

The Role of the SDR Leader in the Age of AI

A CONVERSATIONAL REPORT

with Community Members of SDR Leaders of USA

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Are you leading an SDR team? If you are, you're doing more than managing pipeline growth.

You're redefining how prospecting and outbounding gets done today.

And with the amount of change that's happening -- driven in part by AI -- it's no small feat. So, what kind of role should SDRs and leaders have in the future?

We share the view that SDR teams are most effective when they're focused on the human-first aspects of selling. Building rapport, making emotional connections, empathizing with prospects -- creating real relationships that drive growth.

We believe that SDRs and SDR leadership should spend less time buried in admin and more time doing what moves deals forward -- connections, conversations, creativity. And that's what this paper is about: how AI can automate the busywork so your team can double down on the human side of selling.

We are proud to contribute data and insights to this work because we hear from SDR leaders every day that the role is evolving fast. The best leaders are coaching, guiding, and creating space for reps to grow. And they're using AI-enabled tools to do it.

This report gives a glimpse of that future. It's practical, tactical, and rooted in what's already happening across the best SDR teams in the world.

We hope it gives you new ideas and the support to lead with a human-first, tech-enabled mindset.

Let's build the next generation of SDR leadership—together.

– The Nooks Team



**With contributions from community members:**

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Cameron Lincoln

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Nicole Osborne

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Introduction

WITH OVER 40% OF SALESPEOPLE NOW LEVERAGING AI TOOLS,

one thing is becoming increasingly clear – SDR Leaders who don't understand how to embrace new solutions and processes will soon be left behind.

What's required is a strategic approach to integrating AI into workflows, enabling it to enhance efficiency without replacing human decision-making or fostering over-reliance. The work of an SDR Leader now involves evaluating solutions, empowering reps to adopt new approaches, and ensuring that analysis and strategy are present at every stage.

How does this look in practice?

That's what we'll explore in this report.

SDR Leaders will spend more time talking to quality candidates

The average SDR role attracts around 200 applicants, but **a bad hire can cost up to three times their salary**. This leaves you, as SDR Leader, caught in a tug of war between speed and precision, trying to pinpoint the right skills while drowning in hours of admin. At least, it did – until the rise of AI interviewing solutions which allow you to spend less time vetting and more time talking to quality candidates.

“If we’re looking at making the SDR function more of a cost positive for the business, we’ve got to think about ways of how we can create more efficient ways to find the right candidates and take away some of that human error. That’s where AI comes in.”

-DAVID WILKINS ★



How does this look in practice?

AI tools can pre-vet candidates in seconds, automatically pulling information from resumes or LinkedIn profiles based on parameters set by SDR Leaders. You might input that you’re looking for B2B SaaS experience, outbound sales skills, or a proven track record in high-volume prospecting, for example.

Of course, LinkedIn and resumes don’t always paint the full picture so **pairing this with an AI pre-screening assessment** is a good way to go. This will delve deeper into pre-set questions and roleplay scenarios, scoring candidates and then passing them to you so you can save time and ensure you don’t miss high-quality applicants.

What are the limitations?

Concerns about bias in hiring with AI solutions are common. But with the right strategy, you can actually reduce bias and subjectivity. Focus on:

- Using tools that prioritize skills-based assessments rather than relying on demographic details or past experience.
- Creating scorecards which measure objective strengths and competencies.
- Using tools that free up your time to engage more with candidates on a human level.
- Continuously evaluating your interview process to reduce bias and improve quality.

“What I’m interested in is the story behind the resume. Resumes can be helpful in quickly summarizing information and AI can help with this, but we also need something that can pick up soft skills and understand someone’s journey.”

-JASON SILVERMAN



Understanding the Journey

Capturing the narrative of personal growth



Soft Skills

Identifying interpersonal and adaptability skills



Resume Summary

Quick overview of qualifications and experience

Tips from the Community

“We see AI training bots play an increasingly important role in screening applicants. They can provide a scalable step that consistently challenges interviewees and offers independent scoring and evaluations based on criteria you set. This can cut hours or even days from your process depending on your volume of interviews.”



