

The sale is made before the seller arrives

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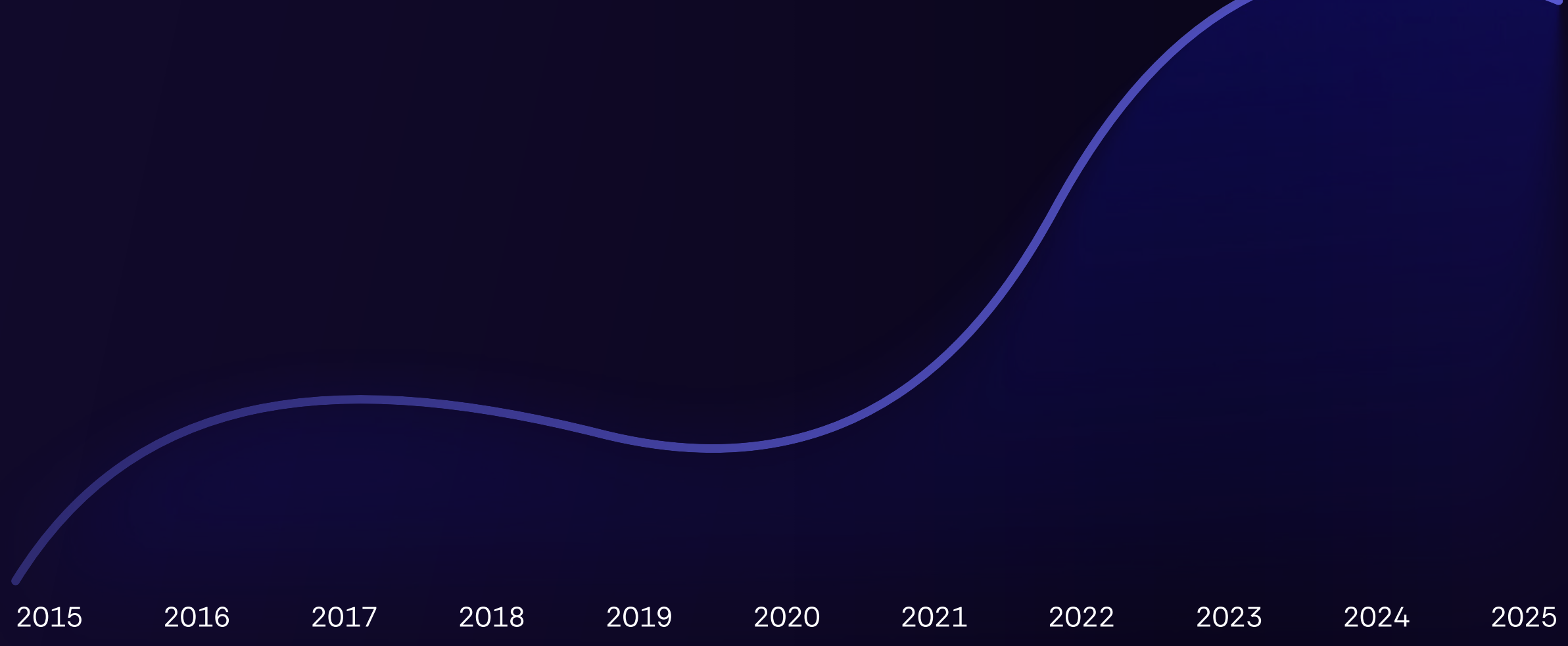
NIIOMA Cognitive AI

Buyers now choose before they call. Selling in the AI era means earning a place on the shortlist long before anyone picks up the phone.

In 2015, a B2B sale still ran through a person. A buyer had a problem, a seller had the information, and the meeting was where the two came together. The seller controlled what the buyer knew, so the seller controlled the pace.

That arrangement has quietly ended.

What changed between 2015 and 2025



Information moved first.

Product details, pricing, reviews and peer opinion left the sales deck and went online. Buyers followed them there. Gartner found that B2B buyers spend only 17% of their buying time meeting potential vendors. With three vendors in contention, each one gets about 5%.

17% 5%

buying time spent meeting vendors

buying time spent with each of three shortlisted vendors

70%

buying journey completed before sales

81%

Already have a favourite

Preference moved next. Research by 6sense shows buyers are around 70% of the way through the process before they first speak to a seller, and 81% already have a favourite by then.

4/5

deals won by favourites

61%

refer buying without sales reps

That favourite goes on to win about four deals in five.

Then patience ran out. In a 2025 Gartner survey, 61% of B2B buyers said they would prefer to buy without a sales rep at all.

Read those numbers together and the conclusion is uncomfortable. In most deals, the decision has been made by the first meeting. The seller arrives to confirm it.

Why AI speeds this up

Generative AI has made the buyer's private research faster and deeper. A procurement lead can now summarise a market, compare 40 vendors and draft a requirements list in an afternoon. Work that once needed a seller's help, or a consultant's, now happens alone.

The seller's side has changed too, though not always for the better. AI made outreach almost free to produce, so volume went up. Buyers responded the way anyone would and filtered harder.

73%

of B2B buyers actively avoid vendors who send irrelevant outreach

Where this is heading by 2035

Looking ten years out, the direction is clear even if the details are not. Buyers will hand more of their early research to AI agents that scan, compare and shortlist on their behalf. Vendors will use agents of their own to describe, qualify and respond. Much of the first half of a sale will be one machine talking to another.

That has a consequence for every vendor. If an agent builds the long list, a company that is hard to find, hard to verify or vaguely described will not make it. Being good will matter less than being legible: clear about what you do and for whom, with proof that a person and a machine can both check.

It also leaves room for people. The same Gartner research found that buyers still want a seller's input on the hardest question of all: will this actually work for us? Fit, context and judgement remain human work. AI can narrow a market. It cannot yet carry the trust needed to sign a multi-year contract.

What to do about it

Start by assuming the buyer has already done the research. The job of sales moves from presenting information to being worth talking to.

- Be findable before you are needed. Buyers build their shortlist in private. If your name, your proof and your customers are not visible where they look, you are not on it.
- Describe yourself precisely. One clear problem you solve, for one kind of customer, in plain words. Vague positioning is invisible to buyers and to the AI tools they use.
- Earn the first conversation with relevance. Contact a buyer about something happening in their business, not something happening in your quarter.
- Bring judgement. When a buyer does call, they want help answering 'will this work here?' That is where an experienced seller still wins.
- Shorten the path to proof. Pilots, references and outcomes the buyer can check do more than another meeting.

None of this removes the seller. It moves them earlier. The best sellers of the next decade will spend less time pitching and more time making sure they are already trusted by the time the buyer reaches out.

That is the shift NIIOMA is built for: enterprises and vendors finding each other directly, on merit, before the shortlist closes.

Sources: [Gartner, B2B buying journey](#) (survey of 750 B2B buyers); [Gartner sales survey, June 2025](#) (632 B2B buyers); [6sense Buyer Experience Report 2024](#); [6sense Buyer Experience Report 2025](#).

In this page

- 01 What changed between 2015 and 2025
- 02 Why AI speeds this up
- 03 Where this is heading by 2035
- 04 What to do about it