

GROWTH INSTITUTE · EXECUTIVE BRIEF · SEPTEMBER 2026

The 3x Seller

How AI enables a new generation of sellers, and why the software industry needs them now.

Abstract: In 2026, the software industry saw the rise of the AI-powered 10x engineer. As Marc Andreessen argues, with AI writing 90% of the code, engineers can do 10x as much. This paper argues that AI can enable sellers to achieve 3x their current commercial capacity. We call this practitioner the 3x Seller.

The conventional levers of volume, win rate, and deal size do not help achieve 3x. Instead, we start from the constraint that has shaped every human-led effort: 2,000 working hours a year. AI is not bound by the 2,000 hours. Unlike the seller, it can work around the clock and across many opportunities at once. It can take on the tasks it performs more effectively than a person: research, preparation, administration, and monitoring. That frees the seller for the work only humans can do: having conversations with other humans.

The freed hours let the seller take on more opportunities, not just in acquisition, but also in expansion. The latter becomes essential as usage- and outcome-based pricing require sellers to stay involved longer.

AI amplifies how sellers sell today, and most sell to the pain a customer arrives with, not the Impact the customer wants to achieve. The 3x Seller is built on the Impact Seller.

The problem is not the technology. Humans and process move more slowly than technology, and a system moves at the pace of its slowest part. The path to the 3x Seller runs in three stages: 1x, fluency with AI and the human skills that now matter most; 2x, handing the work around the conversation to AI; and 3x, owning the customer beyond the Commit.

Why 3x rather than 10x? Engineering operates in a relatively structured environment, supported by established practices, shared repositories, and repeatable testing. Selling runs through people: buying groups whose priorities shift, whose members disagree, and whose decisions take time the seller cannot compress. These conditions set our working target at 3x.

This Executive Brief is intended for chief executives, revenue leaders, and boards responsible for designing the next generation of commercial organization. It is not a playbook of tactics or a guide to AI tools. We draw on classic scientific thinking, such as Goldratt's Theory of Constraints and Little's Law, and on what AI has already done to software engineering, to show how the role of the seller evolves next.

Keywords: 3x Seller, Impact Seller, AI Readiness, Abundance Era, Commercial Capacity, Economic Diffusion, Throughput, Flow Time, Theory of Constraints, Little's Law, Humans, Process, and Technology, Seller Capacity, Orchestration, Comprehension Gap, Signal Layer, SPICED, Net Revenue Retention (NRR), Annual Contract Value (ACV)

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Chapter 1. The 10x Engineer

In 2004, Paul Graham observed that a great programmer could be 10x or even 100x as productive as an ordinary one, and that in every field, “technology magnifies differences in productivity” (Ref 1). Software engineering, where AI arrived first, offers a useful model for understanding AI’s impact.

1.1 The 10x engineer, measured

The shift began in earnest with GitHub’s Copilot in June 2022 (Ref 24). Within a year 70% of developers were using or planning to use AI tools (Ref 25). By late 2025, agents were taking on whole tasks rather than completing lines of code.

In September 2026, OpenAI published data on how its researchers use coding agents (Ref 2). It shows that in January, coding-agent usage was close to zero. By mid-August, median daily spending exceeded \$600 per researcher, while the top 10% spent more than \$7,000.

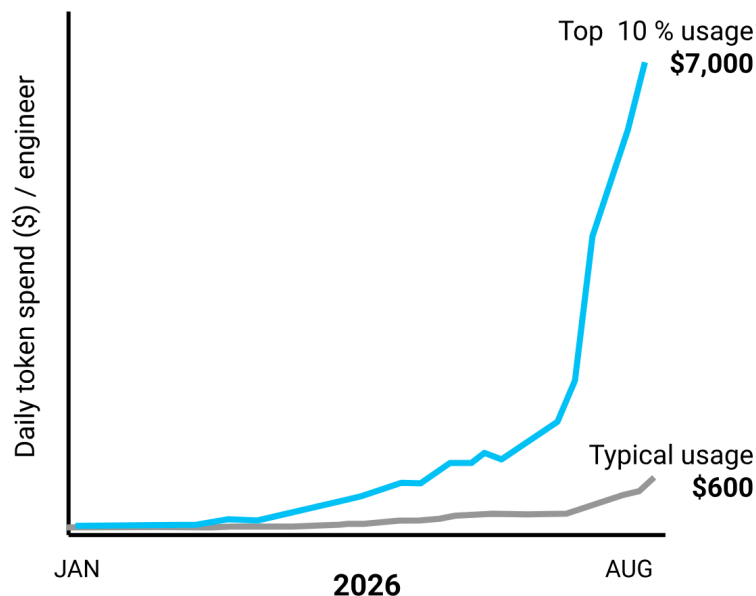
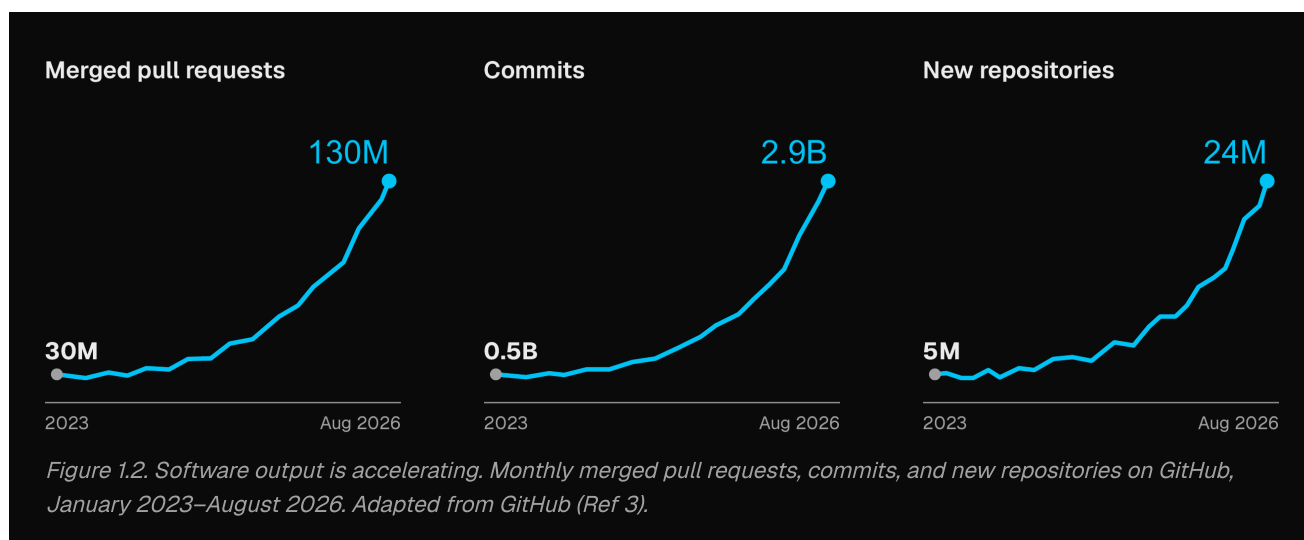


Figure 1.1. A >10x gap in AI usage. Daily coding-agent spending among OpenAI researchers, median versus top 10%, January–August 2026. Adapted from OpenAI (Ref 2).

