

The 2023 Presales Landscape Report:

The Solutions Engineer's Playbook for Sales Efficiency



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Raising the Bar for Enterprise Sales

In the current economy, achieving greater sales efficiency is the name of the game. While everyone wants their sales cycles to move faster, competing market dynamics show why many organizations may struggle to gain the efficiency they're seeking.

First, typical B2B buying habits have been rapidly changing. According to Gartner, **33% of buyers** demand a sales-free experience. That number jumps to 44% for millennials, which proves that buying habits are trending toward self-evaluation and self-service — fast. Unsurprisingly, many organizations have embraced product-led growth (PLG), **including 61% of Cloud 100** companies.

Even so, in complex enterprise tech sales, sales teams aren't going anywhere. According to LinkedIn's Buyer First Report, 88% of buyers prefer working with sales professionals they perceive as trusted advisers. Plus, 91% prefer working with those that are well-informed about their industry. In other words, sales teams need to meet a high bar to work with prospects, many of whom have already done their homework.

Presales professionals like solutions engineers (SEs) play an important role as enterprise software sales accelerators. The unique value they bring to the table comes in the form of customized, technical product knowledge to augment enterprise account executives' relationship-building skills. However, their time is frequently used inefficiently throughout the sales cycle, often through demos with unqualified prospects.

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So, how do you reconcile the need for prospects to self-serve with the desire for high-touch, personal and informed experiences in enterprise sales? All while meeting demands to move the sales cycle faster?

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of buyers prefer working with sales professionals they perceive as trusted advisers

We recently surveyed 110 SEs at enterprise software companies for the 2023 State of Presales Demo Report.

The goal was to learn more about their role in the sales process, and where they feel their time is inefficiently allocated. Let's dive into these findings to learn more about common sales inefficiencies. From there, we'll guide you through a playbook on how to navigate the modern sales cycle including:



How product tours on your website can help prospects self-qualify before reaching the sales team.



How SEs can equip AEs to be more informed, consultative sellers by empowering them with interactive demos earlier in the sales cycle.



How to build winning technical demos for later-stage deals, with less effort.

The 2023 State of Presales Demos Report

Today, demos remain the most popular way to evaluate software. According to **TrustRadius**, product demos are the top resource that buyers use during the evaluation process, with 59% of buyers relying on them. This has been true for six consecutive years. The same report shows that nearly all buyers want the opportunity to self-qualify. In fact, 70% seek out product demos or free trials available on a company's website.

With demos holding such an important role in the software evaluation process, it's critical that prospects get the right information at the right time from the right resource. That's not necessarily happening at every organization.

70%

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According to the Reprise 2023 State of Presales Demos Report:

Most organizations surveyed (**68%**) had an average deal size of **+\$50K** and long sales cycles of **90+ days (67%)**. Within these sales cycles, demos are frequent and common. Every week, the average SE gives:

36%

1-3 DEMOS

29%

3-5 DEMOS

18%

5-10 DEMOS

While frequent demos are good for qualified prospects, many SEs say their time is misallocated. That dynamic happens in a few different ways:



Unqualified Prospects: The majority of SEs report spending time on unqualified demos (52% spend 1-3 hours; 9% spend 3-10 hours).



Prep Work: 38% of SEs spend more than 5 hours per week preparing demos.



Maintenance: 71% spend more than an hour per week cleaning/maintaining their demo environment; 21% spend between 3-10 hours. On the high end, that's a whopping 21 days per year wasted for these high-value employees!

Key Takeaways

Solutions engineers are often in short supply and high demand. As a result, it's important to maximize their time on the most highly qualified opportunities requiring technical expertise and detail.

That means:

- Creating interactive demos and product tours for your website to help prospects self-qualify before reaching a presales/sales representative.
- Avoiding “leftward drift” in the sales funnel by enabling AEs with foolproof demos, so solution engineers aren't brought into unqualified deals.
- Adopting an easy-to-use demo creation platform to avoid the unnecessary time spent preparing demos and/or cleaning and maintaining a demo environment.

Let's dive in on how to execute on each of these goals.

Improving Sales Efficiency by Leveraging SEs More Strategically: A Playbook

Creating an Interactive Demo or Product Tour

Given what we know about prospects' need to self-serve, an [interactive demo or product tour](#) on your website can help accelerate the sales cycle. Interactive demos help prospects decide for themselves whether your product or service meets their needs.

Think of this step as the overview that gives prospects initial exposure to the product, so they can ask more targeted questions to the sales team down the road. Having an interactive demo will help the sales team have more directed conversations with prospects, focused on specific pain points.

Best Practices for Creating and Using Interactive Demos

Test different product messaging.

