ProPair

Executive Guide to Machine Learning Enabled Sales and Marketing Operations

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Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning have already enveloped our daily lives.

Siri and Google understand every word we utter.

Netflix feeds up our next binge, seemingly subconsciously.

Amazon already knows what you're likely to buy next and stocks it in a nearby distribution center so you can have it today.

Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok seem to be directly wired into our brains, serving up exactly what we need to see next to keep us scrolling.

Meanwhile, sales operations notably lags the trend — deeply integrating Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML) to get what we want faster and with less friction.

This is your opportunity to leap in front of your competition.

Sales operations are rich with the kinds of data that AI/ML thrive on — consumer data records, structured sales leads, contact (email, text, and call) logs, and standardized statuses and dispositions.

AI/ML is capable and production-ready to accelerate sales and revenue.

This whitepaper will show you how to build an AI/ML strategy within your sales and marketing operation, step-by-step, and hand your CEO and CFO lots of additional revenue.

What is Machine Learning?

Let's start with understanding the foundation of the science we're leveraging.

Machine learning is a subset of Artificial Intelligence, which is the theory and practice of using computer systems that are capable of performing tasks that normally require human intelligence.

Machine learning involves a similar use of computer systems, designed to learn and adapt without following precise rules but instead using algorithms and statistical models to analyze and develop inferences about patterns in data.

For the purpose of this whitepaper, let's confine our discussion to how we can leverage machine learning to enhance sales and marketing decision-making. Furthermore, we will demonstrate how you build operational strategies that use this enhanced decision-support at enormous scale, with incredible predictability, to generate remarkable outcomes.

Machine learning can be categorized into roughly four types of applications, based on complexity and integration. The table below demonstrates this landscape with some practical examples.

Stand-alone machine learning apps • Advisory and discovery apps • Customer retention and engagement apps (More Advanced, Isolated Platform)	Integrated machine learning apps • Predictive lead scoring • Predictive lead distribution (More Advanced, Integrated Platforms)
Stand-alone task-automation apps • Chatbots • Email automation (Less Advanced, Isolated Platform)	Integrated task-automation apps • Lead distribution • Call routing (Less Advanced, Integrated Platforms)

Within this whitepaper, we will focus primarily on integrated machine learning applications. This category of applications typically achieves the greatest impact by providing a tight coupling of our predictive dataset and more sophisticated learning and decision models.

Why is Sales Operations a Rich Environment for AI/ML?

Your sales operation is full of interesting and highly predictive datasets. Furthermore, the environment itself is conducive to continuous data collection and potential predictive learning.

Here are a few example datasets that can be significant in learning how to optimize your overall sales performance and production:

- **Sales leads** - Leads are individual consumers who show buying intent. They are inherently the most basic seeds of future sales and are full of predictive indicators of future closed deals. These leads can indicate the probability of not only being qualified but also being attractive to sales agents — seemingly easy to close or large deals with significant commissions.
- **Sales activities** - Most CRMs and supporting telephony systems are oozing with lead status, call tracking, email open rates, and other actions taken to move a lead to a closed deal. All of these little steps contribute to the probability of a lead turning into a closed deal.
- **Lead assignment and distribution** - When and how is a new lead or aged lead assigned or reassigned. This set of decisions, which in many sales operations happens thousands of times a day, is a significant factor in a sales lead even becoming a viable opportunity for a closed deal.

We could list hundreds of individual decision and data handling points throughout your sales process. Each of these process points produces predictive data. Each of these process points materially impact on how many deals you close this month and how many you will leave on the table.

Knowing how to spot a lead that is highly probable of closing, and the attributes that are most important (predictive) is a significant competitive advantage.

In sales, your number one expense — drag on your production — is missed closing opportunities. Deals that are closed, but didn't close with you.

Let's take a look at the kind of datasets that we are looking for to implement effective machine learning into our sales operations.

Structured Data

First, and most importantly, we want data that is inherently structured. Think of data that you can easily put into an Excel spreadsheet.

Machine learning can be highly effective at analyzing and learning from unstructured data, but this is more difficult and computationally expensive.

Sales operations is full of structured data, making it an ideal place to implement machine learning to directly impact your company's revenue operations.

High Frequency Consistent Activities

The more observations we can make, the faster we can train our models and the higher confidence levels we can reach.

Again, sales operations are full of this kind of data. A sales team makes thousands of calls, sends thousands of emails and text messages, and then annotates and statuses all of these activities with outcomes — every day.

This activity gives any machine learning model we create tens of thousands of decision points and outcomes to evaluate in a very short period.

