

**Aaron Wallis**  
Sales Recruitment



## The State of Sales in the UK and Ireland Sales Survey Results

Commissioned by Rob Scott, Managing Director

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# The Sales Industries of Britain and Ireland

Last week British and Irish officials met in Co Caven, Ireland for the 40<sup>th</sup> British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly where Professor Patrick Honohan “repeated his call for wage cuts to drive economic recovery.”

Sales professionals are a relevant part of nearly every industry and the findings in this paper give us an in-depth look at the ‘state of sales’ in the UK and Ireland so that we can better understand the situation of the workforce and how they are coping in the downturn (that has gratefully now become the upturn according to most).

We take a look at two surveys carried out by Rob Scott of Aaron Wallis Sales Recruitment based in England who teamed up with Niall Kelly of Sales Jobs.ie, Ireland at the end of last year to undertake two of the largest surveys of their type;

The ‘State of Sales in the UK’ and ‘The State of Sales in Ireland’ were both completed by 644 respondents and take a detailed look at all aspects of the sales profession in the UK and Ireland and provide some interesting insights into everything from sales targets to key motivators to work-life balance and everything in between. The surveys aimed to give us all a greater understanding of how to manage and motivate our sales teams through tough financial times and beyond.

In this article we take a look at what comparisons can be drawn from the surveys and how the countries compare on a number of issues in the industry.

*“This focus on pro-employment recovery strategies is continuing as both the UK and Ireland rise out of recession.*

*On a wider scale the economy as a whole is still shaky and the labour market is continuing to deteriorate, however this has been at a more moderate pace over recent months”.* (EU Employment Situation and Social Outlook, European Commission > Employment, Social Affairs, February 2010)

# UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

## Differences in UK and Irish Gender Pay Gaps

In Ireland pay gaps between men and women remain vastly unequal and the male domination of sales we have seen in previous years is continually evident in the country. This is in contrast to the UK where we have seen a 28% increase (compared to a similar previous survey) in female respondents who earned over £25K, showing a dramatic move towards a fairer deal for women in the industry. The amount of executive female sales professionals (sales managers, sales directors, managing directors) has nearly doubled in the UK although women are still missing out on the top wages- with no women earning over £100k.

It appears that despite continuing concerns in the wider business community that women are still not earning equal pay to men, the sales industry in the UK appears to be levelling out the gender differences in this area. The significant differences in men and women's pay in Ireland however is evident and this is despite the fact that more women are in higher level sales jobs in the country- women in Ireland are taking on more responsibility with very little improvement in salary.

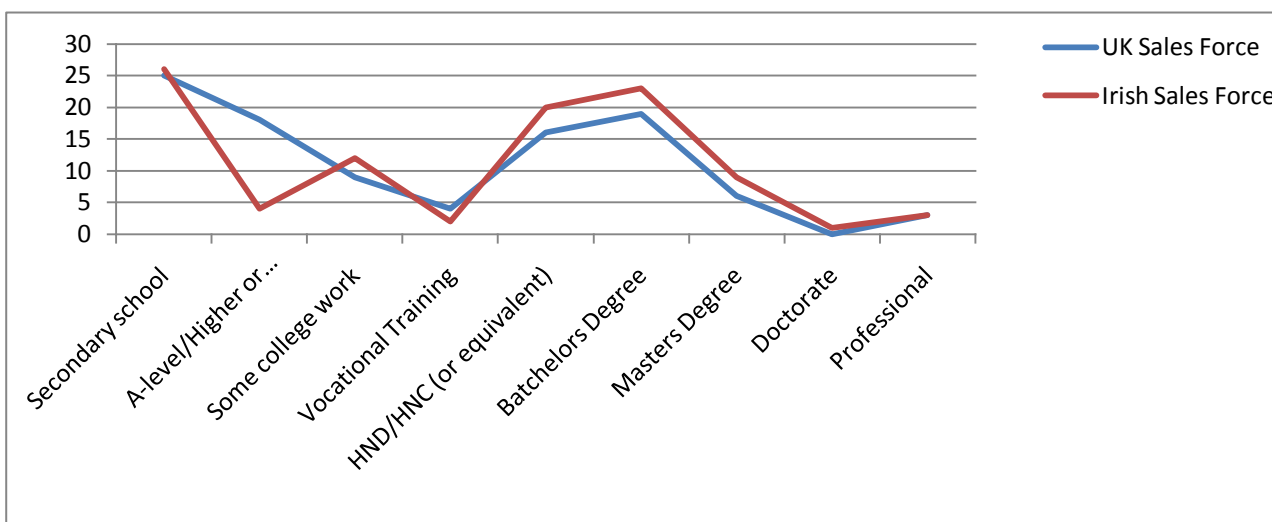
Although there were higher rates of unemployment in the industry in the UK, in both countries women suffered less unemployment than men and fewer women than men stated that the reason for their unemployment was redundancy. In the UK and Ireland 25% of female sales professionals were unemployed compared to 29% of men in Ireland and 38% of men in the UK.