-PETER MOLLINS

AI-Enhanced Interview Process



Time Efficiency



Candidate Insight



Question Improvement

“We use AI to listen more, to engage more. Our tool notes down questions and answers and saves us time in interviews to really get to know someone.”



-NICOLE OSBORNE

“You can analyze interviews to find out which questions are triggering responses that are good and where interviewers can improve the experience for the candidate and the organization.”



-CAMERON LINCOLN

SDR onboarding is becoming more efficient

AI presents a huge opportunity to optimise and personalise your onboarding processes, allowing you to reduce ramp-up time and support SDR engagement.

“The big trap SDR Leaders fall into is to try and teach the A to Z of everything. The reality is an SDR might not need to know B and another might not ever use C. AI can help you pinpoint weaknesses and elevate strengths while giving reps access to all the information they need.”

-DAVID WILKINS ★



How does this look in practice?

AI tools use data found at the onboarding stage to create personalized learning programs that help people improve their weaknesses and elevate their strengths. This will typically include tailored use cases, tracked assessments, and learning materials in different mediums for different types of learners... Think videos for visual learners, articles for complex topics, and recordings for real-life practice for example.

Integration with LMS systems allows these tools to seamlessly pull through important information to make SDR learning more efficient and enable self-paced learning. This means fewer questions for SDR Leaders.

AI is also an essential tool for allowing SDRs to practice cold calls without burning through real prospects. As Peter Mollins describes, “SDRs can roleplay in Nooks, practising with personas built from transcripts and then with do-overs of tough calls. You can build scorecards that are aligned with best practices and what’s proven to work.”



What are the limitations?

While AI-driven learning programs offer efficiency and personalization, they do have limitations. The onboarding phase is an SDR's first real experience of the company, shaping their perception and engagement. Especially in remote teams, relying too heavily on AI can make the process feel impersonal and transactional.

A strong human presence ensures that SDRs feel supported, understand the company culture, and build relationships that are essential for long-term success.

Tips from the Community

"We've seen that AI bots for role-playing have reduced onboarding time by 40%. New reps can practice at will, with no fear, at any time. And the trainers can adapt and focus on key concepts as the reps level up."



-PETER MOLLINS

"We feed our AI bot information about our competitors so that reps can learn to find weaknesses more easily."



-NICOLE OSBORNE

"You can upload sales materials into ChatGPT and ask it to outline practical exercises that SDRs can be doing in a real-world setting."



-CAMERON LINCOLN

SDR leaders will empower reps to spend more time building pipeline

Identifying contacts, gathering data, and manually dialling—this was how SDRs spent much of their time before AI.

IN FACT, IN 2023, OVER

70%

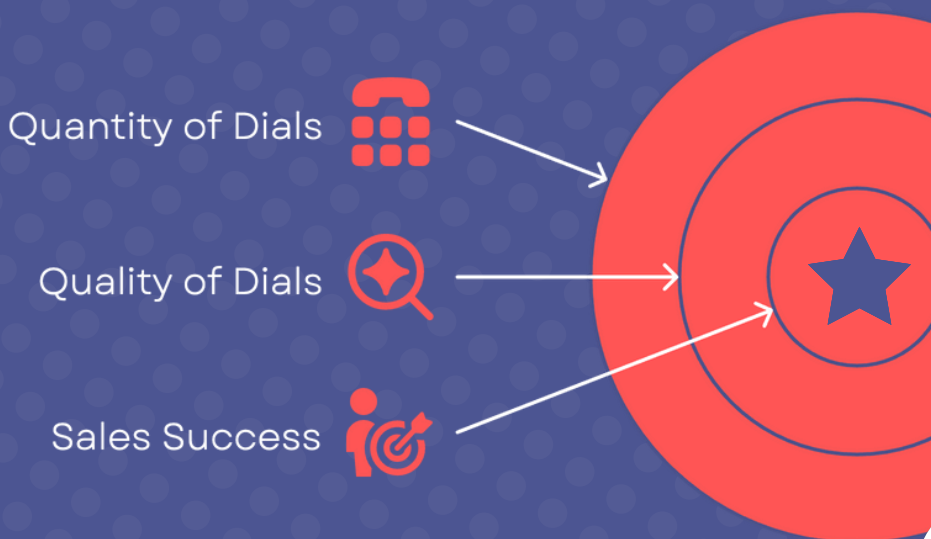
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SALESPERSON’S TIME WAS STILL ESTIMATED