Large and active sales teams allow us to train new models, determine predictability, and reach a high degree of confidence in these algorithms in a matter of hours, not days, weeks, or months.

Significant Outcome Volume

Sales operations are also rich with outcome data — the disposition of each sales activity and ultimately the final disposition of each and every lead.

Again, this kind of environment gives our machine learning models tens of thousands of actions and outcomes. With this volume of data, it makes it very easy to determine which actions are most predictive of desirable and undesirable outcomes.

Training machine learning on high volumes of both desirable and undesirable outcomes can certainly predict activities that increase desirable outcomes — more closed deals.

But, one of the surprising, high-impact benefits is the productivity and production increases you get from your current sales operations by reducing unproductive activities.

What are the Most Promising Applications of AI/ML in Sales and Marketing?

Hopefully, I've convinced you that Sales Operations is a target-rich environment for machine learning. Now, let's figure out the best places to insert machine learning applications.

Based on ProPair's experience, here are some of the most promising application areas that help boost conversion rates.

Standardization

Even the smallest sales operation makes hundreds of decisions a day, from lead distribution to prioritizing sales activities. As you scale, these decisions explode geometrically to hundreds of thousands of tiny decisions.

Each of these decisions increase and decrease the probability of each lead closing. Some decisions incrementally impact that outcome, but many of them can irrevocably kill the lead's opportunity to close.

We assume that we can simply run a report, see trends, and stop making bad lead management decisions. The problem is humans, even with known best practices and rules, make decisions inconsistently.

Lead distribution and disposition are notorious points of inconsistent lead management decisions. Sales managers, and even programmatic system rules, are variable based on perceived experience and intuition.

I say perceived experience and intuition because even in a small 10 sales agent team there is way too much data to accurately analyze and determine the right decision.

On the other hand, computers are highly effective at standardizing their decision-making and then quickly spotting predictive patterns and learning how to increasingly make the right decision.

Optimization

Machine learning's most basic application is analyzing data, recognizing patterns, and learning to predict desirable outcomes. This makes optimizing processes at scale relatively easy.

Knowing what leads and activities to prioritize allows your most expensive and skilled resources — sales professionals — to focus only on the things that have the highest probability of producing a closed deal. Then, of course, the second half of that equation is actually knowing who your most valuable (skilled and effective) talent is at any given moment.

For years we have assumed we are optimizing for the best leads and giving them to the best sales agents. However, in fact, we have been making only slightly better than random assumptions and then locking these decisions into static rules.

What's worse, these rules are often poorly documented and quickly sewn into the fabric of our sales operations for better or worse, any certainly sure to degrade over time.

Fortunately, machine learning can now re-evaluate those same assumptions and decisions continually, holding onto the good ones, and discarding or recalibrating the poor ones.

Automation

Lastly, but not necessarily finally, machine learning is especially good at triggering automation — alerting us to do things at scale, based on very specific individualized activities.

Most sales operations and CRMs rely almost entirely on sales professionals to use their experience-based intuition to determine and take the next best action. I don't even have to enumerate the reasons why this is a formula for suboptimal performance.

An improvement over that approach is building time-based drip campaigns to simulate salespeople following up with prospects. This strategy is actually highly effective; however, its lack of precision and personalization delivers significant collateral damage to the user experience.

I would argue that this attempt to scale sales operations, with basically indiscriminate automation has resulted in a patchwork of almost debilitating (for sales operations and customer experience) regulatory and technological countermeasures.

Again, machine learning can bring a much more intelligent and precise approach to customer experience. Our models can be trained to identify activities that signal buying intentions. Then our sales automations can trigger with laser-like precision and personalization.

The Competitive Advantage of Implementing AI/ML is Now

Armed with a fresh understanding of how machine learning can increase your organization's sales performance and production, the question becomes:

"How urgent is it for your company to implement these competitive advantages?"

The best way to evaluate that decision is to answer two questions:

1. Is machine learning ready for production sales operations?
2. Is the ROI significant enough to invest now?

Although machine learning is in an early stage of production implementation, with 86% of organizations not using any form of AI the impact of putting machine learning into your sales operation is significant, with top-performing sales teams being 4.9 times more likely to be using AI.

And, does it yield a big enough ROI? The data is also proving this benefit too, with a 50% increase in leads and appointments and 60–70% call time reductions.

These metrics are even more interesting because they are not only showing a sizable competitive advantage but also generating advantages in both increased revenue and productivity.

ProPair's own data is showing the same competitive advantages, most notably increasing conversion rates at a consistent and predictable 7-10%.

This lift in conversion rates is also proving to increase as more and more decision points in our clients' sales operations are identified for machine learning optimization.