## Education in the Sales Industry

British and Irish sales professionals were comparatively similar in education: The survey found that The British fared slightly lower with 25% being educated to degree level compared to 30% of Irish.

A notable surprising finding in the survey in terms of the education of the respondents was that Britain's masters degree holders were the most likely to be unemployed amongst the group. A huge 45% of respondents who were educated to Masters degree level were unemployed, whereas in Ireland a mere 7% of those with masters degrees were unemployed. 50% of the unemployed in Ireland that were surveyed were qualified to secondary level only.

The highest proportion of those educated to degree level or above now work as a Sales Manager, or an Account Manager.



## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

From the findings of both the surveys it is evident that a high level of education is not entirely necessary to carry out a career in sales, however the statistics do point to the idea that those who enter sales with a degree choose to pursue a sales management or account manager role instead of an 'out and out' role. Around 50% of the overall respondents were educated to HND/HNC level.

Interestingly, in both Ireland and Britain 86% of sales professionals possessed 5 years sales experience or more meaning that sales professionals in both countries are not just a clever bunch of people, they have the experience too!

## Unemployment Trends in Sales

Overall employment trends in the UK in relation to gender and unemployment point to a vast difference in how men and women have been affected by the economy. Early on in 2009, men accounted for "two thirds of the overall increase in unemployment since spring 2008". From June however there were signs that unemployment might be starting to equally affect men and women, with "rates for both men and women increasing at a broadly similar pace, women were accounting for as much as 41%, 49% and 46% of the overall rise in unemployment in August, October and December."

(EU Employment Situation and Social Outlook, European Commission > Employment, Social Affairs, February 2010)

The survey revealed that unfortunately, yet unsurprisingly in the current financial climate, unemployment in both Ireland and the UK was higher than we would hope with 28% of Irish and 35% of British respondents being out of work. However whilst the Irish survey found 'no disparities' that indicated huge differences between gender, age or sector, the British unemployment statistics were a little more discriminating towards those over 43 years old, backed up by the statistic that only half of one percent of British under 27s surveyed were unemployed.

Approximately 10% of respondents in Britain and Ireland are happy with how their employer was dealing with the financial crisis, suggesting employees are experiencing a huge amount of discouragement and lack of confidence about the competency of their company in such a situation.