Within 8 months, the top 10% of researchers were spending more than 10x as much on coding agents as the typical researcher. Around the same time, GitHub reported 130 million merged pull requests, 2.9 billion commits, and 24 million new repositories per month, up from about 30 million, 0.5 billion, and 5 million at the start of 2023 (Ref 3). Vercel reported the same pattern: deployments on its platform rose from about 1 million a day to 10 million in a single year (Ref 14).



Management expectations are changing with it. Jensen Huang of Nvidia has argued that an engineer earning \$500,000 should consume at least \$250,000 in AI tokens per year (Ref 4). Andreessen describes engineers who no longer operate as individual contributors but as orchestrators of a fleet of agents (Ref 5).

The power lies not just in engineers producing more code, but in developing a workflow that writes the code. A workflow built today can run again tomorrow; it retains context and, more importantly, improves with feedback. With each improvement, the engineer can direct more, and more complex, work.

10x engineers are accelerating and becoming harder to catch.

1.2 More engineering tasks are performed by AI

As AI takes on more execution, the constraint moves, and the engineer's focus shifts with it. At first, engineers were constrained by how fast they could write code: the speed of their fingers hitting the keyboard. AI code writing removed that constraint and moved it to code review.

This is where we are today. As AI now takes on code review, we expect the constraint to move to understanding requirements, designing the solution, and ensuring it delivers the intended result: tasks that continue to rely on human judgment and context.

Table 1.1. How an engineer's time moves across tasks, 2024–2027. 2024 values draw on developer-time survey data (Ref 6); later values are estimates.

#	Engineering task	2024	2026	2027
1	Understand the requirement	8%	15%	20%
2	Design and architecture	8%	20%	25%
3	Write the code	32%	10%	5%
4	Debug	19%	8%	5%
5	Test	12%	3%	2%
6	Review	8%	25%	12%
7	Document	5%	1%	1%
8	Ship and operate: does it do what it was meant to do	8%	18%	30%

With AI, the engineer's role shifts from writing code to orchestrating agents that write code.

1.3 What we learn from this

Engineering holds three lessons for sales:

Lesson 1. AI removes the constraints that humans have formed

Each time AI learns to do more, the constraint moves to the next piece of work that still needs a person. In sales, that constraint today is the seller's time.

Lesson 2. AI in GTM is much harder than AI in product

Code can be tested against a specification. A sale cannot. A buying group makes the decision, and its members have different priorities, incentives, and concerns, and must reach consensus. AI can prepare the seller, track the account, and follow through between meetings, but it cannot hold the conversation that moves the group. As a result, we expect sales to follow the same path, but to a smaller multiple.

Lesson 3. Sales trails engineering by 2 years

Economic Diffusion is the spread of a new technology across companies and industries: firms adopt the technology, redesign their work around it, and turn it into measurable gains. It often follows a Productivity J-Curve: gains stay small while organizations redesign the work, then rise sharply once the redesign is in place (Ref 28).

In engineering, this happened in late 2025.

AI adoption in sales started about 2 years later, in 2024, when AI began to take on inbound lead development, the work of the sales development rep (SDR) who engages and qualifies inbound

interest. Qualified launched Piper, an AI SDR that engages website visitors, in April 2024 (Ref 26).

Sales is still in the flat part of the J-Curve.

Mark Roberge, who built HubSpot's sales organization, compares this moment to the late 1990s, when B2B companies saw the internet as a way to put a PDF of their brochure online (Ref 27). Most sales teams use AI to do yesterday's work faster. By his estimate, only about 2% of teams have used AI to double the time their sellers spend with customers.

Sales will trail engineering by 2 years.

Chapter 2. The Impact of AI on Sales

Every profession eventually meets a technology that does part of its work better than humans do. When computer-aided design arrived, architects and engineers stopped drawing by hand. The drawings still had to be made, but the software made them faster, and more precisely than any drafter could.

The architect's job did not disappear. It moved to the design itself. AI is doing the same to selling. It is not changing the tasks a sale requires. It is changing which of those tasks the seller performs and which AI performs.

2.1 The tasks of a seller

In Chapter 1, we broke the engineer's week into tasks and observed how AI changed each one (Table 1.1). As AI took over tasks, the constraint moved. We now apply the same approach to the seller. The tasks are very different, so the constraint shows up differently: in the hours each opportunity takes.

Table 2.1. The tasks of a seller.

#	Seller task	What it consists of
1	Find and Qualify	Identify accounts, contacts, triggers, and intent; determine whether the opportunity is real
2	Research	Understand the company, the person, the industry, and the situation; form an Impact hypothesis
3	Engage	Create interest through email, calls, social, and other communication
4	Diagnose	Verify the problem, quantify the business Impact, establish the Critical Event
5	Demonstrate	Show how the solution delivers the agreed Impact, and prove it
6	Navigate	Map the buying group, multithread, build champions
7	Propose	Create proposals, business cases, plans, presentations, and recaps
8	Contracting	Negotiate terms, clear procurement and legal, reach the Commit
9	Deliver Impact	Drive adoption toward first Impact, monitor the outcome, expand, and generate advocacy
10	Administer	CRM, notes, scheduling, reporting, internal communication

AI changes sales tasks in four ways:

- **Quality:** some tasks are done better, such as deeper account research.
- **Scale:** more tasks run at once, across every account and opportunity.
- **Speed:** a recap or a proposal takes minutes instead of hours.
- **Availability:** Work runs outside the seller's working hours, around the clock.

The tasks fall into three groups:

- **Seller-led:** conversations with buyers and customers. AI prepares the seller, and the seller holds the conversation.
- **AI-led:** work that produces a document or a record, such as research, proposals, and CRM updates. This is the seller's equivalent of code, and AI does it faster and better.
- **Hybrid:** AI drafts, and the seller decides what reaches the customer.

This provides reasoning we can apply to each sales task.

2.2 Two main constraints

Selling works like any throughput system: opportunities enter, are worked over time, and leave as revenue, won or lost. Two rules govern it.

By Goldratt's Theory of Constraints, output is set by a single binding constraint; relieving it raises output until the constraint moves elsewhere, as it did in engineering (Ref 10).

By Little's Law, the opportunities worked at once (work in process) equal the opportunities that leave each year (throughput) multiplied by how long each stays open (flow time) (Ref 11).

