



# The future of sales

Voices from the room: what 80 sales leaders are really experiencing

Future of Sales Event - 31 March 2026 - Wintercircus, Ghent  
Hosted by PwC Belgium - Commercial Excellence Practice

Event insights report  
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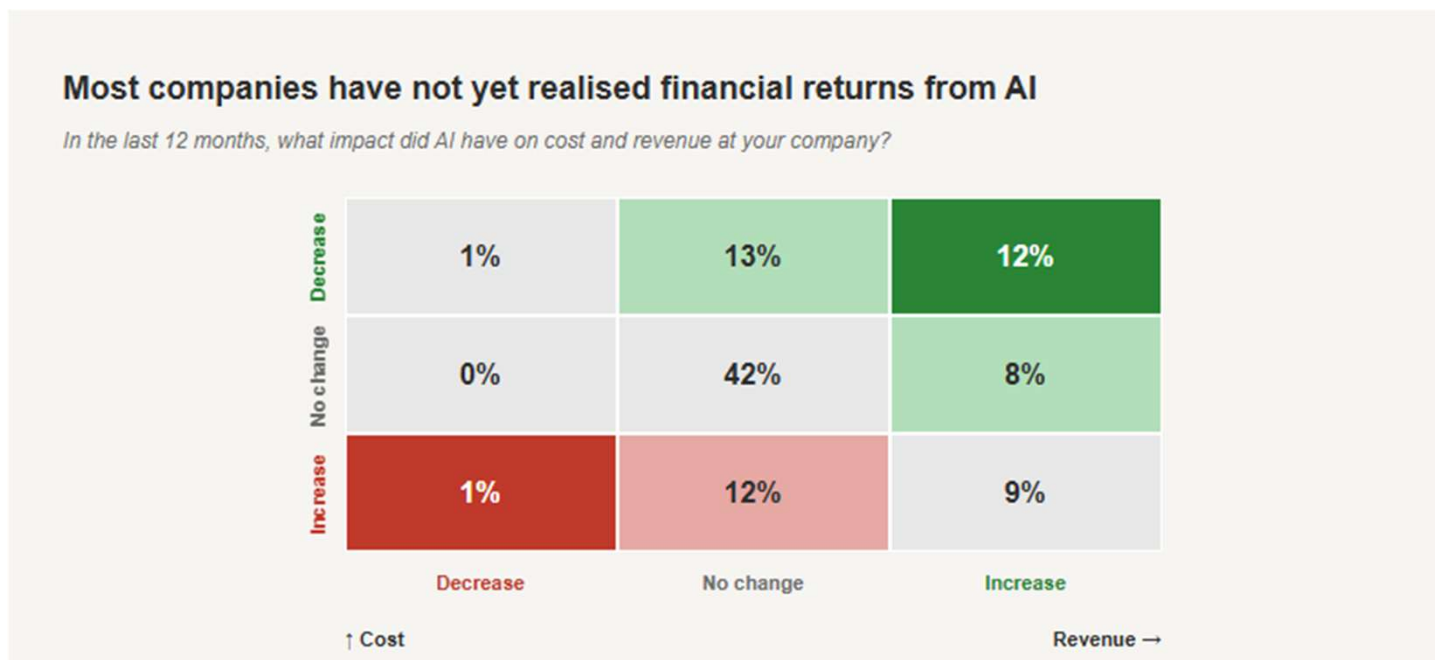
# Times are changing. For good.

The world of sales is undergoing a profound transformation. Customers are more connected, informed, and demanding than ever before. Digital channels, automation, and artificial intelligence are reshaping how organisations engage. The traditional sales playbook, built on product pushes and transactional relationships, is no longer enough.

Consider the reality. 45% of buyers have already used AI to support a recent purchase decision. Meanwhile, 71% of B2B buyers are Millennials or Gen Z, generations that have grown up expecting digital-first, self-directed experiences.

Your prospects are changing. The question is whether your sales organisation has changed with them.

For most, the honest answer is "not yet". According to PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey, 42% of CEOs report that AI has had no measurable impact on either revenue or costs over the past twelve months. Only 12% have achieved the ideal outcome: revenue up and costs down at the same time (see the chart below for the full story).



This isn't just an evolution. It's a permanent transformation of strategies, processes, people, and technology. Sales is shifting from manual, periodic activity to proactive, AI-assisted workflows, unlocking a more fluid rhythm where teams focus on timing, human judgement, and the moments that build trust.