You may have different buyer personas evaluating your product, or different pain points your product addresses. Experiment with multiple demos approaching the product from several angles. A/B test messaging or create an interactive product tour for each pain point, embed them on the website, or share them in other channels like email marketing or social. That will help you see which demos get the most leads and engagement.

After reviewing analytics on your demos, optimize your product tours accordingly. With an interactive demo platform, you can see what's working, where prospects are exiting the tour, and where they're spending the most time. With the right demo software, editing your demos only takes a few clicks.

Speak directly to target customers.

Create interactive demos tailored to all of the different stakeholders involved in your purchase decision. These people could be end users, influencers or champions who are driving the process, or final decision makers like an executive approver and budget controller.

Understanding their roles, objectives, pain points, and any gatekeepers who might be blocking the purchase along the way is critical. Think through the best way to convince each of these people in the sales cycle when creating your GTM strategy, and then determine how to reach them. From there you can create bite-sized product demos customized for each persona, and organize them into a [demo library](#) on the website.

Incorporate interactive demos throughout the buyer journey.

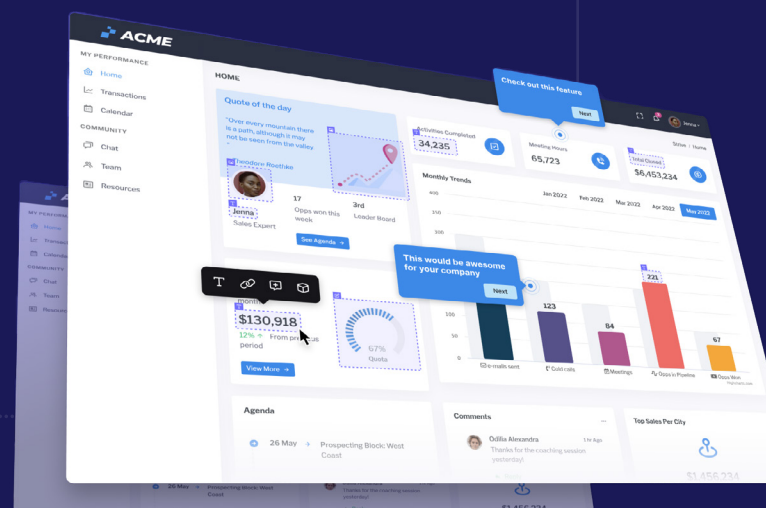
In addition to having a demo on your homepage or product page, you can incorporate interactive demos throughout the buyer journey. Earlier in the journey, demos can make email marketing campaigns more exciting and effective. Micro-demos of specific features can also make blog posts, thought leadership pieces and other content more engaging.

Later on in the buyer journey, interactive demos can be used as freemium or free-trial onboarding assets. Including bite-sized, self-guided demos in your onboarding process is a great way to guide new users to realizing immediate product value. In short, they'll know what they're doing (this is even more critical if your product is complex). Seeing more value upfront means they're less likely to drop off and more likely to convert to paid customers.

Enabling AEs and SAEs to Create and Present their Own Demos

Another major way to accelerate your sales cycle is to empower AEs and SAEs to present their own demos without the involvement of an SE. Most SEs support a variety of teams, not just sales. That means their time is in high demand, so they can't necessarily be on every sales call (particularly the early ones).

Ideally, AEs and SAEs can be equipped with the tools and training to run early demos solo, cutting down on the number of unqualified demos SEs give every week.



Best Practices for Empowering Sales Teams with Demos

Leverage SE talents to standardize a first-call demo and demo scripts.

There's no need to reinvent the wheel for every first call. SEs can help create a standard demo that sales reps can easily customize to the prospect. There can even be multiple standard demos tailored to industry verticals, or certain prospect group pain points.

Pair that demo with a script to enable sales to confidently deliver the demo solo. Include objection-handling scripts and sales training to ensure that newer AEs are confident in talking about the solution and how it compares with competitors.

Another option is to build a guided demo to serve as a training and enablement tool. Using the same clicks, AEs can walk through the guided demo independently, learning how to deliver it at their own pace.

Here's where SEs can help in this process:

Map: SE maps out the vertical markets their AEs are targeting and identifies product use cases within them.

Build: SE uses a demo creation platform to pre-make custom demos in sandbox environments for each vertical market use case.

Deliver: SEs meet new buyer needs by giving their AEs relevant, persuasive pre-made demos they can run without them during discovery demo calls.

Create an interactive demo library.

A product "demo library" or "demo center" is a collection of interactive, self-guided demos, as well as live demo replays that can be sent or used as leave behinds (more on that in the next point). You can use this library to showcase the various features, functions, and use cases of your product. Each demo in the library should serve a specific purpose.

