

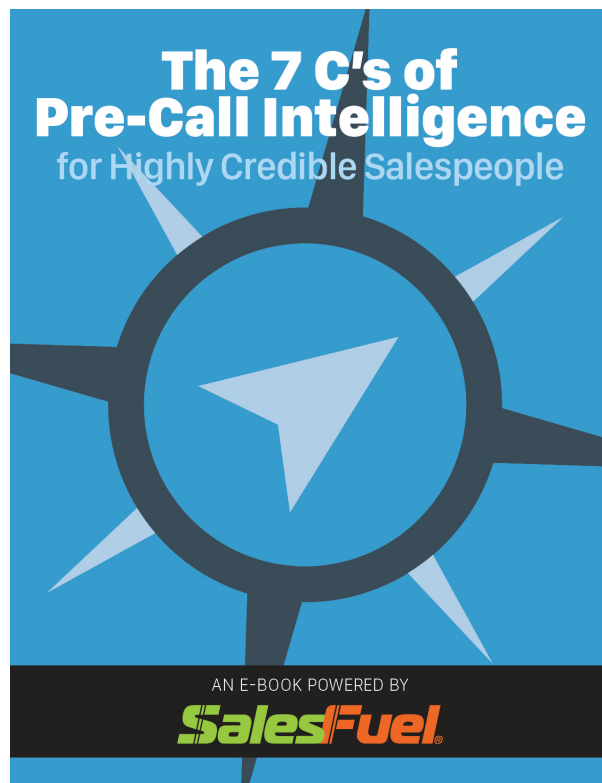
An Actionable Sales Journal



SALES CRED™

How Buyers Qualify Sellers

C. Lee Smith



Being a highly credible salesperson requires being prepared for every sales call. Salespeople who take a moment beforehand to find something of relevance to the buyer that they can share, instead of just winging it and trying to get by on personality, are perceived as more credible. They're also more helpful and have a far greater chance of connecting the dots for the buyer.

Visit <https://salesfuel.com/7c> to download this free e-book "The 7 C's of Pre-Call Intelligence for Highly Credible Salespeople."

SalesCred™ (Book Excerpt)

How Buyers Qualify Sellers

C. Lee Smith



An Actionable Sales Journal

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Please go to
<https://aha.pub/SalesCred>
to read this AHAbok and to share the
individual AHAmessages that resonate with you.



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Introduction

In sales, there's a lot of talk about qualifying the buyer. What's the lead scoring say? Are they a marketing-qualified lead or a sales-qualified lead? Do they fit our ideal customer profile? Will they buy enough to become an enterprise account?

Perhaps you've gotten it exactly BACKWARD. Instead, you should be talking about how the buyer qualifies (and disqualifies) the seller. What determines whom they invite to compete for the business? Whom do they call or email back? And whom they share sensitive business information with?

How the buyer perceives the seller has significantly more impact on whether a sale is made than how the seller perceives the buyer. This is why having Sales Credibility is so vitally important.

Like the credentials pictured on the cover of this book, having SalesCred™ gives you access to important people and information that ordinary salespeople simply can't get.

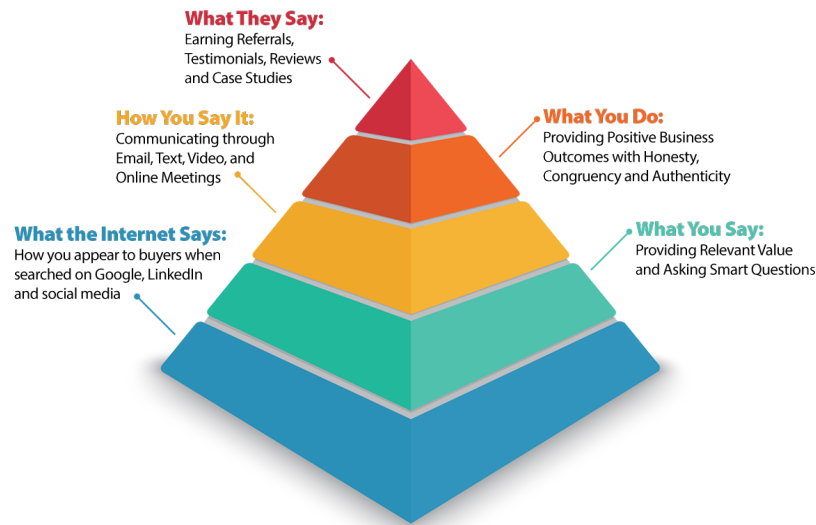
A buyer is far more likely to honestly answer your discovery questions if you are known to help people solve problems, achieve goals, and improve their business results.