Rearranged, Little's Law says that throughput is work in process divided by flow time. A seller's output therefore has two limits: how many opportunities can be worked at once, and how long each one stays open. The seller's hours set the first limit, and the buyer's pace sets the second. Either can be the binding constraint. For most sellers today, it is the seller's.

The seller's constraint

A seller has about 2,000 working hours a year. Some of these hours go to internal meetings, training, planning, and other organizational work. What remains is the Seller Capacity: the hours available for commercial work, about 1,600.

Every customer meeting costs more than the meeting itself. Each one needs preparation before and follow-up after, and together they often take longer than the meeting. Across a year, the total time spent around each opportunity, not the sum of meeting time, determines how many opportunities a seller can carry at once. This is where AI can help.

The buyer's constraint

A deal is decided in a small number of meetings that matter: discovery, discussions with the buying group, meetings to demonstrate and validate, and meetings to close. Many smaller interactions happen around them, but these carry the decision. Lost deals end earlier, after fewer of these meetings.

The length of the sale is not set by the length of a meeting. A few hours of conversation spread across several months means the calendar is mostly gaps. Between meetings, the buying group meets

internally, consults others, and works toward consensus, and the seller cannot compress that time. This sets the flow time, and the buyer controls it. So at first, AI will barely shorten the sales cycle, because the cycle is not made of the seller's work.

The buyer's constraint sets the length of the sale. The seller's constraint sets how many opportunities can be worked at once.

2.3 Case in point: 50 opportunities per seller

How many opportunities can one seller carry at once? For a seller of a \$50,000 product, the two constraints put the number at about 50.

Table 2.2. Baseline capacity model for a seller of a \$50,000 product.

Step	Calculation	Result
Seller Capacity	2,000 working hours – 400 organizational hours	1,600 hours
Hours/meeting	1 hour meeting + 1 hour prep + 1/2 hour follow-up	2.5 hours
Meetings/opportunity	10% won × 8 meetings + 90% lost × 4 meetings	4.4
Hours/opportunity	4.4 meetings × 2.5 hours	11 hours
Throughput	~1,340 hours (84% of Seller Capacity) ÷ 11 hours	122 a year
Deals won	122 opportunities × 10% win rate	12 wins
New bookings	12 wins × \$50,000/deal	\$600,000
Sales cycle (Flow time)	Every opportunity, won or lost	150 days
Work in process	$122 \times 150 \div 365$ (Little's Law)	~50

That limit of about 50 is what one seller's hours can carry at the buyer's pace. It is consistent with time studies that find sellers spend 28–30% of their week selling (Ref 12); in this model, meetings take about 27% of the year. Territories, specialization, handoffs, quotas, and manager ratios are all built on that limit. If the constraint moves, all of them are open to redesign.

The GTM motion is not designed around the buyer's constraint. It is designed around the seller's.

Take research, for example. A seller needs 2–3 hours to research a \$50,000 opportunity, working across the CRM, email, call recordings, news, public filings, and so on. Most of it is irrelevant or repetitive. AI examines the same sources in a fraction of the time and returns a synthesis the seller verifies. The same holds for the rest of the work around each meeting: preparation and follow-up fall from 1.5 hours to 0.5.

The same 50 active opportunities now only need 800 hours instead of 1,340, freeing 540 hours.

Using AI to move the seller's constraint lays the path to the 3x Seller.

Chapter 3. AI Readiness

Chapter 2 showed that AI can free 540 of a seller's hours a year. The question is what those hours will amplify. Before you deploy AI across your sales organization, ask yourself whether you are ready.

AI does what your process tells it to. Graham's observation in Chapter 1 cuts both ways: technology magnifies differences. Deploy AI on a sub-par process and it amplifies the process. All of it. Only faster.

3.1 Built for abundance

From 2012 to 2022, the grow-at-all-costs years of SaaS known as the Abundance Era, companies grew on an abundance of inbound demand. Search, email, and social media gave companies access to buyers at unprecedented scale. The model was predictable and controllable: spend more, reach more buyers, generate more inbound.

Organizations built a new GTM motion around that supply: marketing generated leads, sales development (SDR) qualified them, account executives (AE) closed them, customer success (CSM) minimized churn, and account management (AM) looked for expansion.

Over 20 years, every part of this process became a specialized role, and RevOps emerged to stitch them together (Ref 9).

This produced today's typical seller, built to sell against inbound demand.

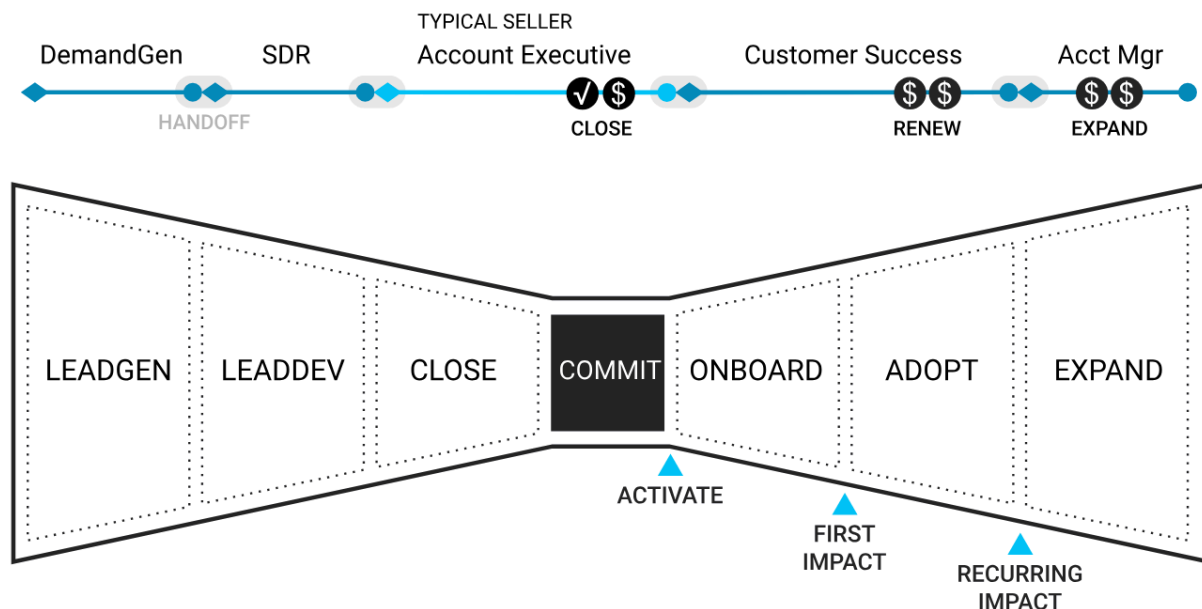


Figure 3.1. The SaaS GTM motion, built for an abundance of inbound. Each specialized role owns one part of the customer journey, which turned the typical seller into an inbound seller whose work ends at the Commit. Adapted from the Winning by Design Bowtie.

