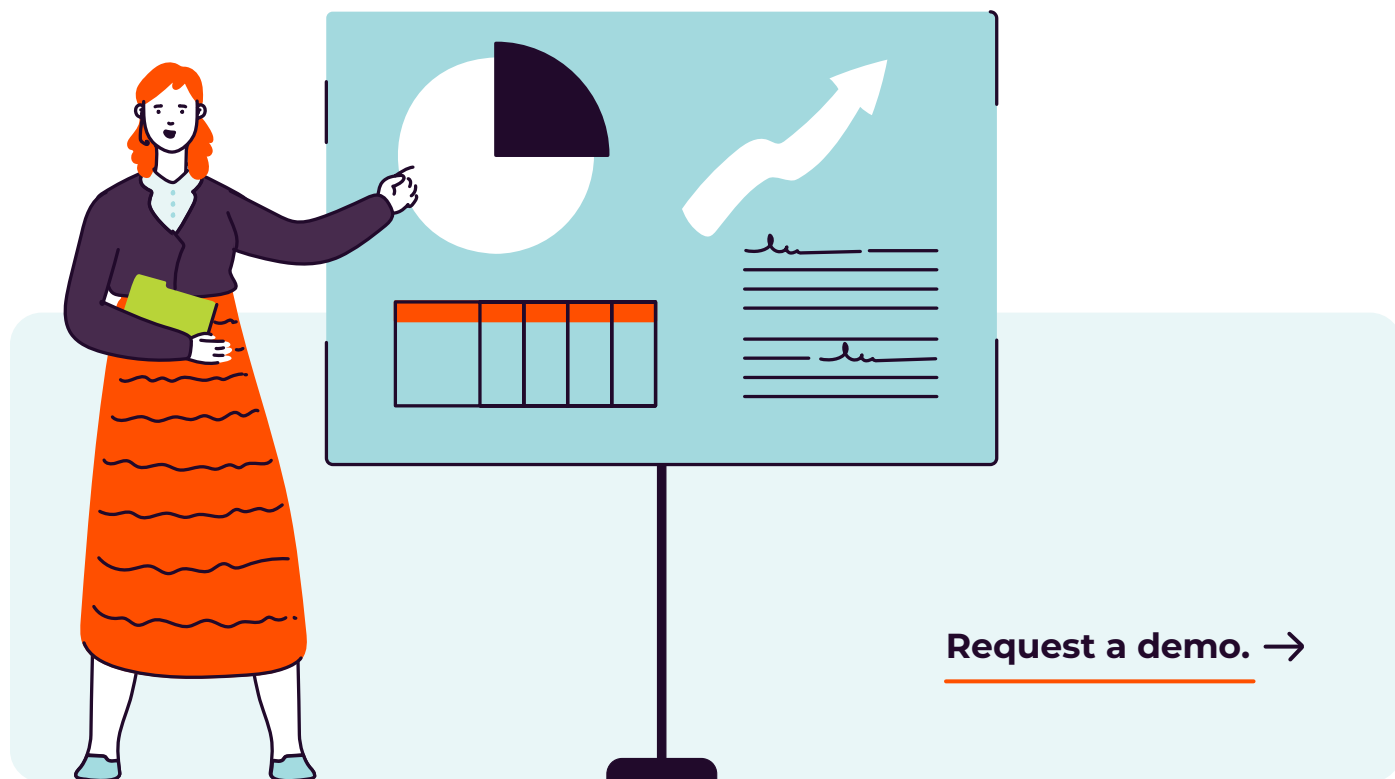
Request a demo. →

About Seismic

Seismic is the global leader in enablement, helping organizations engage customers, enable teams, and ignite revenue growth. The Seismic Enablement Cloud™ is the most powerful, unified enablement platform that equips customer-facing teams with the right skills, content, tools, and insights to grow and win. From the world's largest enterprises to startups and small businesses, more than 2,000 organizations around the globe trust Seismic for their enablement needs. Seismic is headquartered in San Diego with offices across North America, Europe, and Australia.

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