A top executive is far more likely to instruct the gatekeeper to schedule a meeting when they believe that you won't waste their time—and that associating with you won't come back to bite them later.

Yet most salespeople close these doors with the words they say and the actions they take every day, both online and in person. They give away their credibility, their leverage, their POWER, in a business relationship that is already tilted in favor of the buyer. But it doesn't have to be this way.

I believe that sales, when done right, is a noble profession, but the industry needs a framework to make it easier for salespeople to learn how to be credible. This book discusses that framework, which is represented in The Hierarchy of Sales Credibility pictured below. The hierarchy is based on the work I have been doing at my firm, SalesFuel, for more than thirty years.

THE HIERARCHY OF SALES CREDIBILITY



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Starting with the foundation of the pyramid and building upward allow you to achieve what all salespeople want: credibility through the perception of others in the form of referrals and testimonials.

This book explains The Hierarchy of Sales Credibility and how each layer builds upon the last, enabling you to reach ultimate sales credibility—when those who know you talk about you in a way that positively influences those who don't, which makes future sales much easier.

While I was writing this book, my publisher, Mitchell Levy, was at the tail end of interviewing 500 thought leaders on credibility. His work led to a number of outcomes, including a new definition of credibility, which he discusses in-depth in his book, *Credibility Nation*, and which you'll see in the Three Pillars of Credibility diagram in Chapter 1 of this book.

The Three Pillars of Credibility and The Hierarchy of Sales Credibility complement each other. In order to move up the pyramid to a higher level of credibility, you need to succeed at being known, being likeable, and being trustworthy in what you say and do.

Salespeople can use the tips in this book to learn how to move up the hierarchy. Sales managers can use the framework to grow their sales team and provide their team members with the necessary training and coaching to increase credibility.

My first book, *Hire Smarter, Sell More!*, helps sales managers understand how to use data and analytics to hire salespeople who can build credibility and add significant value while being team players (e.g., not being a toxic troublemaker).

This book benefits both buyers and sellers by increasing the credibility of sales professionals, based not on theory, but on proprietary research done with B2B buyers, sales managers, salespeople and top company executives. Supporting data appears throughout this book and in the Appendix.

As you read *SalesCred*, you will learn what sales credibility is about and how salespeople can live and work credibly. When you apply the knowledge gained from this book, you will see growth in your sales numbers and happiness in your life—and the lives of others you serve every day.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to the two most important women in my life.

To Kelly Smith, my wife, best friend, and the best sale I ever made. She spent numerous nights and weekends by my side to help me get my company started during our salad days. She also is the CEO of the Smith household and one of the hardest workers I've ever known.

To Audrey Strong, my second-best friend whom I've known since college. She shares my dedication to ridiculously high service levels. For ten years, she never had to solicit new clients for her PR firm. They all came to her by referral. Another one of my best sales was convincing her to join my firm, SalesFuel.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Kathy Crosett, Vice President of Research and one of the OGs at SalesFuel. Kathy and I collaborate on all of the primary research for the firm, including many of the findings contained in this book. She is one of the most credible people I know. I rarely publish anything without Kathy reviewing it first.

Special thanks to Mitchell Levy. He is not only my publisher but also the Global Credibility Expert and author of *Credibility Nation*, which focuses on how all humans can become more credible. Together, our two books will contribute toward setting a higher standard of public discourse and professional conduct in the world. I truly enjoyed the brainstorming sessions we've had on both books, as well as his guidance on presenting the SalesCred story.

