

2026 Sales Metrics for Chemicals

A Guide for New Metrics in a Changing Industry Landscape



The Reality Check

Chemical companies are experiencing massive changes in both what they sell and how they sell it. Everything that worked in 2020 is broken. B2B sellers face unprecedented pressure, with 84% of sales reps missing their quota last year according to recent industry research⁶. Despite strong market conditions in many sectors, sellers in the chemicals industry continue facing tough challenges growing revenue.

Three Major Shifts Since 2020

1. Sales Cycles Are Significantly Longer

Industrial sales cycles have stretched dramatically. In 2024, the average time from first contact to customer in manufacturing was about 130 days⁴. But the true buying journey is even longer. When counting all the early research buyers now do independently, the full cycle averages 379 days, a 16% increase since 2021⁴.

Compliance burdens amplify these delays. Every RFQ today demands extensive documentation including REACH registrations, conflict minerals disclosures, and sustainability scorecards, which can add a week or more to quote turnaround times. Multi-step RFQ processes wrapped in regulatory requirements frustrate sellers and slow deals.

2. Price Transparency Has Intensified

Buyers now compare multiple suppliers in real time. B2B buyers spend 70% of their buying journey doing their own research before talking to vendors¹. In chemicals and manufacturing, digital marketplaces like ChemDirect and Knowde (which now hosts over 8,000 suppliers²) put products from many vendors side by side. Even broad platforms like Amazon Business offer live pricing on commodity materials.

Customers often know competitors' pricing before the first sales call. The traditional "relationship selling" advantage, where personal connections could sway deals, is fading. Today's buying committees are large and often anonymous. Sales teams may never meet half the stakeholders influencing the decision. Purchasing managers prioritize cost, speed, and data over personal rapport.

3. Tariff and Supply Volatility Is the New Normal

Global trade turbulence has become standard for manufacturers. Early 2025 saw new U.S. tariffs of up to 25% imposed on thousands of imported materials, including base chemicals and specialty ingredients. Such policy changes mean input costs can swing wildly month to month.

Critical raw materials can spike double digit percentages overnight after geopolitical events or policy changes. In this environment, traditional 90 day or annual quotes often become obsolete quickly. Sales teams constantly renegotiate prices or absorb margin erosion due to volatile feedstock costs and currency fluctuations. Forecasting and hitting targets is far tougher when the ground constantly shifts beneath your feet.

Where Traditional Metrics Fall Short

Many companies still use outdated metrics from decades past. CRMs dutifully log call volumes and pipeline dollar values but lack insights into the bottlenecks that really matter in today's reality. Consider these gaps:

Quote Speed: Why does it take sales teams 5+ days to deliver a quote? Which steps in the process (compliance checks, internal approvals, disconnected systems) create delays?

Sample Conversion: Which product sample requests convert into sales orders? In manufacturing sales, customers often require samples or prototypes. Tracking conversion rates and cycle time from sample to order is crucial, yet few companies measure this effectively.

Cost to Quote: How much does it cost to deliver a quote? Quotes require significant time gathering requirements, compliance documentation, and pricing strategy. This cost to quote can be substantial in terms of sales team time that could be spent on higher converting opportunities.

Most manufacturers with traditional metrics can measure activity (calls made, proposals sent) but are blind to efficiency and effectiveness. As sales cycles lengthen, leading manufacturers are shifting focus to velocity metrics.

The 3 Efficiency Metrics That Matter in 2026

World class manufacturers in 2026 focus on sales velocity, not just pipeline volume. Leading teams obsess over quote turnaround time, digital engagement levels, and proposal to close conversion rates. Here are 3 metrics we are seeing matter in 2026.

1. Speed-to-Quote

What it measures: Time from receiving an RFQ to sending a complete, accurate quote

Why it matters: 35% to 50% of B2B sales go to the vendor that responds first³. Delays drive down win probability by 12% or more

Industry average: 5 days
Best in class: 4 hours

2. Sample-to-Order Conversion Rate

What it measures: Percentage of samples that convert to purchase orders within 90 days

Why it matters: Chemical samples create operational bottlenecks and hidden costs, yet they also identify serious buyers from perpetual testers.

Industry average: 20% conversion
Best in class: 40%+ conversion

3. Pipeline Velocity

What it measures:	Speed at which opportunities move through your sales pipeline
Formula:	$(\text{Number of Deals} \times \text{Win Rate} \times \text{Average Deal Value}) \div \text{Sales Cycle Length}$
Why it matters:	Revenue growth requires either more deals or faster deals. Speed is far more controllable and dependent on internal strategy

How to Track These Metrics

These metrics are historically difficult to track because information lives across multiple systems:

- Email threads
- CRM systems
- ERP systems
- Spreadsheets
- Compliance databases

Modern AI systems have improved at connecting these internal systems, filtering noise, and capturing timestamps that actually move the metrics. The key is finding tools that can unify your data sources and provide real time visibility into these critical performance indicators.

Taking Actions

To compete in 2026's chemical sales environment, companies need to:

- Modernize measurement: Move beyond activity metrics to velocity and efficiency indicators
- Invest in speed: Automate quote generation and metric tracking to reduce administrative burden off sellers.
- Track the full journey: Measure from initial inquiry through sample requests to final order.

The companies that adapt their metrics and processes to this new reality will be the ones that thrive. Those clinging to outdated approaches will continue struggling with lengthening cycles, increasing costs, and missed quotas.

At Poka Labs, we're building AI powered quoting and pricing agents specifically designed to help chemical manufacturers accelerate these critical metrics. Our platform connects existing systems to deliver complex quotes in hours while maintaining compliance and accuracy.

Ready to transform your sales metrics? Visit <https://www.pokalabs.com/> or contact sales@pokalabs.com to learn more.

SOURCES

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