Yet technology alone isn't the answer. Today, 59% of customers feel companies have lost touch with the human element of customer experience. The gap between expectation and reality is widening, and sales teams sit right at the centre of it. The future belongs to those who can blend digital enablement with the irreplaceable human touch.

In March 2026, we brought together more than 80 commercial leaders at the Wintercircus in Ghent. Building on the themes explored in our pre-event white paper, we followed Maxime, a sales representative, through a week of AI-assisted selling as we moved from theory to practice. Through candid conversations and live demos of tools like Visiblie, Donna, Blindspot, and Equazion, as well as real-time audience polling, a strikingly honest picture emerged of where organisations are standing now and what needs to happen next.

This is what your voices told us.

**How AI is used in your day-to-day work**

**66%**

use AI mainly for individual productivity

Writing, summarising, and research aren't embedded in how the business sells

**AI is everywhere, but still shallow.**

**What this tells us**

Nearly every leader in the room uses AI today. But **two out of three (66%) only use it for personal tasks** like writing emails, summarising meetings, or doing quick research. Just 14% have embedded it in their sales or customer workflows. Another 14% say it has fundamentally changed how they work every day. A small but notable minority, around 6%, indicated they're either not yet using AI or haven't yet considered how it fits into their daily work.

During the event, we introduced three simple levels for thinking about AI ambition. When we map the polling data onto it, the picture becomes clear.



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**The flip that needs to happen**

Most organisations are currently working on boosting everyday productivity. They're optimising the core, making individual work faster and easier, but the AI stays with the person who uses it. It doesn't change how the team sells, how the pipeline moves, or how the customer experiences your brand. In our Global Workforce Survey, employees who use AI daily report striking productivity gains of 34% compared to non-users. But those gains remain individual. Most enterprise AI use cases still focus on internal productivity. Relatively few directly impact how organisations engage with their customers.

The opportunity comes from organisations moving from optimising the core to reshaping and elevating the way they operate and, eventually, reimagining their value proposition. That means embedding AI into the lead-to-close workflow: smarter prioritisation, AI-assisted outreach, automated customer relationship management (CRM) updates, and real-time negotiation guidance. This doesn't replace sellers. Instead, it redirects their time from low-value admin to the conversations and creative problem-solving that customers actually value.

**Freeing sales focus on what matters the most**

When AI shifts from a personal tool to enterprise infrastructure, the seller moves from 40%/60% selling/admin ratio to an 80%/20% one. The role doesn't disappear. It's elevated, freeing the seller to be more human, more present, more creative, and more trusted.



We're giving everyone a Swiss Army knife when what the business needs is a new operating system.

## What happens when you adopt AI tools

# 41%

say a few people use it well,  
but it doesn't scale beyond them

Only 10% report genuine transformation

## It works for a few, but stalls for most.

### What this tells us

**41% of leaders say that when their company adopts a new AI or digital tool, a few people use it well, but it doesn't scale beyond them.** Another 31% report tools add value within existing ways of working, without transforming anything. Only 10% see a genuine organisational change: new processes, new roles, and real impact.

Perhaps most telling: **10% say their company doesn't yet invest in AI tools at all**, and 7% say tools get bought, piloted, and quietly forgotten. That means nearly one in five leaders in the room see AI investment as either absent or wasted. Research consistently shows that the majority of digital transformations fail, and the primary causes are organisational and change-related, not technological. **More than half of CEOs report not yet seeing the financial benefits of their AI investments.** The vast majority of AI pilots fail to achieve business impact at scale, citing lack of leadership alignment, inadequate change management, and unclear business cases.

### The root cause is rarely the technology itself. It's the lack of a bold vision for how work should fundamentally change.

Without that ambition and end-to-end workflow reinvention, coupled with unclear ownership and metrics that still reward old ways of working, tools get adopted by early enthusiasts, but the broader organisation sees no reason or incentive to follow.



### Scaling requires three deliberate shifts

- **Rewrite the culture** – spark curiosity, build psychological safety, and encourage letting go of old habits that feel productive but add no value to the customer.
- **Redesign the work** – design the human-AI handoff deliberately. Think AI-generated briefings at 8am, auto-updated CRMs after calls, and AI negotiation coaches that prepare sellers before every meeting.
- **Redefine roles and metrics** – new game, new scoreboard. Create metrics for AI agent performance, human-AI collaboration effectiveness, and human excellence in the moments that matter.