AEs can use this demo library as a sales enablement tool, so they can choose the most relevant demo for their prospect's use case. As a few examples, you can create different demos centered around:

- New or complex features
- One or more buyer personas
- A specific use case
- FAQs
- Apps and integrations
- Analytics

Use a guided demo as a leave-behind.

Instead of the typical one-pager no one reads, share a guided, custom tour with potential customers to enable them to effectively internally sell your product to the rest of the buying committee. **Some options could include:**

Create a gated version of the live sales demo with a sandbox environment that buyers can explore after the call. By requiring them to input data like their name and email for access, SEs will be able to see which users are engaging with their demos, and in what ways.

Create guided demos as leave-behinds for buyers.

Guided demos have elements like pulsating buttons and pop-up instructions that act as a virtual AE & SE team, filling in the knowledge gaps for your champion while enabling them to share it with other evaluators on their team.

Bringing SEs into the Sales Cycle after Prospects are Already Qualified

One of the best moments for SE involvement in the sales cycle is after the prospect has been qualified. That's usually when the discovery process has unveiled new questions about how the prospect might use your product in their specific environment. An SE can go beyond the technical scope of a first call or introductory demo.

Even when they are involved more strategically (and later) in the sales cycle, SEs don't have to reinvent the wheel with each demo. Nor do they have to rely on complex, hard-to-scale, unreliable sandbox environments that might crash or interfere with data in production. Here are a few ways in which a demo creation platform can help SEs build tailored, technical demos in less time.

Best Practices for Winning Technical Demos

Don't reinvent the wheel.

The same demo creation platform used to build interactive product tours and standardized sales demo libraries can be used to tailor SE demos. You can think of a demo library as a big box of reusable assets that can be shared as-is, or duplicated and customized for deeper, late-funnel discussions.

Now that you know more about the prospect and their specific needs or questions, it's time to think about the story you want to tell. A good demo creation platform will allow you to tailor and customize a demo quickly.

Some questions to ask to tailor your demo might include:

- What parts of the product do you want to explore in this stage of the cycle?
- What types of anonymized data do you want to show in the demo, and is it relevant to the prospect?
- How can you proactively address challenges, questions or objections as you dive a layer deeper into your demo?

Remain hyper-focused on what the prospect is trying to understand.

It can be tempting to feature-dump in a technical demo, showing off every possible capability your product has to offer. In many cases, this approach can confuse or overwhelm a prospect that has a specific pain point. Instead, cherry-pick the ideas that seemed most interesting to the prospect on previous calls, and explore those in further depth.

Prospects at different stages in the funnel have different attention spans. Top-of-funnel prospects have the least time and attention, so it's important to keep an interactive product tour short and sweet. Think 5-10 clicks. Once a prospect hits a first call with an AE, they may have slightly more attention to give. If you're using an interactive demo platform for the product tour, you'll have more intel on where to focus your first AE demo.

From there, the demo should get customized further based on what the prospect wants to see. Rather than talking through every possible feature, using a guided demo as a leave-behind can address what isn't covered on the SE call.

Use guardrails to keep a live demo on track.

To keep the conversation highly tailored to prospect needs, a good demo creation platform will allow you to set guardrails on exactly what parts of the product environment you'll show at any given time. This keeps the demo under control for both the SE and prospect alike, and avoids needless distractions that can extend the sales cycle even further.

Improving Sales Efficiency with the Right Interactive Demo Creation Platform

Fortunately, the playbook above is easy to execute with the right demo creation environment. Choosing the right solution can help you save time at every stage in the sales cycle: From prospect self-discovery to close.

Tips for Choosing the Best Demo Creation Environment

Choose a platform that allows you to:

- Create both live demos and guided demos/product tours for prospects.
- Prioritize safety and stability, particularly in enterprise environments where data security, anonymization and compliance regulations are critical.
- Easily connect to and clone your application environment.
- Customize your demo, so you can start with a baseline/standardized demo and tailor it to a specific industry, persona or use case.
- Integrate with your sales and marketing stack, or provide data API connectivity that you can leverage within your data lake or data warehouse.
- Leverage demo analytics to improve your demo over time, or prioritize use cases that get the most traffic on your website. You can even use this data to trigger specific sales and/or marketing actions.

This demo approach will improve your team's consultative selling approach at each stage of the buying cycle. The ultimate goal? Sales teams become trusted advisers who are highly knowledgeable about their field, maximizing every moment they have with the prospect.

Want to learn more about increasing sales efficiency with a demo creation platform?

Explore Reprise for Solutions Engineers [➤](#)