Employment status in UK & Ireland

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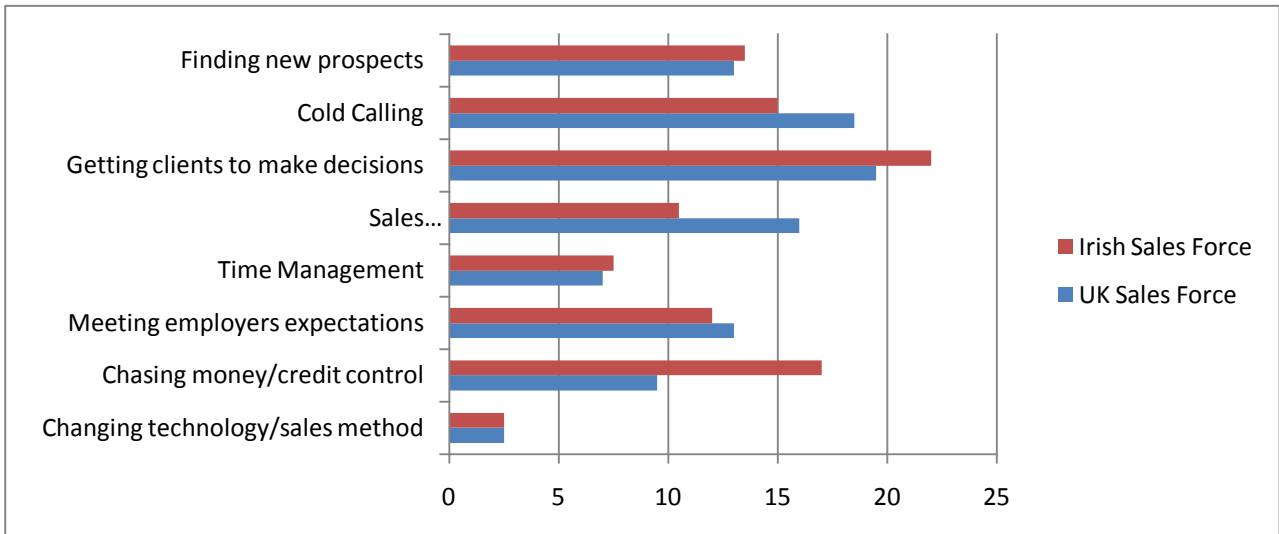
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# UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

## Difficulties of sales

Amongst both countries, the respondents cited the same aspects of their work to be the most difficult, with 'getting clients to make decisions' being the biggest concern, closely followed by cold calling. However in Ireland chasing money and credit control is cited as being more of a concern for individuals than in England.



*The most difficult aspects of sales according to sales professionals in UK and Ireland*

As it's generally believed that Ireland has been even greater impacted it is perhaps not surprising that the UK did not find money and credit control as big an issue when Ireland. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the joint biggest concern between the two countries was 'getting clients to make decisions'

## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

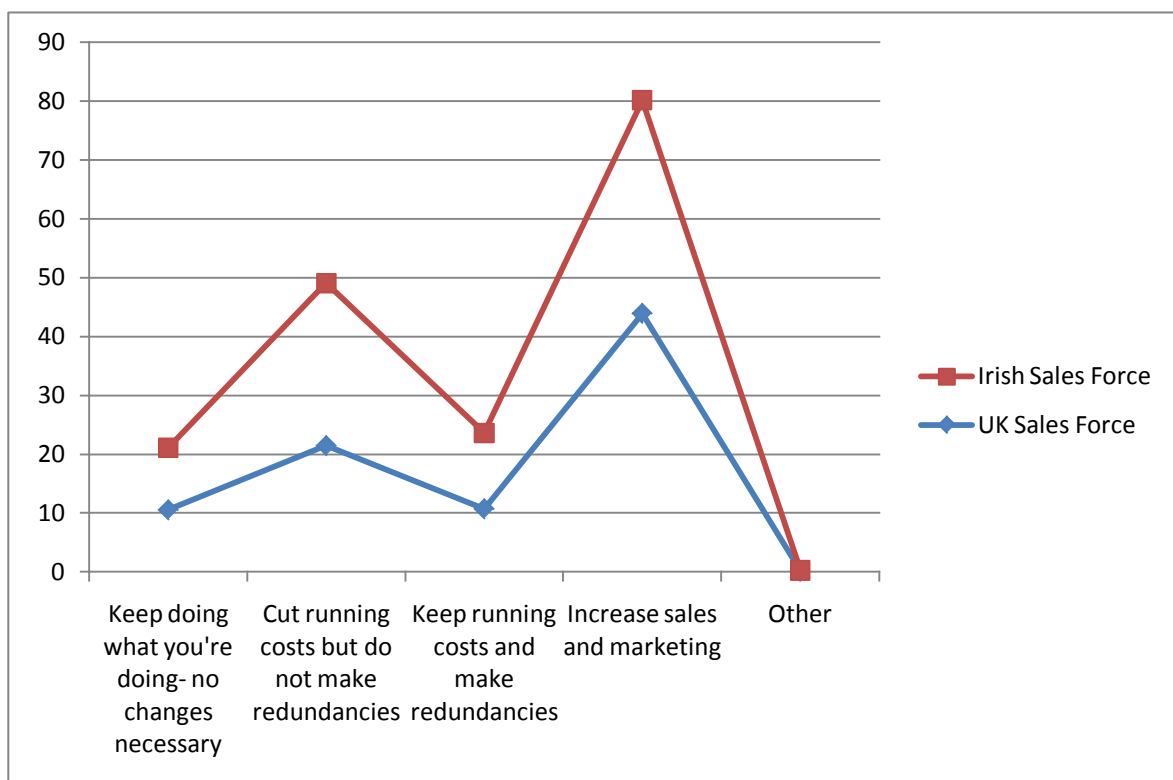
### Increased sales targets in an economic downturn

