

Sales Representatives (Wholesale and Manufacturing)

AI is automating prospecting, quoting, order entry, follow-ups and CRM notes, leaving reps to handle relationships, negotiation and complex deals.

EXPOSURE	WINDOW	ADOPTION TODAY	READING
76 Very high exposure	0–3 yrs until change lands	High	Core tasks are being automated now. Exposure is the share of today's work AI can plausibly take on within the window.

§ 01

WHAT IS HAPPENING

What is happening to sales representatives (wholesale and manufacturing)

Impact

Wholesale and manufacturing sales reps are among the heaviest observed users of generative AI in any occupation. Tools in Salesforce, HubSpot and Microsoft Dynamics draft outreach emails, score leads, summarise calls and update the CRM automatically; conversation-intelligence platforms such as Gong record and analyse every call; and distributors are moving routine reorders to self-service portals and AI agents that quote, check stock and take orders without a rep. The day-to-day is shifting from volume activity to a smaller number of higher-value conversations, with the software handling most of the correspondence and administration in between.

Risk

Core tasks are being automated now; the human value moves to negotiation, trust and solving customer problems.

This is a very high exposure role. Official measures place it in the top exposure tier, task-level applicability is high and observed usage is among the highest recorded in the Anthropropic Economic Index, which is why the score is 76 and the window is 0-3 years. Prospecting research, email sequences, quote generation, order processing, meeting notes, pipeline updates and routine account check-ins are already being automated or heavily assisted. What stays human is the relationship: understanding a customer's operation, negotiating terms and pricing, resolving supply problems, and being the person a buyer trusts when something goes wrong. Expect headcount pressure on roles that mainly process reorders and run high-volume outreach, and continued demand for reps who manage complex accounts and bring in new business.

Sector readiness

Widespread CRM-Embedded Deployment

AI has reached sales teams faster than almost any other function because it ships inside the CRM and sales-engagement tools already in use. Large manufacturers and distributors have deployed lead scoring, conversation intelligence and automated outreach widely; smaller wholesalers are following as the features appear in HubSpot and Dynamics. Adoption is rated high, and the remaining gap is in how well teams actually use what they have bought.

§ 02 POSITION

Where you stand

- i Position yourself as a consultative seller who understands the customer's operation and solves problems the self-service portal cannot.
- ii Become the rep who uses AI prospecting and conversation intelligence to run a larger, better-qualified pipeline than peers.
- iii Specialise in complex, multi-stakeholder accounts and new-business development, where negotiation and trust still decide the outcome.

§ 03 ACTIONS

6 POINTS

What this means for you

Concrete changes to how the work gets done, in the order you are likely to meet them.

- 01 **Let the software do the outreach.** Use your CRM's AI to draft sequences and summarise calls, then spend the saved hours on live conversations. Activity volume is no longer the differentiator.
- 02 **Know your customers' operations.** Walk their warehouse or plant, understand their constraints, and you become the rep an AI agent cannot replace.
- 03 **Learn to read the signals.** Lead scoring and conversation intelligence surface which deals are moving. Act on them rather than on gut feel alone.
- 04 **Move up the complexity curve.** Routine reorders are heading to portals and agents. Aim for accounts with custom requirements, technical questions or difficult logistics.
- 05 **Guard the relationship data.** Make sure what you know about an account is in the CRM. It feeds the tools you rely on and shows your value to the business.
- 06 **Negotiate as a craft.** Pricing, terms and problem resolution remain human. Invest in negotiation training and in understanding your own margins.

§ 04 CAUSES

6 DRIVERS

What is pushing this change

- 01 **CRM-embedded AI.** Salesforce Einstein, HubSpot and Dynamics 365 generate emails, score leads, forecast pipeline and update records automatically.
- 02 **Conversation intelligence.** Platforms such as Gong record and analyse calls, producing summaries, coaching notes and next steps without rep effort.
- 03 **Self-service B2B ordering.** Distributors are moving reorders to portals and AI agents that quote, check stock and take orders directly.
- 04 **High observed usage.** Sales is one of the occupations where generative AI is already most used day to day, so change arrives quickly.
- 05 **Margin pressure in distribution.** Thin wholesale margins reward any tool that cuts cost per order and per customer contact.
- 06 **Buyer behaviour.** Procurement teams increasingly research and reorder online, reducing the number of touchpoints a rep controls.

