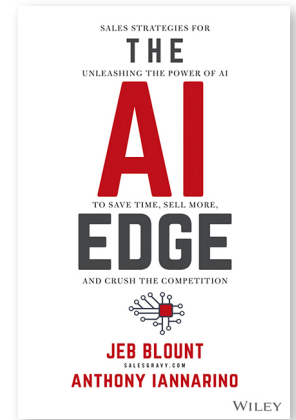


The AI Edge

Sales Strategies for Unleashing the Power of AI to Save Time, Sell More, and Crush the Competition

by **Jeb Blount and Anthony Iannarino**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

This is a guide focused on helping sales professionals identify how to begin to integrate artificial intelligence into sales processes and approaches. *The AI Edge* is a foundational guide for using AI to save time and sell more. It's about putting sales professionals in control of a powerful rocket engine that will achieve sales goals. As the first generation of sales leaders, sales managers, and salespeople to access artificial intelligence, this moment in time is an inflection point, one that breaks from the past, with no turning back. Salespeople in the future will be armed with AI, and so will clients.

This is a sales book, written by and for sales professionals, that teaches how to leverage AI in the context of sales to gain a competitive advantage. Included is an overview of how artificial intelligence tools can support salespeople, and the book provides an understanding of how and when AI can be useful — and when being human matters more. By providing guidelines and foundational principles, authors Jeb Blount and Anthony Iannarino seek to prepare salespeople to be discerning as more AI tools are encountered in the course of their work.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Discover what the role of AI is and will be in sales.
- Learn how to successfully integrate AI into the sales cycle.
- Validate the necessity for emotional intelligence and the human-touch in sales.
- Balance the 'AI partnered with human' advantage.

PLUGGING INTO AI

The Beginning of Everything

In this brave new world, there will be three types of people:

1. People who are displaced by robots.
2. People who are controlled by robots.
3. People who are enhanced by robots.

To survive and thrive in the future, it is essential that we move into category three. We must lean into being human. We must get fundamentally better at doing the things that only humans can do. We must leverage AI as a tool to enhance our human advantage and give us more time to do those things that we do best.

AI Everywhere, All the Time

AI has evolved, moving from challenges like the “AI Winter” to breakthroughs such as IBM’s Deep Blue beating Garry Kasparov. Today, AI powers many industries, with models like OpenAI’s ChatGPT at the forefront of innovation.

The Next Level: Is the Singularity Near?

Professionals worry about AI displacing jobs, but salespeople skilled in real-time, authentic communication will remain invaluable. The human element of trust-building and communication is irreplaceable, making sales roles more crucial.

The Six Million Dollar Man

As AI integrates more into human life, it will amplify our potential in sales by streamlining tasks like content creation, prospecting, and sales forecasting. Salespeople will use AI to focus on building relationships and solving customer problems.

The Human Advantage

The role of the salesperson is not diminishing. Instead, it’s evolving and becoming more important. With AI handling data analysis, content creation, and strategy suggestions, salespeople can focus on what they do best: building genuine authentic relationships, trust, and developing creative solutions for customer problems.

Better Together

So there you have it, AI and humans each have advantages. AI can do wonderful things, but the complexities of human behavior are a puzzle that AI cannot fully decode. We, on the other hand, have the unique ability to build rapport and build deep emotional connections,

but we are infinitely slow at crunching data.

The Three A’s

The keys to plugging into AI to become an enhanced human—faster, better, smarter—are the three A’s:

1. **Adopt:** Commit to becoming an early adopter of new, cutting-edge technology, and leverage it to achieve a game-changing, competitive edge.
2. **Adapt:** Adapt new technology to your unique sales process. Avoid seeing AI as a one-size-fits-all solution. Most importantly, leverage artificial intelligence in your sales day to gain more time for focusing on high-value human interactions and strategies.
3. **Adept:** Rapidly assimilate AI into your sales motions, blend it into your sales process—even when it feels uncomfortable—and then use it, practice it, experiment with it until you become adept at it.

The Four Elements of Sales Intelligence

Success in sales requires a balance of technology acumen (TQ), intelligence (IQ), knowledge (AQ), and emotional intelligence (EQ). High-TQ sellers thrive by using AI to free up time for relationship-building.