Special thanks to Tyler Welsh for his commitment to excellence as Creative Manager at SalesFuel. Tyler created the graphics for this book.

A THiNKaha book is not your typical book. It's a whole lot more while being a whole lot less. Scan the QR code or use this link to watch me talk about this new evolutionary style of book: <https://aha.pub/THiNKahaSeries>



How to Read a THiNKaha® Book

A Note from the Publisher

The AHAtat/THiNKaha series was crafted to deliver content the way humans process information in today's world. Short, sweet, and to the point while delivering powerful, lasting impact.

The content is designed and presented in ways to appeal to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic personality types. Each section contains AHAmessages, lines for notes, and a mime that summarizes that section. You should also scan the QR code, or click on the link, to watch a video of the author talking about that section.

This book is contextual in nature. Although the words won't change, their meaning will every time you read it as your context will. Be ready, you will experience your own AHA moments as you read. The AHA messages are designed to be stand-alone actionable messages that will help you think differently. Items to consider as you're reading include:

1. It should only take 25 to 30 minutes to read the first time. When you're reading, write one to three action items that resonate with you in the underlined areas.
2. Mark your calendar to re-read it again.
3. Repeat step #1 and mark one to three additional AHA messages that resonate. As they will most likely be different, this is a great time to reflect on the messages that resonated with you during your last reading.
4. Sprinkle credust on the author and yourself by sharing the AHA messages from this book socially from the AHAtat platform <https://aha.pub/SalesCred>.

After reading this THiNKaha book, marking your AHA messages, rereading it, and marking more AHA messages, you'll begin to see how this book contextually applies to you. We advocate for continuous, lifelong learning and this book will help you transform your AHAs into action items with tangible results.

Mitchell Levy, Global Credibility Expert
publisher@thinkaha.com

THiNKaha®

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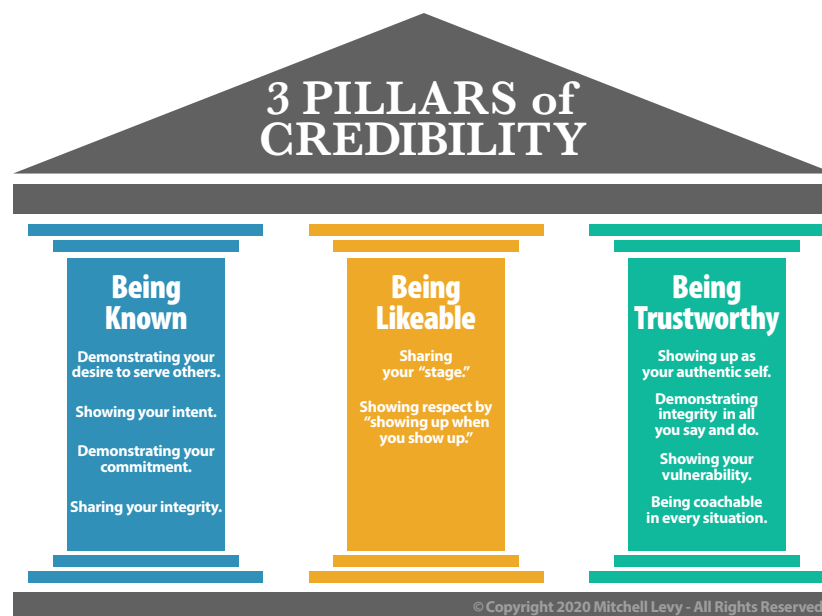
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Credibility, as defined by Mitchell Levy in his book, *Credibility Nation*, requires being known, being likeable, and being trustworthy.

It is much more than just having integrity or being friendly.

In fact, if one pillar crumbles, so does one's credibility.

Share the AHA messages from this book socially by going to

<https://aha.pub/SalesCred>.