Impact by sector

The headline figure is an average. Where you work changes the picture.

Industrial and MRO distribution	High-volume reorders and catalogue sales are the most exposed; portals and agents already handle much of the routine business.
Food and beverage wholesale	Frequent, relationship-driven deliveries keep some human contact, but order-taking and route planning are automating fast.
Capital equipment and custom manufacturing	Long sales cycles, technical specification and negotiation keep reps central; AI assists with research and proposals rather than replacing the sale.
Building materials and construction supply	Contractor relationships and site logistics matter, but quoting and credit checks are increasingly automated.

Skills to build

The skills that keep the human part of this work valuable as the routine part is automated.

- 01 **Consultative selling.** Diagnosing a customer's problem and shaping a solution is what portals cannot do; formal methodologies and field time both build it.
- 02 **CRM and sales-AI proficiency.** Knowing how to configure and exploit Einstein, HubSpot or Dynamics features turns the tool into a multiplier rather than an administrative burden.
- 03 **Negotiation and pricing judgement.** Understanding margins, terms and leverage remains central; practise with real deals and seek coaching.
- 04 **Product and application knowledge.** Deep knowledge of how products are used in the customer's process is a defensible edge over generic AI answers.
- 05 **Data interpretation.** Reading pipeline analytics, win-loss patterns and territory data critically helps you prioritise where to spend time.
- 06 **Problem resolution.** Handling supply failures, quality issues and disputes builds the trust that keeps accounts; treat each one as a chance to prove your value.

Tools in use

KINDS OF TOOL WORTH KNOWING

- 01**ZoomInfo Copilot.** Prospecting data platform that uses AI to identify and prioritise accounts showing buying signals.
- 02**B2B self-service ordering portals.** Distributor portals and AI ordering agents that quote, check stock and take reorders without a rep.

NAMED TOOLS ALREADY IN USE

Salesforce Einstein	VISIT
Generates emails, scores leads, forecasts pipeline and powers agents inside Salesforce.	
HubSpot	VISIT
CRM whose Breeze AI features draft outreach, summarise calls and automate follow-up for smaller sales teams.	
Gong	VISIT
Conversation intelligence that records, transcribes and analyses sales calls to produce summaries and coaching.	
Microsoft Dynamics 365 Sales	VISIT
CRM with Copilot features for email drafting, meeting preparation and opportunity summaries.	

In practice

Ways people in this role are already using AI, and what they get from it.

Automated call summaries into CRM EXAMPLE 1	HOW	A distributor's reps let conversation intelligence transcribe each call and push summaries and next steps into the CRM.
	GAIN	Hours of weekly note-taking disappear and pipeline data becomes more complete.
AI-drafted outreach sequences EXAMPLE 2	HOW	A manufacturer's inside sales team uses CRM AI to draft personalised prospecting emails from account data, then edits before sending.
	GAIN	Reps reach more qualified prospects in less time while maintaining a personal tone.
Self-service reorder portal EXAMPLE 3	HOW	A wholesaler shifts routine reorders to a portal with AI stock and pricing answers, freeing field reps for new business.
	GAIN	Order-processing cost falls and reps concentrate on growth accounts.

§ 09

CONTEXT

How this role compares

Three neighbouring roles chosen to show the direction of travel.

Telemarketers MORE EXPOSED	AI IMPACT Scripted, high-volume outbound calling is being replaced directly by AI voice and messaging agents. WORK MOVES TO Outbound contact and lead generation at volume.
Business Development Executives DIFFERENT SKILLS, GROWING	AI IMPACT AI supports research and outreach, but the role grows around partnerships, new markets and complex deals. WORK MOVES TO Strategic relationships and new-market entry.
Sales Managers COMPLEMENTARY, LESS EXPOSED	AI IMPACT Coaching, territory strategy and people management are less exposed than individual selling tasks. WORK MOVES TO Team leadership, forecasting and performance coaching.

§ 10

VERDICT

Closing judgement

If you sell for a wholesaler or manufacturer, most of what fills your inbox and CRM is already being done by software, and the rest will follow within a few years. The work that remains is the part you went into sales for: understanding the customer's business, negotiating, fixing problems and earning repeat business. Use the tools to clear the administration and spend the time with customers. Reps who are primarily order-takers or email senders are the ones most at risk.