TO BE SPENT ON NON-SELLING.

By integrating AI into your prospecting process, you can eliminate admin-heavy work, allowing your team to focus on what truly matters: engaging more prospects and building pipeline.

Building Pipeline



“Sales is still a numbers game; AI tools that can boost both the quantity and quality of the dials are critical. The less busy work - the more time your reps will spend talking with more of the right people.

- DALE THORN ★



How does this look in practice?

AI accelerates account research, allowing SDRs to find out who to target by rapidly assessing information about their industry, pain points, behavioural intent and more. Predictive tools take this a step further by analyzing past successes, identifying patterns, and suggesting high-potential prospects based on knowledge-base data.

You can also use AI tools to **craft personalized messages in minutes** by analyzing key buyer signals and previous interactions. AI can generate an initial draft email based on the context of past calls, insights from CRM data, and external research—like a company's annual report or a CEO's statements about future plans. This allows SDRs to quickly distill relevant information into effective messaging. AI also makes A/B testing easier by generating multiple variations with different inputs.

Power dialers and parallel dialers automate outreach, allowing SDRs to reach more prospects. And **when combined with AI tools, they can significantly improve connect rates** by identifying the best times to call, enhancing data quality, and mitigating spam risks.

AI ensures contact details are accurate by cross-referencing multiple sources, flagging outdated records, and prioritizing high-value leads based on engagement and intent signals. It also helps prevent calls from being flagged as spam by monitoring phone number reputation, optimizing call patterns, and rotating outbound numbers to maintain a strong call presence.

“AI means that as an SDR Leader you have more time for coaching. Rather than spending time researching and writing emails for your team, you’re able to ask ‘Why did you book this meeting?’ and ‘What went well?’”