During times of economic downturn it is hard to gauge how individual companies will respond and what pressures companies are putting on their employees but the surveys provided some interesting responses;

A large proportion of both Irish and British respondents stated that their employers increased their sales targets during the economic downturn and similarly both the Irish and the British (57% and 61% respectively) said that their company had taken the economy into account when setting these targets.

These results are interesting considering the respondents to the survey also stated that their employers were not dealing well with the economy, so whilst employers are aware of the need to make changes due to the economy, many sales professionals don't believe they are making the right changes.

Over one third of both groups of respondents surveyed believed that the most critical decisions their company needed to take in dealing with the poor economic situation was to 'increase sales and marketing' endeavours.



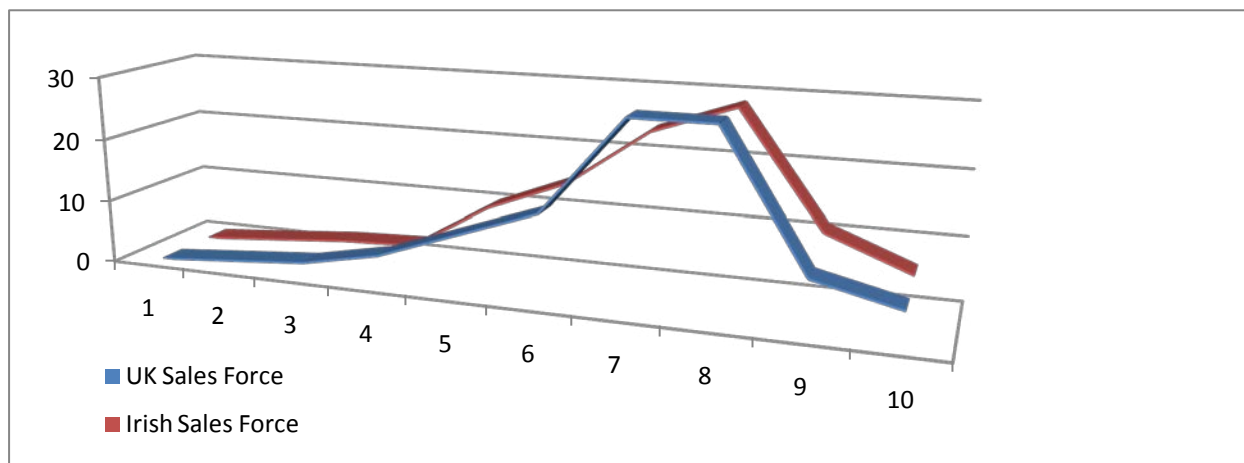
Measures that needed to be taken during the recession according to UK and Irish respondents

It seems that culturally there are huge differences between Ireland and the UK in tactics used to deal with the economic downturn. In contrast to the British group surveyed, 40% of Irish respondents had been asked to take a pay cut compared to the British in which only 16% were asked to do them same.

## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

### How happy is the UK and Irish Salesforce?

In both Ireland and Britain sales professionals remain remarkably positive about their current employment. In both countries 95% of respondents said they enjoyed working in sales. Half of both groups surveyed also stated that they did not plan a career in sales - with 31% describing themselves as having grown into the role and 25% stating that they 'fell into the role.'



How sales professionals in UK and Ireland rate their career

In both Ireland and Britain sales professionals stated that they were happier in their role than when asked in the previous survey, with respondents typically being 10% better pleased with their career than 5 years ago.