This GTM motion depends heavily on an abundance of inbound that has since faded. Since 2022, the growth rate of B2B software companies has fallen sharply, while retention in that same period declined modestly (Ref 15). In 2024, growth held steadily for a few quarters, and many took that as the floor. In 2025 it fell steeply again. Acquisition is now the main constraint.

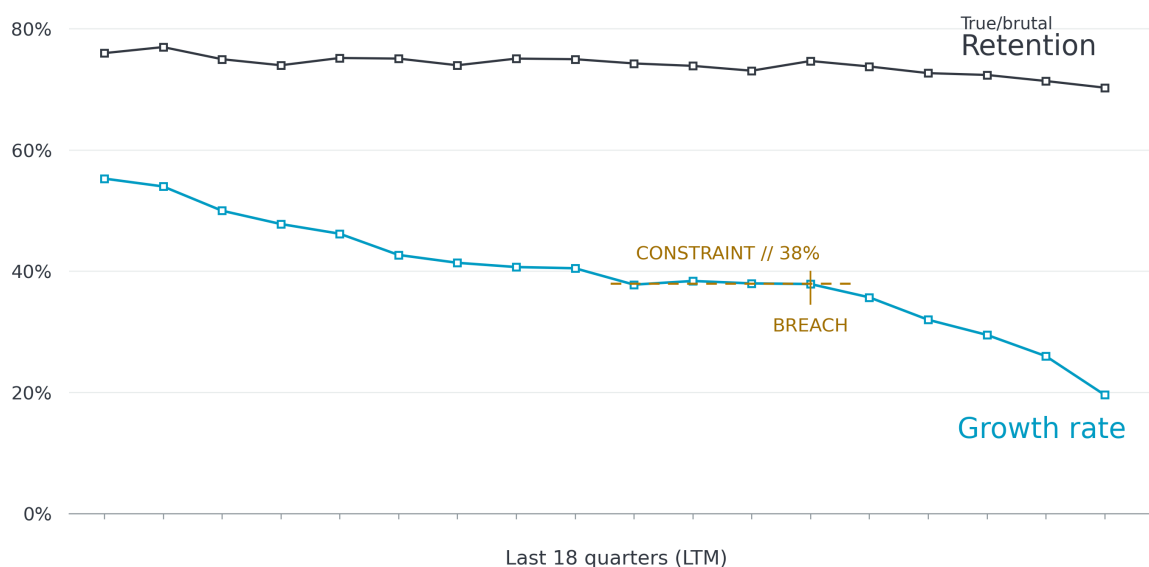


Figure 3.2. Growth falls while retention holds. Growth rate and retention of B2B software companies with ARR above \$100,000, last 18 quarters (LTM). Source: ChartMogul and BenchSights (Ref 15).

3.2 The inbound seller problem

The typical seller is so dependent on inbound and high velocity that they have honed their skills to sell to the pain a customer arrives with, not the Impact the customer wants to achieve. We see this across hundreds of sales organizations.

Call analysis shows the result: sellers diagnose the Situation and Pain then pitch and demo the solution. They struggle to establish the Impact the customer wants to achieve (Ref 7).

Winning by Design analyzed 57,826 opportunities over a trailing 120-day period, excluding renewals (Ref 16). The data shows the inbound seller concentrating on Situation and Pain, the behavior the Abundance Era taught, measured and rewarded.

Table 3.1. SPICED elements in 57,826 opportunities and their association with revenue and win rate. Revenue indexed to Pain = 100; associations, not causal estimates. Source: Ref 16.

SPICED element	Opportunities with the element	Won revenue (index)	Win rate
Situation	63%	90	37.0%
Pain	55%	100	39.9%
Impact	21%	144	42.4%
Critical Event	22%	150	42.4%
Decision	7%	176	55.4%

Each element the inbound seller tends to skip is associated with more revenue or a higher win rate, and deals with a Critical Event also close 21% faster. Opportunities with every element complete result in 2x the revenue (Ref 16).

We define this higher-performing seller as the Impact Seller: a seller who establishes Impact and a Critical Event. The typical seller positions the product against the pain, so the decision is led by a champion. The Impact Seller helps the customer decide against the Impact, so the decision is made with the decision maker.

The typical seller sells to pain. The Impact Seller sells to the Impact that pain causes.

3.3 Performance has drifted to the bottom

Split a sales team by performance and three tiers appear: a small top tier, a middle tier that is the largest group, and a bottom tier. The middle tier should perform close to the top. Instead, it has drifted toward the bottom. Together, the middle and bottom tiers make up 80% of the team, and both sharply underperform (Ref 16).

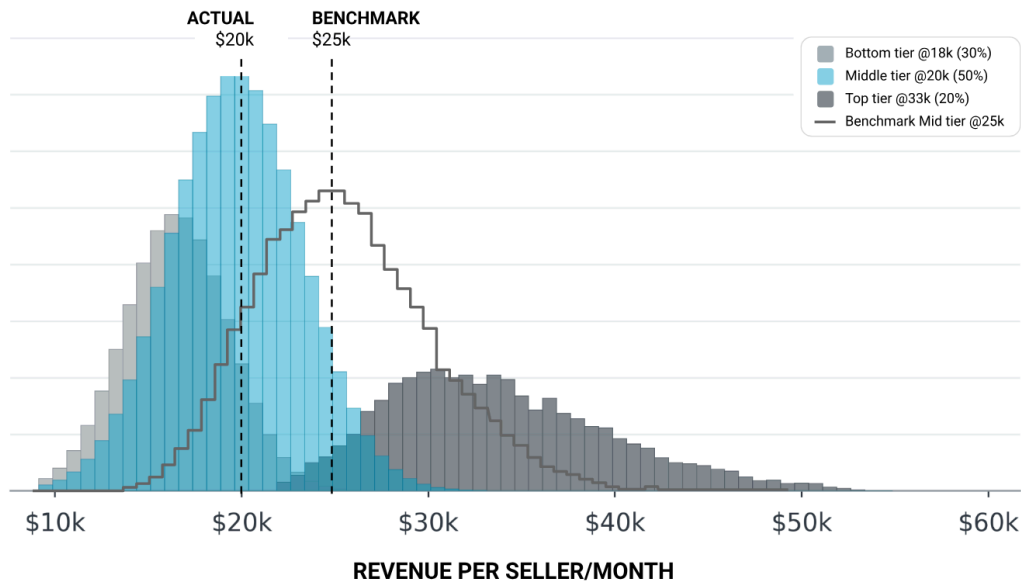


Figure 3.3. The middle tier has started to perform like the bottom tier. Distribution of modeled monthly revenue per seller for the bottom (30%), middle (50%) and top (20%) tiers, from 50,000 simulation runs. The benchmark shows where the middle tier should be. Source: Ref 16.