-DAVID WILKINS ★

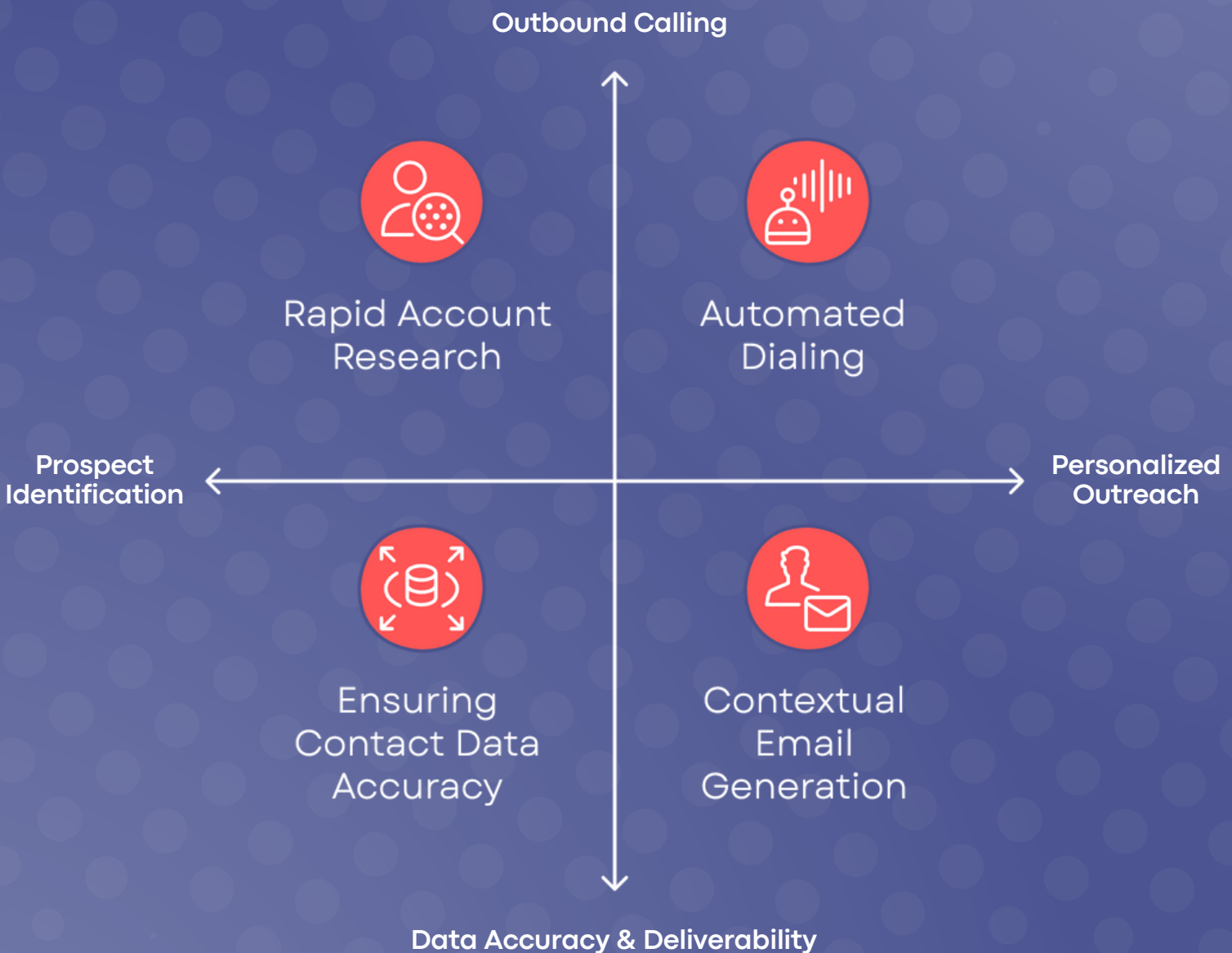


What are the limitations?

SDR leaders risk over-relying on AI tools in prospecting, which can lead to generic outreach, missed context, and a lack of genuine engagement.

To prevent this, it's crucial to continuously monitor AI-generated output and use poor examples as learning opportunities for SDRs. As Peter Mollins puts it, “AI should automate the busywork and science, allowing reps to focus on the art and human side of selling.”

AI in Sales Process Optimization



Tips from the Community

“The way I see AI being used—and where it has untapped potential—is in embedding research-driven prompts directly into the CRM. As reps prospect, they wouldn't just see a contact's name; they'd get instant insights on key KPIs, role responsibilities, and how that role interacts with the products or services they use”.



- MATT FRUITHANDLER

AI-Enhanced Sales Process



AI-Driven Insights



Targeted Prospecting



Automated Tasks

“Gone are the days when you had to do list building. With AI tools, you can specify who you're looking for based on really narrow signals and triggers.”



-ELIJAH AWOKÉ

“AI can automate much of the busywork of prospecting -- including researching accounts and building prospect lists at scale. We've seen AI cut up to a day's worth of work per week from each seller. That's time that can go back to core selling.”



- PETER MOLLINS

Lead qualification will become more strategic

With way more data (and new ways to analyze it) at our fingertips, lead qualification is becoming more strategic than ever. AI tools can identify patterns, surface intent signals, and score leads with greater accuracy. They can also vet the quality of an entire opportunity as well as individual leads.