Section I

Introduction

Only 1 in 4 North Americans views salespeople as credible in what they say and do, according to The State of Credibility survey conducted in September 2020 by SalesFuel®, Credibility Nation™, and Behavioral Resource Group. The number is even lower for automotive salespeople. 1 in 3 adults view real estate agents as credible.

Credibility is the pre-requisite of trust. A high degree of credibility is required for a salesperson to gain access to top decision-makers, sensitive business information, and the leverage needed to close business. Every word and action taken by salespeople, at all stages of the sales process, should boost your credibility, enabling you to earn the buyer's trust.

The major problem is that most salespeople unknowingly limit their success by pushing their prospects away with the words they speak and the actions they take every day.

This section discusses what sales credibility is and how valuable it is for salespeople to have and to build. By understanding credibility and the role it plays in sales, sales managers can be more effective in guiding their salespeople toward success.

Scan the QR code or use this link to watch the section videos and more on this section topic:
<https://aha.pub/SalesCresVs>



1

Credibility is the master key that unlocks the sales process. Every stage, whether it be connecting, discovery, solving, or closing, becomes much easier when your prospect perceives you as credible. #SalesCred
<http://cleesmith.com>

2

Most salespeople want to be thought of as "trusted advisors." But you cannot be trusted without a high degree of credibility. #SalesCred <https://cleesmith.com>

3

A salesperson without credibility is not only at a competitive disadvantage today, they're at risk for being replaced by AI tomorrow. #SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

4

All sales managers want to have a high-performing sales team. To achieve this goal, they have to improve both their sales process and their salespeople. Building credibility is a rare opportunity to do both at the same time. <https://salescred.com>

5

Credibility is being known, being likable, and being trustworthy. It is one of the basic foundations of building good relationships, which is the essence of sales. #SalesCred <https://mitchelllevy.com/credibility>
—Mitchell Levy

6

Being Known includes impacting customers in positive ways and letting other people know about it. Ideally, they'll hear it from the customer.
<http://cleesmith.com>

7

What are you known for? What do you WANT to be known for by your clients and prospects?
What is your area of expertise that rises above your competition? What are you doing to BECOME known?
#SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

8

Being Likable is more than being friendly, happy, and successful. It's about sharing credit for your successes and showing the expected level of respect for other people and things.

#SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

9

Being Trustworthy is a key requirement of a credible salesperson. Anything you say or do that the buyer believes to be untrustworthy immediately kills your credibility. #SalesCred <https://aha.pub/MitchellLevy>

10

#SalesCred requires follow-through, accountability, and congruence. Always deliver what you promised. Admit your mistakes. What you say and what you do must always be in alignment. <http://cleesmith.com>

11

Credibility multiplies the effectiveness of your sales methodology. In what ways can having greater credibility improve your existing sales process? #SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

12

Salespeople can build their credibility with what they say, how they say it, what they do, and what others say about them. #SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

13

Salespeople can either increase or decrease their credibility in the actions they take when performing their jobs. What past actions have increased or decreased your credibility?

#SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

14

The bigger the sale or the more complex your solution is, the more credible you need to be.

#SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

15

The more difficult the economy is, the more important your credibility becomes. Buyers will be seeking every opportunity to reduce risk. Your credibility is the leverage needed to keep from dropping your price.

#SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

16

In sales, your level of credibility acts like a magnet. It either attracts your desired buyers to you or it repels your desired buyers away from you. Which way is your magnet turned? #SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

17

How credible are you as a salesperson? More importantly, how credible do your prospects think you are? #SalesCred <http://cleesmith.com>

140+1

You may have noticed a common thread through the 140 CredTips we've presented here: intelligence.

Whether it be pre-call research, business acumen, emotional intelligence, or sales know-how, being a lifelong learner gives you the edge in building and maintaining credibility.

Some sales veterans—even the successful ones—may find it tempting “go with their gut” and say, “I’ve been doing this for 20 years, so I know all about . . .” But the world is not the same as it was 20 days ago, much less 20 years ago, and neither is sales.