ROBOT RULES

Robots Have Goals, Not Souls

Though artificial intelligence may appear to think and reason, it does not. Anything about it that seems human is an illusion—a crafty parlor trick. It is a robot. A digital machine. It does not feel emotions. It does not care.

Beware of the Authority Bias

This is the human inclination to accept and value the views, information, or recommendations from authoritative sources, without critically evaluating their validity or accuracy. In other words, we have a pernicious tendency to seek guidance and direction from “experts” whom we perceive as knowledgeable or possessing a higher status. As our reliance on digital sources—especially artificial intelligence—for knowledge grows exponentially, this bias will become an increasing danger, across society.

Harnessing Generative AI

At the root level, generative AI is built on a large language model (LLM) that learns how to predict, based on statistical

The first step toward harnessing the true power of AI is learning how to direct it to achieve your goals efficiently and effectively.

probabilities, what you want based on the prompt provided. The first step toward harnessing the true power of AI is learning how to direct it to achieve your goals efficiently and effectively. This requires practice, trial and error, a significant investment of time, and increasingly an investment of money.

Robot Rules

For a modern sales professional, merging the power of AI with the human touch will remove many of the repetitive boring tasks that steal your joy, allow you to lean into the things that make you uniquely human, give you the competitive edge you've been seeking, and ultimately give you more time to sell more. To guide your journey into the future, we've developed a new set of robot rules.

- Never Trust, Always Verify
- Crap In, Crap Out
- Just Because AI Can, Doesn't Mean It Should

MORE TIME TO SELL MORE

Time Discipline

As a modern sales professional, your most precious resource is time. Selling and revenue generation is how you make an impact. AI should help you make a bigger impact.

Me Management

Here are the foundations of Me Management:

- Adopting a CEO mindset
- Ruthless prioritization
- Planning and calendar management
- Territory mapping
- Attention control
- Time blocking

The First Seven Steps on Your AI Edge Journey

1. Conduct a Time Investment Audit to gain a clear understanding of what you are doing now.

2. Make a comprehensive list of the activities only you can do and which activities you should delegate to AI (or someone else).
3. Brainstorm all of the possibilities for how AI might put time back into your sales day.
4. Research and test AI tools and platforms.
5. Prioritize where and how you hand activities off to AI and integrate it into your sales process, planning, calendar management, and sales day.
6. Implement AI using the three A's: Adopt, Adapt, Adept.
7. Continue to repeat and refine this process until you've optimized your sales time for leveraging your human advantage.

The real secret to truly harnessing the power of AI is separating the things that only you can do from the things that robots can or should do.

Time Investment Audit

This helps put into sharp focus how you are actually using time. It's a transformative lens. Through it, you'll be able to quickly identify the activities that drive sales from those that drain your time, energy, joy, and income.

Brainstorming and Prioritizing AI Possibilities

Now that you're thinking about how you spend your time, let's brainstorm a list of the work, activities, and tasks that you'd like to give to AI:

Outreach

- Email management
- Scheduling send times
- Content sharing

Daily Tasks

- Research automation
- Agenda setting

- Automated CRM data entry

Me Management

- Task prioritization
- Time tracking
- Automated scheduling

Prospecting

- Opportunity finder
- Intent and buying windows
- List building

Strategic Thinking

- Pre-call planning
- Account expansion and retention
- Competitor analysis

Professional Development

- Sales performance tracking

Practice and Prompts

Learning how to use AI effectively is frustrating, just as it is when you attempt to learn anything new. There will be times when it feels like it's taking longer to delegate the task to the robot than to just do it yourself. You'll want to give up. Don't.

Prompt Engineering

The goal of prompt engineering is to write prompts that are clear, concise, and produce the information you seek on the first try.

Build a Sales Prompt Library

What you want to avoid doing is reinventing the wheel each time you need something from AI. That will cost you a lot of time. Instead, when you find a prompt that works for you, add it to your prompt library to make it easy to reference when you need it in the future.

WRITING, GRAMMAR, AND COMMUNICATION

Humans Resent Being Manipulated

Humans distrust laziness. Misusing AI to take shortcuts in communication can damage relationships. Strong writing and editing skills are necessary to guide AI effectively. AI is a fast writer, but humans craft more compelling, nuanced mes-

sages. To make AI-generated content sound more human:

1. Vary sentence structure.
2. Mix formal and informal tones.
3. Write with emotional depth.
4. Avoid repetitive points.

PROSPECTING

The Asynchronous Seller

AI is a powerful tool that will help you become more effective and efficient at prospecting, but it will not remove your responsibility to interact and talk with people. It is not an easy button. Not a panacea. Not a replacement for the human touch.