“AI gives SDR leaders a bird’s-eye view of their pipeline, showing not just which leads are worth pursuing, but which opportunities have the highest potential ROI.”



-DALE THORN ★

How does this look in practice?

AI tools can unearth insights that you can easily miss when you’re on the phone trying to book a meeting. Through sentiment analysis, AI can detect subtle buying signals and tone shifts that indicate a prospect’s true level of interest and pain points. When you consider that 55% of communication is non-verbal, this is a huge opportunity.

It can also point out gaps in SDRs questioning based on past conversations and suggest improvements to refine their approach and qualify leads more accurately. This might mean suggesting more relevant follow-ups or reframing questions for deeper insights.

Tools like Nooks not only score leads, but analyze call transcripts to identify the best follow-up actions. By assessing conversation flow, sentiment shifts, and unanswered questions, it can recommend next steps.

What are the limitations?

AI can score leads and surface intent signals, but it's only as good as the data it analyzes. Inaccurate or incomplete records can lead to false positives or missed opportunities.

It also can't replace human judgment—buying decisions aren't always black and white, and AI may overlook subtle signals that indicate a strong fit. The best approach? Use AI as a guide, but let SDRs make the final call.

"We've been testing AI to remove subjectivity from qualification—from SDR to handoff. It ensures key criteria are met, flags gaps, and instantly alerts SDR leaders via Slack with green or red flags. It will also trigger if there are additional questions that need to be asked".

-CAMERON LINCOLN



Instant Alerts

Immediate feedback on performance



Gap Identification

Highlights areas needing improvement



Criteria Assurance

Verifies standards are met

AI Enhanced Lead Qualification



Sentiment Analysis

AI detects subtle buying signals



Questioning Gaps

AI identifies areas for questioning improvement



Follow-Up Suggestions

AI suggests relevant follow-up actions



Lead Scoring

AI scores leads based on engagement

SDR function performance could skyrocket

With AI handling manual tasks, SDR leaders can focus more on growth—both for their reps and themselves. AI tools can help with this, facilitating a more data-driven approach to coaching, performance tracking, and skill-building.

However, ultimately it falls on SDR Leaders to create strategic professional development plans that further growth. In this final section, we offer some tips for areas to focus on.

“With AI, you as a leader can be a lot clearer in how your team is performing and the gaps that it has. You can pinpoint what assistance you need as a leader for your team to improve, but also for you to further improve and scale”.

-DAVID WILKINS ★



What should SDRs be focusing on in the age of AI?

“SDR Leaders should be enabling SDRs to hit their goals, but also eventually get promoted off the team into other roles. This might mean training them on product knowledge, how to manage, or how to create reports”.



-DALE THORN

“As leaders, we have to think about how to coach our reps to spend time on new activities that will make our lives and their lives easier. This means being more strategic – think social selling or working in a smarter way with account execs, for example”.



-NICOLE OSBORNE



“Training on AI tools is essential. It’s like when Google first came out and you had to teach people how to do proper Google searches. You need to teach effective methodology because you can’t assume people will use technology correctly every time”.

-MATT FRUITHANDLER

“AI makes it easier to track contribution and performance so now you need to be telling the story... What is the output of your contributions? Where you haven't hit your goals, what is the reason why? What is the assistance you need?”



-DAVID WILKINS

“One of your best differentiators is a human-led selling motion. One that lets your sellers build empathy, understanding, and relationships with your prospects and customers. AI helps you achieve that by removing the burden of busywork so sellers can focus on high leverage, human-led selling.”



-PETER MOLLINS

“AI can help you learn much more, more quickly. If you don't have time to read an email or attend a webinar, you can put it into ChatGPT. The barrier to consuming information is lower and this is something SDR Leaders should leverage.”



-JASON SILVERMAN