Knowledge that comes from learning from credible sources—and applying that knowledge—is a vital part of what it takes to be seen as a credible salesperson who can provide Relevant Value to customers, enable buyers to solve problems, and help them achieve their goals.

Salespeople who are coachable, are open to what their mentors and managers share with them, invest more time in learning, and have positive, optimistic attitudes are the ones who can elevate their game when the marketplace is sluggish.

Always be learning.

Always be helpful.

Always be credible.

Always, in all ways.

Appendix

Salespeople are considered to be among the least credible professionals in America. This needs to change.

Credibility—and whether a person has it or not—determines whom you trust for guidance and which information you use to make decisions in your everyday life. The three pillars of credibility for any human being are being known, being likable, and being trustworthy. Credibility is gained (or lost) by what they say, how they say it, what they do, and finally, what others say about them.

Q: Do you agree or disagree that these professionals tend to be credible in what they say and do?

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Nurses	81%	14%	4%
Doctors	78%	15%	7%
Pharmacists	77%	19%	5%
Small business owners	67%	27%	6%
High school teachers	66%	24%	9%
Weather forecasters	62%	28%	10%
College professors	60%	27%	13%
Accountants	57%	33%	9%
Hair stylists	57%	34%	9%
Nerds/geeks	57%	35%	9%
High-ranking military officers	55%	30%	15%
Judges	55%	29%	15%
Police officers	55%	24%	21%
Book authors	51%	39%	9%
State and federal public health directors	49%	28%	24%
Financial advisors	48%	36%	16%

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Sports team coaches	46%	36%	18%
Religious leaders	46%	30%	24%
Local TV/radio/newspaper reporters	44%	30%	25%
Bartenders	43%	41%	16%
National news media reporters	37%	26%	37%
Business consultants	37%	43%	21%
Local government officials	36%	31%	33%
Home repair contractors	36%	38%	26%
Real estate agents	35%	40%	25%
Talk show/Podcast hosts	34%	38%	28%
Lawyers	34%	34%	32%
Business executives (other than CEOs)	30%	39%	31%
CEOs of publicly traded companies	29%	37%	34%
Salespeople (not automotive)	28%	42%	30%
Members of Congress	23%	27%	50%
Car salespeople	20%	29%	51%
	CREDIBLE	NEUTRAL	DUBIOUS

EXTRA POINT: Approximately 47% of Americans believe that most people have become somewhat or noticeably less credible in the previous year.

SOURCE: The American State of Credibility 2020, September 2020, Credibility Nation, SalesFuel and Behavioral Resource Group. Based on a representative sample of 1,025 online adults in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit salescred.com

When consumers buy a new car/truck, the dealership's credibility plays a key role in the purchase decision.

Q: What factors are most important to you when choosing a DEALERSHIP? (Check all that have a significant impact on your buying process)

1. Dealer reputation (48%)
2. Willingness to deal/negotiate fairly (43%)
3. Selection of vehicles available (38%)
4. Location close to home or work (34%)
5. Previous purchase experience—yours or someone you know (30%)

EXTRA POINT: Approximately 24% of auto buyers choose a dealership (in part) based on “where the salespeople are helpful and friendly.”

SOURCE: AudienceSCAN 2020, March-April 2020, SalesFuel. Based on a representative sample of 15,281 online adults in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit [AudienceSCAN.com](https://audiencescan.com)

All these factors are important when an SMB decision-maker qualifies a seller. Some factors are more important than others.

Q: What are the top five attributes you seek in a salesperson who calls on you (top ten results shown)?

1. Knows their product (60%)
2. Provides relevant ideas to help my business (45%)
3. Is responsive (39%)
4. Is professional in conduct and appearance (51%)
5. Knows my company/line of business (44%)
6. Is experienced (42%)
7. Cares about me and my business (40%)
8. Delivers what they promise (39%)
9. Knows my customers (38%)
10. Is creative (32%)

EXTRA POINT: Nearly 30% of SMB decision-makers say that they are “willing to pay a premium to buy from a supplier that provides extra customer service.”