The reason is how they sell. The middle tier has shifted from consultative selling, which diagnoses the Impact, to solution selling, which pitches and demos features against a pain. Deals are priced against the pain, not the outcome. They work as many opportunities as the top tier, but close at lower prices offering deeper discounts.

Left alone, this will not correct itself. Without clear and decisive intervention, the middle tier keeps trending toward the bottom until executives step in.

By selling to pain, 80% of all sellers now operate at, or close to, bottom performance.

3.4 Technology shapes sales generations

Each generation of sellers is shaped by new capabilities. In the 1980s and 1990s, those capabilities were methodologies, as sellers moved from pitching to consultative approaches such as SPIN and to qualification methods such as MEDDIC. From 2000 onward, it was technology that drove the shift.

Table 3.2. Four generations of technology-enabled selling.

Era	Generation	What it adds
G1 2000s	Digitization	Record and organize customer information, and create a visible pipeline.
G2 2010s	Automation	Run repetitive tasks, such as personalized email outreach, at scale.
G3 2020s	Virtualization	Engage customers remotely. Less travel frees the seller's time to reach many more customers.
G4 2026+	Orchestration	Lift the limit of the seller's hours: AI agents work 24/7, raise the quality of what reaches the customer, and build deep contextual awareness of each customer.

Each new generation of technology opens a gap. This is not new. It produces a generation of top performers whose expertise lets them pull ahead. Automation gave rise to sales engagement and to practitioners such as Mark Kosoglow, who led sales at Outreach and co-wrote Sales Engagement (Ref 32). The technology amplified their expertise, and sellers who did not adapt fell behind. What is different with AI is the pace: powered by the most advanced technology the world has seen, the gap is widening faster than ever before.

Software sales is staffed with G3 sellers, and the G4 world accelerates away from them.

3.5 The stage is set for a new seller

The GTM motion is changing on several fronts all at once:

- AI is being built into all kinds of software products.
- Every use of AI incurs inference costs.
- Business models are becoming a mix of subscription and consumption-based pricing.
- Buyers are using AI, and it is changing how they buy.
- Buyers distrust annual contracts, and want to pay for the outcome.
- Sellers have drifted to solution selling, and their performance with it.
- Technology is inviting a new kind of seller.

Think about it: when SaaS arrived, it did not just move the business model from perpetual license to subscription, and the infrastructure from local to cloud. It also changed the GTM motion: specialized roles and automated sales tasks, resulting in high-velocity growth.

The next generation is now taking shape. The business model is moving to outcomes. Sellers are expected to move to Impact selling, their tools to AI, and their processes from automation to orchestration.

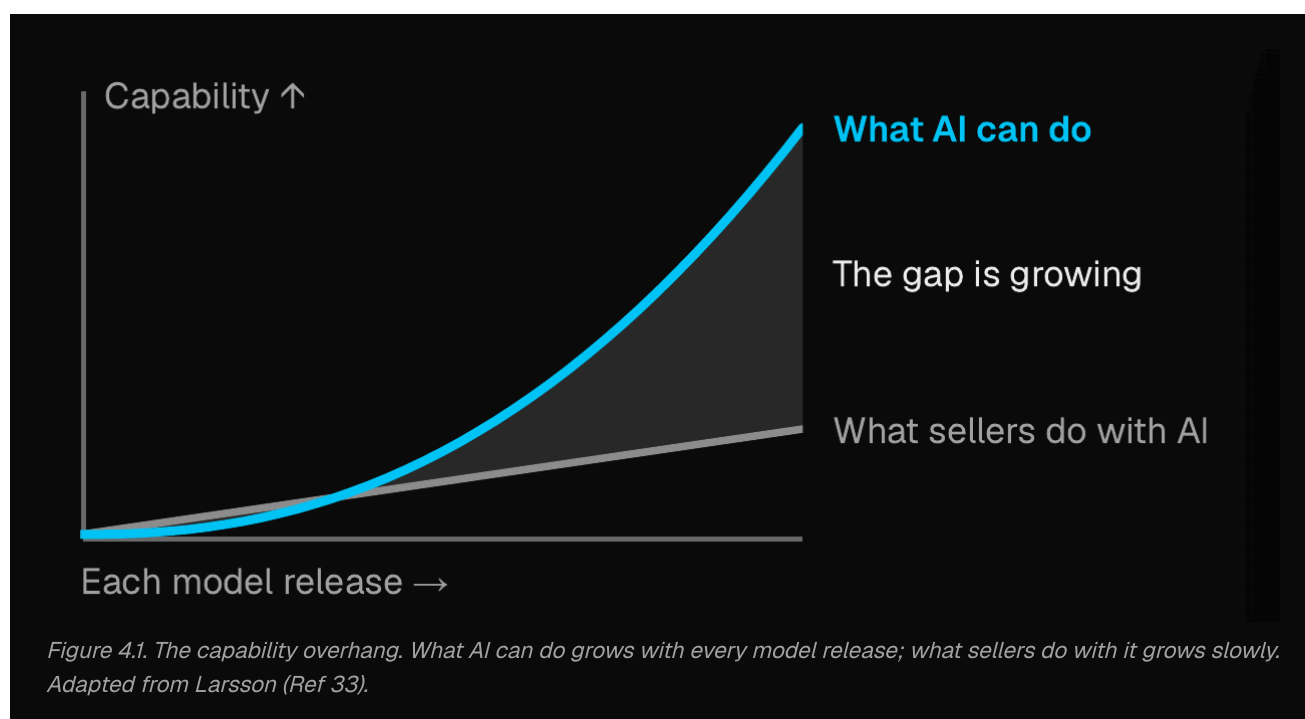
SaaS built the current generation of sellers. AI will give rise to the next one.

Chapter 4. The 3x Seller

A sales organization is a system of humans, process, and technology. Every change in how a company sells runs through all three. Today they move at very different speeds:

- Technology continues to race ahead at a mind-blowing pace (Chapter 1).
- Processes remain largely unchanged, often still built for an abundance of inbound that has faded (Section 3.1).
- Humans are slow to adopt: most sellers still work much as they did last year, and the year before (Section 3.3).

The problem is the gap between humans and the technology. Larsson calls it the capability overhang: what AI can do rises with every release, while what humans believe it can do rises slowly, and the gap keeps widening (Ref 33). It is even worse when the technology runs on an outdated process. Put AI on automated outreach, and it sends more emails, faster, teaching your customers to ignore you.