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### Before you scale, pick the right bets

The three shifts above describe what needs to change inside the organisation. But there's an equally important question that comes first: which AI use cases are worth the effort? Not every tool that demos well will deliver in practice. During the event, we introduced ten criteria that we use with our clients to separate good AI use cases from great ones. They're designed to be used together. A use case that scores well on customer impact but poorly on data readiness will struggle to deliver, just as one with strong return on investment (ROI) potential but no change readiness will stall at pilot.

<b>Customer impact</b> <i>Does it directly improve the customer experience?</i>	<b>Cross-functional alignment</b> <i>Does it ease collaboration across departments?</i>
<b>Revenue potential</b> <i>Will it drive measurable profit growth or protect revenue?</i>	<b>Scalability</b> <i>Can this move beyond pilot to enterprise-wide value?</i>
<b>Process fit</b> <i>How does it integrate with existing workflows and tools?</i>	<b>Change readiness</b> <i>Are the people affected ready, willing, and supported?</i>
<b>Data readiness</b> <i>Is the underlying data clean, accessible, and trustworthy?</i>	<b>Strategic alignment</b> <i>Does it connect to your AI and broader company vision?</i>
<b>ROI clarity</b> <i>Can you build a credible and quantifiable business case?</i>	<b>Ethical and compliance fit</b> <i>Does it meet regulatory and responsible AI standards?</i>

This is what separates good AI use cases from great ones. The 41% that doesn't scale and the 7% that gets quietly forgotten share common pitfalls: strong technology but weak scores on change readiness, data quality, and/or strategic alignment. This framework helps you spot those gaps early, before resources are committed, so you can focus on the use cases with the highest chance of real impact.



We're optimising the engine, but forgetting the passenger.

**Biggest blocker to AI adoption**

42%

identify data - messy, siloed,  
not trustworthy - as the biggest  
blocker

Compliance concerns ranked last at  
just 6%

## The number one blocker is data.

### What this tells us

When asked about **the single biggest blocker to AI adoption**, **42% pointed to data**: messy, siloed, and not trustworthy. Leadership (no clear vision or commitment from the top) ranks second at 20%. People challenges and low prioritisation each sit at 11%. Technology gaps account for 9%. Compliance concerns come last at just 6%.

This is a significant finding. **The barrier to AI-powered sales** isn't regulation, technology, nor budget. It's **the quality and accessibility of the data that feeds every model**, every recommendation, and every automated action. Customer records scattered across CRMs, spreadsheets, inboxes, and the memories of individual sellers make any AI initiative fragile at best.

Among the ten criteria for evaluating AI use cases that we presented during the event, data readiness is a critical threshold. Without trustworthy, accessible data, even the most capable AI will underperform. With one in five pointing to leadership as a blocker to AI adoption, it's clear that **transformation must be sponsored and modelled from the top**, not delegated to IT or innovation teams alone.

### What leading organisations do differently

Leading organisations take a different approach to data, treating it as a strategic asset, not a technical problem. This requires appointing data owners in commercial teams, investing in integration between systems, and setting clear governance standards. Furthermore, they make data quality visible through dashboards that show completeness, freshness, and accuracy, so that everyone understands the cost of poor data.



The barriers aren't regulatory.  
They're fundamental: foundations and conviction.  
Fix the data and the technology will follow.

Top priorities for your company

#1

customer journey mapping to identify CX pain points

Ranked highest priority by the audience (score: 3.48 out of 5)

The roadmap starts with the customer.

What this tells us

When asked what their company should focus on first, leaders ranked **customer journey mapping** as the clear **number one priority**. This confirms that the instinct to start outside-in, rather than technology-first, is alive and well among experienced commercial leaders. If buyers are doing more of the journey independently before they engage a salesperson, then understanding those remaining human touchpoints, and making them count, is the right starting point.

RANK	PRIORITY	SCORE
#1	Customer journey mapping to identify CX pain points	3.48
#2	Align leadership on a shared AI vision	2.84
#3	Ensure data is clean, accessible, and trustworthy	2.26
#4	Map barriers to adoption across the organisation	2.02
#5	Pressure-test AI tools on real value potential	1.27

Scores reflect weighted average ranking on a scale of 1-5 by 80 commercial leaders.

The right sequence

**(1) Listen to customers and map** their journey and data landscape. Understand where friction lives and where trust is built and breaks down. **(2) Align and build foundations** with a shared leadership vision, clear roles and ownership, change management, and new metrics that reward what matters. **(3) Pilot and learn** with a focused sprint, measurable outcomes, and clear ROI targets. In other words: customer first, technology last.