SOURCE: Selling to SMBs Study, January 2019, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,166 self-reported owners, CEOs, other C-level executives, or purchasing agents of B2B companies with between 20 and 500 employees in the United States.

To download a free white paper on the “7 C’s of Pre-Call Knowledge for Credible Salespeople,” visit <https://salesfuel.com/7c>

When buyers research what the internet says about you, they use very specific metrics to qualify or disqualify you.

Q: When researching a salesperson before I meet with them, I usually look for . . . (Check all that apply.)

1. Years of experience (44%)
2. Length of time in previous jobs (31%)
3. Number of years in our industry (34%)
4. Names of previous employers (28%)
5. Their LinkedIn profile (27%)
6. Educational background (27%)
7. Their name in a Google search (24%)
8. Their posts on social media (24%)
9. Photographs they've taken (21%)
10. Articles they've written (21%)
11. Certifications (20%)
12. Their headshot/profile photo (19%)
13. Awards they've won (17%)

EXTRA POINT: Reviewing photographs posted on social media is most common among millennials.

SOURCE: Selling to SMBs Study, February-March 2019, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,166 self-reported owners, CEOs, other C-level executives, or purchasing agents of B2B companies with between 20 and 500 employees in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit <https://salesfuel.com/selling-to-smb>

Exhibit any of these behaviors once, and you've disqualified yourself from the sale with many SMB decision-makers.

Q: Which of these salesperson behaviors are deal-breakers for you? (Check all that apply.)

1. Pushing me to make a decision I'm not comfortable making yet (39%)
2. Blaming other people for mistakes that were likely theirs (38%)
3. Sharing information that they've been asked not to (36%)
4. Having poor hygiene (36%)
5. Being arrogant or overconfident (35%)
6. Not returning my calls or emails (35%)
7. Having poor etiquette/manners/social skills (35%)
8. Being caught telling an obvious lie (34%)
9. Routinely being late (33%)
10. Treating my support staff poorly (33%)
11. Not taking the time to learn about my business' past dealings with the sales rep's company (33%)
12. Sharing confidential information from other sources (32%)
13. Dressing inappropriately or unprofessionally (32%)
14. Failing to deliver on their promises without my intervention (32%)
15. Treating me like I'm small potatoes (32%)
16. Talking too much about how great their products are instead of what they can do for me (30%)
17. Cussing/Using profanity (29%)
18. Badmouthing competitors (28%)
19. Behaving in a manner that conflicts with my personal beliefs (28%)
20. Making claims that may be truthful but are one-sided or exaggerated (23%)
21. Citing research that is misleading or from questionable sources (21%)
22. Wearing too much cologne or perfume (17%)

SOURCE: Selling to SMBs Study, February-March 2019, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,166 self-reported owners, CEOs, other C-level executives, or purchasing agents of B2B companies with between 20 and 500 employees in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit <https://salesfuel.com/selling-to-smb>

There are key marketing offers and content that activate an SMB buyer to raise their hand as a prospect.

Q: What content influences you to share your contact information with a seller?

1. Provider customizes content to my needs (41%).
2. Provider offers insight on use of product/service to solve business problems (39%).
3. Provider offers primary research relevant to my business (37%).
4. Provider's online profile (34%).
5. Provider offers how-to tips (28%).
6. Provider maintains information on emerging market trends (26%).
7. Provider offers a free trial (25%).
8. Provider offers case studies and success stories (24%).
9. Provider offers an email newsletter subscription (10%).

EXTRA POINT: Approximately 28% say that a testimonial from a satisfied customer can influence their buying decision if it seems credible.

SOURCE: Selling to SMBs Study, February-March 2019, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,166 self-reported owners, CEOs, other C-level executives, or purchasing agents of B2B companies with between 20 and 500 employees in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit <https://salesfuel.com/selling-to-smb>

It takes more than a good script to get a response when cold calling.

Q: What factors influence you to return a call or email from a salesperson you've never worked with before? (Check all that apply.)