Systems move at the pace of their slowest part (Section 2.2). The path to the 3x Seller closes the gap in three stages, and at each stage humans, process, and technology move together:

- **1x.** The seller becomes fluent with AI and tunes the human skills that now matter most, starting with discovery that reaches the Impact. The team starts a shared record of every conversation.
- **2x.** The seller delegates routine work and preparation to AI, and spends the time with the buying group.

- **3x.** The seller owns the customer beyond the Commit and directs AI across the full cycle. Accounts, compensation, and roles are redesigned around it.

Technology grows exponentially, skills grow linearly.

4.1 1x: AI fluency and human skills

Productivity skills. Basics of working with AI:

- **Asking AI:** what to ask, and how to ask it. The words the seller writes shape what AI returns (Ref 33).
- **Projects:** one per account, so the context stays in one place and builds over time.
- **Working together:** AI drafts, the seller reviews and refines.
- **What not to do:** never send anything to a customer unread.

Performance skills. It is critical to lay a strong foundation:

- Asking past the pain to uncover the Impact the buyer wants to achieve
- Establishing the Critical Event

Without this, everything that follows is built on the wrong foundation.

One skill runs through both lists: asking well. The words a seller writes to AI shape what AI returns. The questions a seller asks a buyer shape what the buyer reveals. In both, the quality of the question sets the quality of the answer, and it is the first skill a seller learns at 1x.

1x also lays the foundation for every stage that follows: a Signal Layer. We define the Signal Layer as a shared way of recording every conversation, whether a seller or AI held it, so that anyone can pick it up at any stage of the customer journey. It takes three things:

- A model of the complete journey, through adoption and expansion (the Bowtie, Ref 31).
- A standardized data structure, so everyone knows what is measured, and where.
- A protocol that turns human conversations into signals a machine can read (SPICED).

Without a Signal Layer, performance is a guess.

Table 4.1. What the 1x seller does and how they use AI.

Seller task	What the seller does	What AI does
Find and Qualify	Judges fit, not just interest	Scans for triggers
Research	Forms an Impact hypothesis	Builds the account brief
Engage	Establishes a relationship	Prepares talking points
Diagnose	Uncovers the Impact and the Critical Event	Analyzes the conversation
Demonstrate	Demos the Impact of the solution	Tailors the demo to the buyer's Impact
Navigate	Builds relationships	Maps the buying group
Propose	Decides what to propose, and in what order	Drafts a business case in the customer's words
Contracting	Agrees to trades based on priority	Drafts terms, tracks trades and changes
Administration	Checks what is recorded	Updates the CRM and notes

If discovery stops at the pain, nothing AI adds afterward matters.

4.2 2x: AI takes on the work around the conversation

At 2x, AI takes on the routines around the seller's working day:

- **In the morning**, AI reads across their messages and meetings and returns one briefing: a contract awaiting final signatures, material a colleague sent over, an account review across their accounts, a partner search in progress, and a coffee to confirm on an upcoming trip, with a summary of the previous day's calls. They decide what matters today, and in what order.
- **During the day**, the calls, the coffee, and the conversations that move a deal are theirs; no routine attends in their place. After every call, AI drafts the follow-up while the conversation is still fresh, and they edit rather than write: they know what the buyer meant, not only what the buyer said. The same recordings feed a content engine that turns what customers said into material for their own market presence.
- **At the end of the day**, AI assembles one execution report of follow-ups and open actions, and they decide what carries over to tomorrow.

This is available today, but few sellers use it, and those who do mostly work alone. What the best sellers build stays with them, and the sellers who would gain the most, the middle of the team, never see it.

One pattern stands out at 2x. Most sales leaders want their sellers to do more outbound, so the first hours AI releases tend to flow back into outreach. That puts the most expensive resource on high-volume, low-converting work, where AI has much better economics, and it can do this 24 hours a day.

The seller's hours are worth more once a buyer engages. The market has not yet worked out how to use AI for outbound, just as engineering has not yet worked out how to review the code AI produces at

scale.

Productivity tasks return hours, and the buyer never sees them. Performance tasks change what happens with the buyer: the win rate, the deal size, and how long the buyer takes to decide. Top performers have always done them. Most sellers skip them, because each costs hours per deal that nobody has.

- **Multi-threading.** A buying group, not one contact, decides a deal. AI maps that group from calls, CRM records, and public sources, flags who is missing, such as the economic buyer, a user, or legal, drafts outreach suited to each role, and tracks who is engaged and who has gone quiet. It warns when a deal has become single-threaded. Earning access and holding the meetings stay with the seller. Multi-threading raises the win rate, and it is the one lever the seller has on the buyer's pace, the second constraint in Section 2.2.
- **Impact analysis.** Buyers commit to Impact, not to features. AI turns what the buyer said, their public numbers, and industry benchmarks into a business case in the customer's own terms, covering both the rational Impact on the business and the emotional Impact on the people. The seller tests the case with the buyer until the buyer owns it. A case the buyer owns raises the deal size and reduces the deals lost to no decision. It also sets the baseline against which first Impact is measured after the Commit.
- **Personalized proposals.** A proposal built from a template answers the questions the seller expected. AI builds one from what this buying group actually said: their Critical Event, each stakeholder's criteria, and their own words, with a mutual plan that works back from the Critical Event. Deciding what to propose, and the negotiation, stay with the seller. A proposal that reflects the buyer's own case converts from proposal to Commit more often, and sooner.

These are the skills of the Impact Seller (Section 3.2). At 2x, AI does the preparation, and the seller holds the conversation.

Productivity tasks let the seller carry more opportunities. Performance tasks raise what each one is worth. Performance tasks need AI connected to company data, such as the CRM, calls, email, and product usage, through integrations such as MCP, and most sellers lack that access. They also run on the Signal Layer laid at 1x.

4.3 3x: The seller owns the full cycle

Engineering showed where the biggest acceleration comes from: not from writing more code, but from engineers building workflows that write the code (Section 1.1). For the seller, that workflow runs across the full customer cycle.

Section 3.5 showed pricing moving toward usage and outcomes. Intercom's Fin, for example, charges \$0.99 for each resolved customer issue (Ref 30).

This moves revenue from the moment of signature to the moment of consumption. Most GTM teams are ill-prepared for such a significant change.