§ 11

BASIS

REVISED 5 OCTOBER 2026

Evidence and revisions

What the exposure figure rests on, what changed when it was last revised, and the published work cited for this role.

SCORE

76

WINDOW

0-3 years (unchanged)

The 5 October 2026 review held the score.

Exposure Index v2. Inputs: task applicability 61/100 (Microsoft AI applicability score 0.30 for Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products); observed usage 84/100 (Anthropic observed exposure 0.63); official exposure tier 100/100 (BLS: very high); labour-market trajectory not yet mapped for this occupation, so its weight was spread across the other inputs; published adoption rating 70/100 (high adoption). Weighted base 76.2. Final score 76. New report: the window of 0-3 years is set from the score band.

HOW THE FIGURE IS BUILT (EXPOSURE INDEX V2)

Task applicability — Microsoft Research, AI applicability score	61 × 39%	23.7
Observed usage — Anthropic Economic Index, observed exposure	84 × 22%	18.6
Official exposure tier — US BLS AI-exposure category	100 × 22%	22.2
Labour-market trajectory — US BLS projected employment change 2025–35	not measured	—
Published adoption rating — This report's adoption level	70 × 17%	11.7
Weighted base		76.2
Exposure score		76

MEASURES BEHIND THE SCORE

US Bureau of Labor Statistics · *Employment Projections 2025–35 and AI Exposure Categories* (27 August 2026)
AI-exposure tier: Very high. Projected employment change not yet mapped for this occupation. Matched to Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products.

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Microsoft Research · *Working with AI: Measuring the Applicability of Generative AI to Occupations* (10 July 2025)
AI applicability score 0.30 for SOC 41-4012; scaled to 61/100 as the task-applicability input.

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Anthropic · *Anthropic Economic Index report: Cadences* (26 June 2026)
Observed exposure 0.63 for SOC 41-4012; scaled to 84/100 as the observed-usage input.

PUBLISHER PDF

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology · *Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market* (28 January 2026)
UK context: around 70% of UK workers are in occupations with tasks AI could perform or enhance, above the US average; a one-standard-deviation rise in exposure was associated with a 3.9% fall in UK job postings.

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<https://www.careerguard.ai/sources>

Method and sources

Each report was written from a large body of published research. The exposure score itself is computed, not written: it is the CareerGuard Exposure Index, a weighted average of occupation-level measures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (AI-exposure classification and 2025–35 projections), Microsoft Research (AI applicability scores) and Anthropic (observed exposure), together with the adoption rating published on the report. The organisations and publications below are the standing literature behind the narrative sections. Every source, with dates, licences and archived copies where we are permitted to hold them, is catalogued in the research library.

Exposure Index v2 (October 2026). Each input is scaled to 0–100 and weighted: task applicability 35% (Microsoft AI applicability score ÷ 0.5), observed usage 20% (Anthropic observed exposure ÷ 0.75), official exposure tier 20% (BLS very high = 100, high = 70, moderate = 40, low = 10), labour-market trajectory 10% ($50 - 2.5 \times \text{projected \% employment change}$), published adoption rating 15% (very high = 85, high = 70, medium-high = 55, medium = 40, low-medium = 25, low = 10). Inputs not measured for an occupation are dropped and the remaining weights renormalised. An editorial adjustment of at most ± 12 points is allowed only for automation channels the measures cannot see (robotics, self-service, machine vision, medical imaging, RPA/OCR, generative video) and is always logged with its reason. Scores are whole numbers, not rounded to five. The change window shifts one notch (a year at each end) per ten points of movement.

I GLOBAL AND MACROECONOMIC IMPACT OF AI ON WORK

World Economic Forum

The Future of Jobs Report series — Employer survey of expected job growth and decline, skill shifts and technology adoption (2020, 2023 and 2025 editions); *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Entry-Level Work* (2026).

AI governance and transformation reports — Frameworks on ethical AI, talent strategy and industry transformation.

McKinsey Global Institute

AI, Automation and the Future of Work series — Research quantifying automation potential by task, sector and demographic, from "Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained" to "Agents, robots, and us" (2025).

Industry-specific reports — Financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and others.