Synchronous versus Asynchronous Prospecting

1. Synchronous is talking with people in real time - phone, text, direct message.
2. Asynchronous is talking at people, independent of time - email, voice message

Viva la Synchronous Prospecting

Prospecting is the art of interacting—primarily through synchronous channels and secondarily through asynchronous channels. It's about moving opportunities into your pipeline now and qualifying prospects for the future.

Talk with People

There is a fundamental formula for sustained sales success: The more people you talk with, the more you will sell. Talking with people is what we, as sales professionals, get paid to do.

A Powerful Prospecting Partner

What AI can do very well is help you target who you should be talking with and provide you with research, background summaries and dossiers, questions to ask during conversations, and intent data. All of which helps you engage the right people in more meaningful conversations.

The AI tools that are being built into your CRM and sales engagement platforms can make it much easier to develop and execute effective prospecting sequences - an intentional series of prospecting touches. Managing sequences effectively requires a deep commitment to mastering targeting, timing, channel techniques, and message relevance. AI can transform your sequences, making them more strategic, personalized, and adaptable.

When the stakes are high and you need to grab the attention of a high-level decision-maker, a personalized message is the way to go.

AI can be a game changer for designing prospecting sequences because it can crunch and analyze historical data to identify patterns that lead to successful conversions way faster than you can.

The Future of List Building: Right Prospect Plus Right Time

Imagine how things would change for you if, as you started your sales day, your company's sales AI handed you a targeted list of highly qualified prospects that are in the buying window.

Define Your ICP

The first step toward more effective qualifying is developing an ideal customer profile (ICP). AI can quickly analyze your database for patterns and commonalities among your best customers, uncover the stakeholder roles most likely to be involved in decision-making based on past sales data, analyze the deals you are closing, and gain a deeper understanding of trigger events that opened those buying windows.

Intent

The easiest way to sell more is to spend 100% of your time talking with prospects who are in open buying windows and ready to buy. AI is already making this possible by analyzing and scoring leads based on intent data. Though it is far from perfect, now is the time to start familiarizing yourself with intent data and learning how to use it while it is in its nascent stages.

Message Matters

When the stakes are high and you need to grab the attention of a high-level decision-maker, a personalized message is the way to go. Effective personalization should build up your credibility and authority, not damage it. Certainly, AI can speed up the process of research and gathering information when you are working on personalized messages. But this is one place where you, the human, must put your heart and intellect into crafting the perfect message.

Show Me You Know Me

The real secret to crafting personalized messages that

reduce resistance and convert prospecting calls into meetings is remembering a simple but powerful premise: people make decisions based on emotion first, and then justify with logic. Focus on specific problems they are facing and bridge to how you can help them.

Targeted Messaging

When you have a large prospect base combined with high activity expectations, taking time to research each prospect and craft a unique prospecting message before every call makes no sense. Start with segmenting your prospect database into large groups of similar prospects. Then prompt your AI to do the heavy lifting.

Focus on Emotions

The most effective prospecting messages relate to your prospects' emotions like stress, worry, insecurity, distrust, anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger, or they offer them peace of mind, security, options, lower stress, less worry, or hope.

Craft Targeted Messages

Build several targeted prospecting messages for each segment of prospects or targeted list. Test and refine them. As you engage in conversations with these prospects, you'll naturally iterate and refine your message.

Slow Prospecting

Slow prospecting techniques include developing a professional network, networking and community engagement, nurturing high-value prospects, and most importantly for modern sellers, social selling activity on platforms like LinkedIn.

An Explosion of AI-Powered Social Media Tools

The good news is that there is an explosion of new AI-powered tools that can make it much easier to keep your social media presence consistent and strong. Many AI-powered social media tools will even rate and score the content you are sharing for relevance and the potential to go viral. This can help you make better decisions about the content that you choose to post and share.