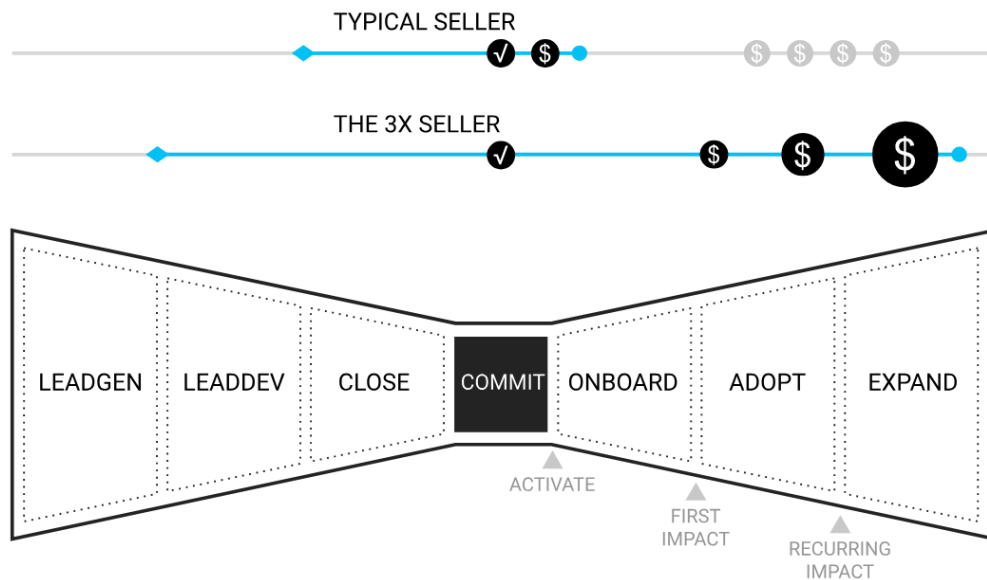


Figure 4.2. From typical seller to 3x Seller: revenue after the Commit belongs to the 3x Seller. Adapted from the *Winning by Design Bowtie*.

This is where the 3x Seller comes in, and it happens naturally: sellers stay with the account after the signature. The seller is commercially accountable for delivering Impact, while specialists, such as forward-deployed engineers, handle implementation.

We define the 3x Seller as a seller who directs AI across the whole customer lifecycle and carries 3x the Commercial Capacity of today's seller: the annual recurring revenue one seller produces and sustains.

The 3x comes from how the released hours are spent. Acquisition stays where it is: in our example about 50 active opportunities at a time and 10 to 12 new customers a year, which generate about \$600,000.

The 540 hours released can now go to working with existing customers. Even at 108% net revenue retention, this accounts for 2x what acquisition adds.

Together, the seller produces and sustains about 3x the recurring revenue of today's seller.

1x and 2x do work we already know, only better. Top practitioners at the fastest-growing companies have uncovered ways AI opens a new way of working.

A four-person enterprise team sells into one large technology account. White space planning used to be a periodic exercise built on Situation and Pain, such as employees compared with seats sold. The evidence sat with four different sellers, each covering different stakeholders, and was rarely collected in one place.

Today the team's deal channel has a fifth member: an AI agent named after the account and set up as a teammate, not as anyone's personal assistant. It watches the outside world continuously (public

statements, customer voice, analyst coverage, filings) and listens to the inside world (every recorded call and the team's discussions, adding new contacts to the CRM as they appear). Every week, it tells the team where the white space is, planned on SPICED: missing Impact heard in calls, stakeholders not yet engaged, and Critical Events surfaced by external research. Any seller can question it in the channel, and others can challenge or extend its answer.

Continuous research and synthesis runs on AI, and what the agent learns belongs to the team rather than to one seller. The sellers act on white space each week. The weekly review replaces the annual account plan, and white space is found as it opens, not months later. The 3x Seller no longer only closes. They develop the business inside the account.

The typical seller stops at the Commit. That is where the 3x Seller starts.

4.4 From 1x to 3x

In every example, the seller does the human work: the conversations with buyers and customers. AI does the rest, and that gives the seller more time for those human conversations.

Ask a sales leader where their sellers' time goes, and the answer is usually "not enough with prospects and customers." Most of it goes to finding accounts, researching them, writing proposals, and administration.

Diagnosing the customer's problem gets a fraction of the time it deserves, and navigating the buying group even less. What happens if AI takes on the rest?

Engineering started in the same place. Writing, debugging, and testing code took most of an engineer's week, while understanding the requirement and checking whether the result worked got the least (Table 1.1). As AI took over the coding, the engineer's time moved to the work that still needed a person. The same pattern applies to the seller, across the task groups of Section 2.1.

Table 4.2. How a seller's time moves across tasks, by stage. Share of 1,600 hours of Seller Capacity; modeled, not measured, and showing the direction of travel.

#	Sales task	Group	Today	1x	2x	3x
1	Find and Qualify	AI-led	13%	11%	4%	1%
2	Research	AI-led	13%	8%	5%	1%
3	Engage	Seller-led	12%	15%	18%	10%
4	Diagnose	Seller-led	9%	14%	24%	28%
5	Demonstrate	Seller-led	9%	14%	18%	12%
6	Navigate	Seller-led	4%	7%	16%	18%
7	Propose	AI-led	18%	14%	6%	1%
8	Contracting	Hybrid	6%	5%	4%	3%
9	Deliver Impact	Seller-led	0%	0%	0%	25%
10	Administration	AI-led	16%	12%	5%	1%

At 3x, time on seller-led work (Engage, Diagnose, Demonstrate, Navigate, and Deliver Impact) rises from 34% to 93% of Seller Capacity. AI takes on the rest.

Putting AI to work takes steps. Moving from AI fluency to productivity does not happen overnight, and not every seller will reach 3x. Each stage asks something different of humans, process, and technology. The names mark stages of rising performance; only 3x is modeled (Section 4.3).

Table 4.3. What each stage toward the 3x Seller requires of humans, process, and technology.

	1x	2x	3x
Humans	Becomes fluent with AI and sells to Impact	Directs agents and reviews what comes back	Owens the customer beyond the Commit
Process	Adds a Signal Layer: a shared record of every conversation	Modernizes the process, using AI to replace human tasks	New account assignment, compensation, and boundary with customer success
Technology	Skills and projects	Connected agents	Iterative workflows
Measured by	Deals closed	Revenue secured	Expansion

A 3x Seller:

- Directs AI work that continues outside their working hours.
- Is accountable through adoption, Impact, and expansion.
- Sets the AI's direction and approves everything that reaches a customer.

Each step depends on review, because a seller who scales before they can review burns the market they depend on. We define the Comprehension Gap as the distance between what AI has prepared

and what the seller understands. A brief can be correct and still fail a seller who hasn't absorbed it: the buyer's first follow-up question exposes the gap. Mark Roberge tests for it in hiring: AI may do the preparation, but the candidate must carry a live role-play against a real prospect profile (Ref 27).

The multiple is set by the constraint, and today the constraint is the human part of the sale. AI can take the work around the conversation, but not the conversation itself: the meetings that decide a deal, and the buyer's time between them. That is why the multiple is 3x rather than 10x.