How ProPair Supercharges Your Sales and Marketing Decisions

As we wrap up this executive guide, I want to give you some very practical examples of how ProPair is supercharging sales operations — increasing conversion rates and generating more closed deals — right now.

Identifying sales leads with the highest probability of turning into a closed deal

One of the most common, and somewhat foundational opportunities within any sales operations is identifying the sales leads that have demonstrated the highest probability of generating revenue — closed deals.

The opportunity here is significant given that most lead scoring and grading, if done at all, are implemented in one of two suboptimal ways:

1. **Scores are weighted on some measure of potential desirability or incentive.** For example, often larger deal sizes, higher credit scores, or C-level titles are scored higher. However, oftentimes your specific data reveals, as our machine learning algorithms begin to train and optimize, that there are other more predictive attributes. These examples are exactly how you pick up several more closed deals, immediately.
2. **Scores that are derived from performance data, but built from a series of point-in-time sales and marketing reports**. These reports often do give reasonable information and show what are the best leads. But, only for that specific moment in time. However, once again the lack of dynamic decision-making cedes your competitive advantage.

   The reality of this approach is that it requires human analysis of static reporting, which takes time and often slips behind other operational priorities. So, these static rules get locked in and you are operating on an old snapshot of your sales

operations. In the interim, since that last analysis you have gained and lost a variety of salespeople, you have probably even made changes to your sales process, and adjusted your marketing channels and lead buying.

In contrast, ProPair RANK:

- **Trains on your specific dataset** - Your leads, sales activities, individual sales performance, and the unique patterns and trends within this data (reflective of your unique sales processes and operations) becomes the foundation of your unique ProPair machine learning models.
- **Learns from your specific dataset** - Our machine learning quickly determines what lead attributes and activities increase and decrease the probability of turning each lead into a closed deal. And, inherently readjusts its learnings as things change in your sales operations.
- **Turns those learnings into actionable attributes** - Now, your existing sales processes and lead management systems know exactly what leads to focus time, attention, and resources on.

Identifying sales agents with the highest probability of closing a deal

Tracking and optimizing our sales processes with a tilt toward rewarding our top sales performers is another common approach to optimizing sales operations.

Once again, the problem with this approach is that even the most data-driven approach will quickly degrade with time, as processes, products, sales agents, compensation plans, and systems change.

ProPair's MATCH machine learning models solve these problems on two fronts:

- **Trains with your unique sales operations data** - From this process, we build and track sales team-specific attributes and activities that predict top sales performers.
- **Learns from your top-performing sales agents** - Our machine learning models will discover patterns in the activities that make sales agents successful — moving more leads to closed deals. These discoveries are continually tuned and optimized to pick sales agents with the highest probability of closing a deal with increasing certainty.

Optimizing the distribution and redistribution of leads to maximize the overall production of the entire sales operation

As ProPair quickly evaluates and learns your specific sales operation's highest value leads and your strongest sales agents, you can begin to optimize.

ProPair's MIX machine learning models will give you the perfect system for distributing and re-distributing leads to the right sales agents.

Getting this mix right can be a big competitive advantage.

ProPair MIX considers a variety of attributes and potential decisions to get the most out of your *raw materials* — leads and sales agents. By scaling these complex decisions you can pull poor performers up, precisely allocate (but, not over-allocate) to top performers, and distribute the perfect mix of high and low probability leads to squeeze the most out of your entire sales operations — with no waste.

Identifying opportunities, both when and how, to engage with a sales lead to increase its probability of closing

ProPair machine learning goes beyond just predicting leads that will close and sales agents who will close them, it turns those learnings into actionable recommendations and nudges.

Once our models have determined the highest value leads, ideal sales agents, and the lead management and agent activities that move leads forward within your sales processes, those processes can be optimized. ProPair, in collaboration with your current systems, triggers and prioritizes higher-value activities against high-probability leads.

Leverage machine learning to catch leads before they fade, engage leads as they gain momentum, and nudge sales agents to take higher-value actions.

Ever-expanding universe of additional opportunities to support decision-making at enormous scale

Everything we have talked about in this executive guide is just the beginning.

Once machine learning is integrated into your sales operations, there are nearly infinite sets of decisions that can be evaluated and optimized — at scale, and with quantifiable certainty that these better decisions yield more sales.

Learn More About the ProPair Advantage

Schedule your discovery call and learn how we can increase conversion rates and close more deals, across all of your sales lead channels, with one simple integration.

As a part of your discovery call, we will also evaluate up to 6 months of data and 10,000 lead records with the ProPair system. From this retro-evaluation, we demonstrate exactly where you left closed deals on the table and how to get those back - starting as early as this month!