QUALIFYING, PRE-CALL PLANNING, DISCOVERY

Everything in Sales Begins with a Qualified Opportunity

Effective qualifying requires a systematic and methodical focus on turning the unknowns into the known. AI is particularly effective at gathering factual information to help you qualify and target the right prospects before you put them into your pipeline. Qualification is a combination of both data and human intuition. You must consider factual evidence and listen to your gut instinct when assessing the viability of an opportunity.

The Art of Discovery

Discovery is the most important step in the sales process. The art of discovery is a uniquely human endeavor. It requires intention, strategy, and planning. You must ask open-ended questions, demonstrate sincere interest, use your empathy, and listen. AI cannot do this job for you.

Eight Big Discovery Mistakes You Need to Avoid

Taking Shortcuts

Asking Stupid Questions

Self-Orientation

Focusing on Your Next Question Rather Than Listening

Interrogation versus Conversation

Asking Hard Questions First

The Pump and Pounce

Failure to Prepare

Pre-Discovery Call Research

Leverage AI, social media, your CRM, and the internet to gather information about stakeholders and their organizations. Proving yourself to be a “knows-something” salesperson requires doing your homework about your prospect, their industry, and the headwinds and tailwinds they face. Research and qualifying go hand in hand. With AI assisting you, there is absolutely no excuse for not doing extensive research on every prospect and stakeholder before you ever engage in a discovery conversation or put them into your pipeline.

AI Can Assist with Discovery Questions

The primary objective of discovery is to gather the infor-

mation you need to put your business case puzzle together. AI can assist you with developing discovery questions as long as you provide it with the right information and prompts. Assist is the optimal word here.

Getting to the root cause of your prospect’s problems is the key to developing a set of personalized solutions to present to the stakeholder group. AI can help you develop root-cause analysis questions.

Identifying measurable business outcomes (MBO) and gaining consensus on the value of those outcomes—the metrics that matter—are the keys to developing a winning business case and proposal. AI can help you develop MBO questions.

It’s important that you understand what your prospect values and how they will select the vendor of choice. AI can help you with these types of questions.

AI can help with stakeholder insights as well.

CLOSE THE DEAL

Competitive Analysis and Objection Prevention

Buyers researching with AI is the new norm. If you walk into a presentation or closing meeting only to be blindsided by tough questions about your competitive weaknesses, that is on you.

AI-Powered Proposals

Those who harness the full power of AI to streamline and elevate their proposal game gain a powerful sales edge. Advanced AI models and platforms are rapidly transforming proposals from dry, lifeless documents into dynamic, multimedia storytelling experiences. In the near future, your CRM will harness AI to fully automate and streamline every stage of the proposal creation workflow.

Closing the Sale

AI can be a game-changing force multiplier for closers, helping you seal more deals through precisely calibrated closing tactics. Over the course of the sales process, AI will continuously reanalyze opportunities and update individual deal playbooks. One of the most promising AI capabilities being integrated into CRMs is the ability to accurately predict close probability at any given deal stage versus just going off gut instinct or traditional forecasting approaches that can be misguided by human biases or lagging indicators.

If you haven’t already experienced AI sales coaching,

you soon will. AI simulation enables salespeople to get realistic, risk-free practice for high-stakes situations like closing the deal.

Case Studies and Social Proof

AI can help you build persuasive, personalized case studies for sales proposals.

Contracts and Lawyers and Terms and Conditions, Oh My!

Because contract negotiations can become emotional, it can be difficult to find the right words. This is where AI shines. Before sending anything to your prospect, paste what you've written (or what you plan to say) into various AI engines—like Claude.AI—for this—and prompt it to make your words more diplomatic and remove any words or passages that might offend the other party.

AI Turns Your CRM into a Strategic Partner

There is no weapon or tool in your sales arsenal that is more important or impactful to your long-term income stream than your CRM. Leveraged effectively, it will give you a decisive edge.

The future of sales lies in the seamless integration of human capabilities and AI technology. By adopting AI tools and strategies, sales professionals can streamline processes, increase efficiency, and free up valuable time for the human-centered tasks that build trust and relationships. AI is not a replacement for human intuition, empathy, or creativity, but rather a powerful tool that amplifies these uniquely human strengths. By mastering the balance between AI and human touch, salespeople will be better equipped to thrive in an ever-evolving market, ensuring they remain indispensable in the new era of selling.



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