The increased use of AI comes at a cost. We expect a 3x Seller to spend about \$10,000 a month on tokens. That is about half of what Huang expects an engineer to consume (Ref 4), because less of a seller's work can move to AI. Against the added revenue, the seller's bill is modest, and it should be seen as an investment, not a saving.

3x is where the constraint sits today, not where it sits forever.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In a prior Growth Institute brief, we argued that AI would not replace the go-to-market technology stack but stitch it together, carrying context between systems (Ref 20). The same now applies to humans. AI cuts the cost of coordinating between roles, and every structure built around the seller's hours, from territories and specialized roles to compensation and manager ratios, is open to redesign.

We get to decide what AI does in sales: not the vendors, not the tools. Closing the gap is not a one-time project. For years to come, we want AI to help us:

- Spend more time with customers, not more time in our tools.
- Use that time to diagnose the Impact, not pitch against the pain.
- Communicate faster and more responsibly, not add more noise across more channels.
- Iterate with the customer until they achieve the Impact, not hand them off at the Commit.

The role of executives is to lead. Do not wait for the perfect tool, the perfect process, or the perfect plan. Every month you wait, the gap widens, and it widens fastest for the middle tier: half of the team, the sellers who carry the number (Section 3.3). They do not need to be replaced. They need to be led: given the time, the skills, and the agents, and put in front of customers, diagnosing the Impact until it is delivered.

In product, the AI race is largely decided: the tools, the category leaders, and a new generation of engineers are in place (Refs 21–23). In go-to-market, no leader has emerged and no generation of seller has been defined. Sales runs about 2 years behind engineering, so its sharp rise should come around 2027 to 2028. The organizations that move in the next 12 to 24 months will set the pace. Those that wait will face a gap they cannot close with effort alone. The technology is ready. The question is whether we are.

Use AI to make the sales experience more human.

About Winning by Design

Winning by Design helps revenue organizations design and run the systems behind their growth. This brief is part of the work of its Growth Institute.

For leaders: the Growth Institute. Where CROs and revenue leaders gather to discuss how to put AI to work to accelerate growth, not compound cost.

For sellers: three SKO packages, one per stage in this brief. 1x Skills: sellers become fluent with AI and sell to Impact. 2x Agents: sellers direct agents and review what comes back. 3x Workflows: sellers orchestrate workflows across the full customer cycle.

To learn more, visit winningbydesign.com or contact Dan Smith, dan@winningbydesign.com.

Appendix

Methodological posture

This Executive Brief is deliberately exploratory. It prioritizes model formation and shared language over finalized, peer-validated conclusions. Software engineering is used as an observable precedent, not as proof that commercial work will reproduce the same multiple. The capacity model in Chapters 2 and 4 is a working model built to be tested; every organization should replace its inputs with its own measurements.

Limitations and boundary conditions

- The capacity model uses working assumptions for a \$50,000 ACV sale: 50 active opportunities, 150 days in the portfolio, a 10% opportunity-to-win rate, 8 meetings per win and 4 per loss, and 2.5 human hours per meeting before AI and 1.5 after.
- The NRR values (105% after handoff, 118% under seller ownership, around 95% under AI competition) are hypotheses consistent with field observation, not measured results.
- The 22 human hours per owned customer per year is a practitioner estimate. The 3-year ownership window depends on it.
- The research figures (70–80% of manual research discarded, about 90% of AI research relevant) and the case details are practitioner observations.
- Engineering time-allocation values beyond the 2024 survey baseline are estimates.
- Several statements in Chapter 1 come from parties with an interest in AI adoption, and are reported as statements of expectation rather than independent evidence.
- The framework assumes business-to-business recurring revenue with multi-stakeholder buying. It has not been tested against transactional, self-serve, or channel-led motions.
- The performance-group analysis in Section 3.3 models one organization's CRM data with a 50,000-run simulation. The SPICED findings are associations across 57,826 opportunities, not causal estimates. The benchmark of middle-tier performance at 80% of the top is a practitioner benchmark, not a measured trend. The call and CRM analyses in Chapter 3 come from one company.
- The Delegated figure of about 84 active opportunities and \$1.0M holds today's workload constant. The 2x label assumes the time around each meeting keeps falling.
- Statements attributed to Roberge (Ref 27) are practitioner views from an interview, not measured results. His Selling Time figures differ between interviews and serve here only as an independent check on the Delegated level.

Glossary of terms

3x Seller (Ch. 4): A seller who directs AI across the whole customer lifecycle, remains commercially accountable past the Commit, and carries 3x the Commercial Capacity of today's seller.

Commercial Capacity (Ch. 4): The annual recurring revenue one seller produces and sustains. It measures revenue, not activity.

Commit (Ch. 4): The Bowtie stage at which customer and seller make a mutual commitment to each other (Ref 31). Not the end of the sale, but the moment the relationship changes from a promise of Impact to an obligation to deliver it.

Comprehension Gap (Ch. 4): The distance between what AI has prepared and what the seller understands. A correct brief still fails a seller who has not absorbed it.

Economic Diffusion (Ch. 1): The spread of a new technology, practice, or economic benefit across companies, industries, and society, as firms adopt it and redesign their work around it.

Flow Time (Ch. 2): How long an opportunity stays open, from creation to won or lost. The sales cycle measured across every opportunity, not only the ones that are won; set mostly by the buyer's time between meetings.

Impact Seller (Ch. 3): A seller who establishes the customer's Impact and a Critical Event, so the decision is made with the decision maker rather than led by a champion. The skill base on which the 3x Seller is built.

Little's Law (Ch. 2): The number of items in a system equals the rate at which they pass through it multiplied by the time each spends inside it. For a seller: work in process = throughput × flow time.

Productivity J-Curve (Ch. 1): The pattern in which measured gains from a general-purpose technology stay small while organizations redesign their work around it, then rise sharply once the redesign is in place.

Seller Capacity (Ch. 2): The hours a seller can spend on commercial work, about 1,600 of a 2,000-hour working year. It is fixed.

Signal Layer (Ch. 4): A shared way of recording every conversation, whether a seller or AI held it, so that anyone can pick it up at any stage of the customer journey. It takes three things: a model of the complete journey (the Bowtie), a standardized data structure, and a protocol that turns conversations into machine-readable signals (SPICED).

SPICED (Ch. 4): Situation, Pain, Impact, Critical Event, Decision. The protocol of the Signal Layer: it turns human conversations into signals a machine can read, across the entire customer journey.

Theory of Constraints (Ch. 2): The principle that a system's output is set by its single binding constraint; improving anything else leaves output unchanged.

Throughput (Ch. 2): The number of opportunities that leave a seller's portfolio in a year, won or lost.

Work in Process (Ch. 2): The opportunities a seller actively works at one time, about 50 at baseline.

Yield (Ch. 2): The share of throughput that is won. In a sales system, the win rate across every opportunity worked.

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