Too many organisations jump to tool selection before understanding the problem. The leaders in our room knew better: **start with empathy**, then design the solution. AI is the accelerator, not the starting point.



The best AI strategy starts with a question: where does the customer experience break down? Everything else follows from that answer.

# Bringing it to life: what we explored together

During the event, we put the framework into practice. Through live demos with Maxime, a sales rep who needs to manage five core activities (create awareness, plan visits, prepare for meetings, update the CRM, and set the right price), we explored what the future of sales looks like when it works. These aren't concepts for the roadmap: they're working today.

## **Visiblie: the discovery layer has changed**

According to Visiblie, the vast majority of AI-powered search sessions end without a single click, and AI models typically cite only three to six brands per answer. There's no page two. Gartner projects that traditional search volumes will drop by 25% by end of 2026, and an estimated €700 billion in spending is expected to flow through AI-powered search by 2028. ChatGPT is now the fourth most visited website, with 900 million weekly users. Visiblie demonstrated how to monitor and improve your brand's presence across ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity. It sits on top of your existing content stack and tells you what to publish, update, or restructure - and why. If your brand isn't being recommended, you risk being invisible to tomorrow's buyer.

## **Donna: the proactive assistant for field sales**

Donna showed how a proactive AI assistant can turn every moment into productive time. From AI-generated meeting briefings and live coaching to automatic CRM logging and post-meeting follow-ups, Donna reports that early adopters see a 75% reduction in visit preparation and admin time, 20% more revenue-generating activity time, and up to 15% more deals closed. CRM adoption increases up to 6x, with up to 10x more data captured, with zero added effort from the rep.

## **Blindspot: smart route planning for field teams**

Blindspot tackled the travelling salesperson problem. With eight stops per day, there are 40,320 possible routes and only one that is optimal. By balancing visit frequency, client segmentation, timing, and distance, Blindspot reports it can reduce weekly planning time from three hours to 20 minutes and recover 16 days per year per sales rep. Colour-coded priorities, optimised routes. No more guesswork.

## **Equazion: pricing intelligence at the point of conversation**

Equazion, our pricing intelligence platform, showed how to shift the pricing conversation from reactive to leading. Field sales reps receive guidance aligned with segment strategy, can model scenarios live during a negotiation, and get AI-driven cross-sell recommendations during the conversation. For commercial leadership, it provides strategic visibility: identifying where margin is leaking across the portfolio and quantifying untapped revenue across customer segments. No spreadsheet, no multiple sources, just guided decisions when they matter.

# The future is yours to shape

The insights from more than 80 commercial leaders paint a consistent picture. The potential of AI in sales is well understood. The blockers (data, leadership alignment, and organisational readiness) are visible and widely shared. The priorities are clear: start with the customer, align at the top, fix the foundations, then scale deliberately. **The challenge is no longer awareness. It's execution.**

These findings are consistent with what we see in our broader research. In PwC's 27th Annual Global CEO Survey, 45% of CEOs express concerns about their company's viability over the next decade if they continue on their current path. The room in Ghent confirmed the same urgency, but also the same honest struggle to translate awareness into action.

01

## Start with the customer

Map the journey end to end. Identify where AI reduces friction and where the human touch matters most. Tailor engagement models to fit complexity.

02

## Align at the top

Build a shared leadership vision for AI in sales. Define what changes: roles, operating models, metrics, and incentives. Sponsor visibly.

03

## Fix the foundations

Prioritise data quality, accessibility, and governance. Map where customer data actually lives. Without solid foundations, nothing scales.

04

## Scale what works

Rewire the culture, redesign the work, redefine roles, and metrics. Build a continuous improvement loop for human-AI collaboration.

Sales is no longer about pushing products. It's about creating confidence, building trust, and delivering outcomes that matter. The tools are changing, expectations are increasing, and the pace is accelerating. Yet at the heart of this transformation is something timeless: the human connection.

Technology will take care of repetitive tasks. AI will surface insights and orchestrate complexity. But the decisive moments, the conversations that build relationships, the creativity that sparks solutions, and the judgement that earns trust, those remain yours.



## Your next step

Ready to move from insight to action?

[Book a 60-minute discussion call](#)

Let us assess where your organisation stands on the AI-readiness spectrum. A focused conversation about your biggest blocker, your quickest win, and your first move. No commitment, just clarity.



The future of sales isn't something happening to you. It is something you can shape - starting now.

## Key contacts



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