1. Current or future need for a product or service (52%)
2. Seller has shared something of value (42%)
3. A referral from a co-worker (32%)
4. A referral from someone outside my company (31%)
5. Seller or company featured in an interview I saw/heard/read (30%)
6. Unhappy with my current provider (21%)

SOURCE: Selling to SMBs Study, February-March 2019, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,166 self-reported owners, CEOs, other C-level executives, or purchasing agents of B2B companies with between 20 and 500 employees in the United States.

To inquire about the latest findings, visit <https://salesfuel.com/selling-to-smb>s

Most sales reps don't even do the minimum amount of pre-call preparation to be perceived as credible resources.

Q: For the majority of sales calls, which activities do you perform for pre-call preparation? (Check all that apply.)

1. Review the company's website (52%).
2. Get up to date on developments in the prospect's industry (39%).
3. Check the company's account status with us (38%).
4. Talk to a contact inside the company (38%).
5. Study the company's target geographical market (37%).
6. Review my CRM notes/past activities (35%).
7. Study the latest developments in their industry (31%).
8. Research their competitors' latest developments (31%).
9. Prepare discovery questions based on pre-call research (31%).
10. Review the company's reputation, ratings, and reviews (30%).
11. Research the needs/tendencies of their ideal customers (29%).
12. Conduct a Google news search (27%).
13. Read the company's blog if they have one (24%).

SOURCE: Voice of the Sales Rep Study, February 2020, SalesFuel. Based on an online sample of 1,075 self-reported sales representatives in the United States. To inquire about the latest findings, visit <https://salesfuel.com/voice-of-the-sales-rep>

About the Author



C. Lee Smith is the Sales Credibility Expert. For more than thirty years, he has helped salespeople leverage critical insights that enable them to acquire, develop, and retain their best customers by building their professional credibility in what they say and do every day.

He is the CEO and founder of SalesFuel®, a sales intelligence firm that has been recognized as one of the Top 10 Sales Enablement providers worldwide by *Selling Power* magazine.

Lee is one of a select few certified advisors worldwide for sales consultant Jeffrey Gitomer and was personally recognized as one of the Leading Sales Consultants by *Selling Power* magazine.

In addition to being a bestselling author and popular keynote speaker, he is also a C-Suite Network Advisor for sales leadership and co-host of the popular *Manage Smarter™* podcast.

Lee is the creator of AdMall®, the leading sales intelligence platform for local media sales and digital marketing professionals. He is also the creator of the SalesFuel HIRE and SalesFuel COACH SaaS platforms for hiring and coaching your best sales talent.

He is also a certified professional behavioral analyst with expertise in consumer behavior, as well as the destructive impact that toxic employees have on your sales team.

Lee is a graduate of Ohio University, with a certificate in executive leadership from Cornell University.

When he's not in the office, Lee can be found on his bike, riding with his peloton, The Honey Badgers, and crushing long-distance rides to raise money for cancer research.



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- ➡ Info on authoring: <https://AHAtthat.com/Author>



In sales, there's too much talk about qualifying the buyer. What does the lead scoring say? Are they a marketing-qualified lead or a sales-qualified lead? Do they fit our ideal customer profile?

Instead, you should be talking about how the buyer qualifies (and disqualifies) the seller. What determines who they invite to compete for the business, who they call or email back and who they share sensitive business information with?

This is the importance of Sales Credibility—the quality all salespeople must have before you can ever “earn trust” or become a “trusted advisor.”

This book reveals how salespeople build (and lose) credibility with the things you say and do every day. You'll learn the secrets of building your SalesCred™, so you can attract higher-value accounts, gain greater access to the real decision-makers, and sell from a position of strength.



Sales Credibility Expert **C. Lee Smith** is the CEO of SalesFuel®, a sales intelligence firm that has been enabling salespeople to be more credible since 1989. He has been recognized multiple times as one of the world's Leading Sales Consultants by *Selling Power* magazine. He is a bestselling author, keynote presenter, and creator of the SalesCred™ Sales Credibility Program, along with the AdMall®, SalesFuel HIRE, and SalesFuel COACH SaaS platforms.

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