PwC

Global AI Jobs Barometer — Annual analysis of job postings and productivity by AI exposure (2024–2026 editions).

Upskilling Hopes and Fears survey — Employee perceptions and readiness.

Microsoft Research and Anthropic

Working with AI (2025); *Anthropic Economic Index* (2025–2026) — Occupation-level usage data from Copilot and Claude conversations, the two observed-usage measures behind the 2026 revision.

Stanford Digital Economy Lab and Stanford HAI

Canaries in the Coal Mine? (2025–2026); *AI Index Report (annual)* — Payroll evidence on early-career employment in exposed occupations; annual measurement of AI capability, investment and adoption.

Deloitte

Human Capital Trends series — Workforce, talent and HR technology trends.

Tech Trends series — Emerging technologies and their business implications.

Accenture

Technology Vision series — Forward-looking analysis of emerging technology, with emphasis on AI.

Fjord Trends — Design, innovation and human experience in a digital world.

Boston Consulting Group

AI/ML insights and industry solutions — "The AI Revolution in the Workplace" and related research.

EY

AI and workforce reports — Adoption, talent strategy and ethics.

IBM Institute for Business Value

AI and automation studies — Business models, workforce evolution and leadership.

OECD

AI Policy Observatory — International data and policy on AI, labour markets and skills.

Employment Outlook — Labour-market trends including technological impact (2023–2026 editions).

International Labour Organization

Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure (2025) — Task-level exposure gradients for every ISCO occupation; successor to the 2023 global index.

International Monetary Fund

Staff Discussion Notes on AI and work (2024, 2026) — Complementarity framing: where AI augments and where it substitutes.

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market (2026) — UK occupational exposure and job-posting evidence.

Brookings Institution

AI and automation research — Economic and social implications, displacement and skills.

Yale Budget Lab and Goldman Sachs Research

Tracking the Impact of AI on the Labor Market; AI and the US labour market (2026) — Aggregate labour-market monitoring; macro displacement estimates.

Oxford University (Oxford Martin School)

The Future of Employment — Frey & Osborne and subsequent research on susceptibility to automation.

MIT Technology Review

AI & Work — Reporting on AI research and its implications for industries and jobs.

Gartner

Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence — Maturity and adoption of AI technologies.

Future of Work reports — Workplace models and talent strategy.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Employment Projections 2025–35; AI Exposure Categories; Occupational Outlook Handbook — Ten-year employment projections and, from the 2025 cycle, an AI-exposure tier for every detailed occupation.

Indeed Hiring Lab

AI at Work Report (2025) and posting-market updates — Skill-level transformation estimates and job-posting trends by occupation.

II CORE AI AND MACHINE-LEARNING RESEARCH

OpenAI

Research papers, blog and API documentation — Large language models, generative AI, safety and societal impact.

Google DeepMind

Research papers and blog — Reinforcement learning, AI for science, AGI and ethics.

Meta AI

Research papers and blog — Large language models, computer vision, AI for social good.

Hugging Face

Transformers library and model hub — Open-source state-of-the-art NLP models.

TensorFlow and PyTorch

Documentation and community forums — Core frameworks illustrating practical capability.

arXiv

cs.AI, cs.LG, cs.CV, cs.CL — Pre-print research.

NeurIPS and ICML

Conference proceedings — Top-tier academic research.

ACM and IEEE

Journals and proceedings — ACM Computing Surveys; IEEE Transactions on AI.

Kaggle

Datasets and competition solutions — Applied machine learning on real-world problems.

The Alan Turing Institute

Research and reports — Responsible and applied AI.

III ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE AI DEPLOYMENT

NIST

AI Risk Management Framework — Voluntary framework for managing AI risk.

European Commission

AI Act — Risk-tiered legal framework for AI.

Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI — Principles for responsible development.

Partnership on AI

Research and best practice — Responsible AI development.

AI Now Institute

Annual reports — Social implications: power, inequality, rights.

ACM FAccT

Proceedings — Fairness, accountability and transparency.

Data & Society

Publications — Social implications of data-centric technology.

WIPO

Conversation on IP and AI — Intellectual-property implications of AI.

IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of AI/IS

Ethically Aligned Design — Recommendations for ethical AI design.

Center for AI and Digital Policy

Policy briefs — Accountable AI policy.