Interestingly, a survey carried out in 2004 by Careerbuilder.com found that 4 in 10 sales professionals planned to change their career that year, motivated by the desire to earn more, advance their careers, find a more rewarding work experience and start their own business. The surveys carried about by Aaron Wallis Sales Recruitment and Sales jobs.ie appear to point to the idea that sales professionals possess a more positive attitude towards the sales industry than 6 years ago.

### Sales employees can do a better job than their bosses?

In both the UK and Ireland the majority of sales professionals who responded to the survey believed they could perform the line manager's role more effectively than them. Only around 35% of respondents did not believe they could do a better job.

The management style of line managers according to respondents was most commonly 'Aggressive' or 'Dictatorial' in both Britain and Ireland although in both countries this was also closely followed by 'supportive' and 'empowering'.

In describing their relationship with their line manager an impressive 56% in Britain and 62% in Ireland said their relationship with their line manager was very good or excellent.

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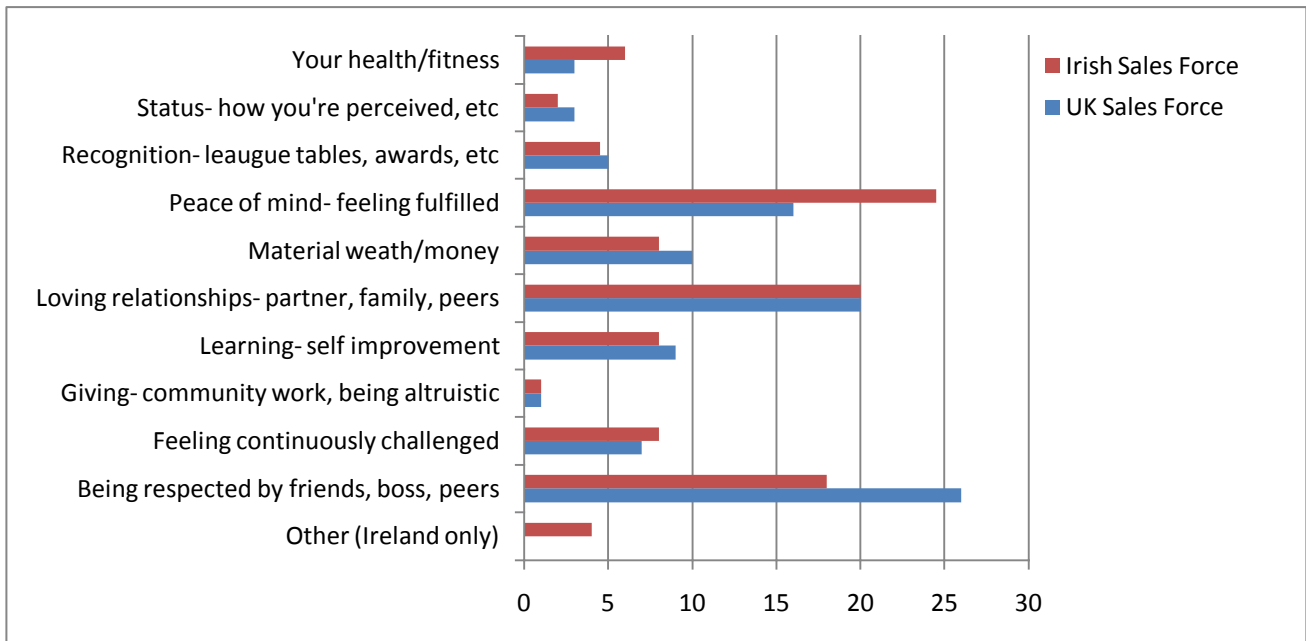
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## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

### 'Peace of mind' versus Respect

Both surveys carried out seem to put to rest the apparent misconception that sales people are mercenary and materialistic as their non-sales colleagues would often like to describe them. However between the two countries there was a difference in what does actually motivate these professionals; In Ireland 24% of sales professionals said they measure their success on 'peace of mind' and fulfilled they are whereas in Britain, the majority (26%) said they measured their success on how respected they believe they are. Only 8-10% of respondents value material wealth and money.



How sales professionals in UK and Ireland measure their success

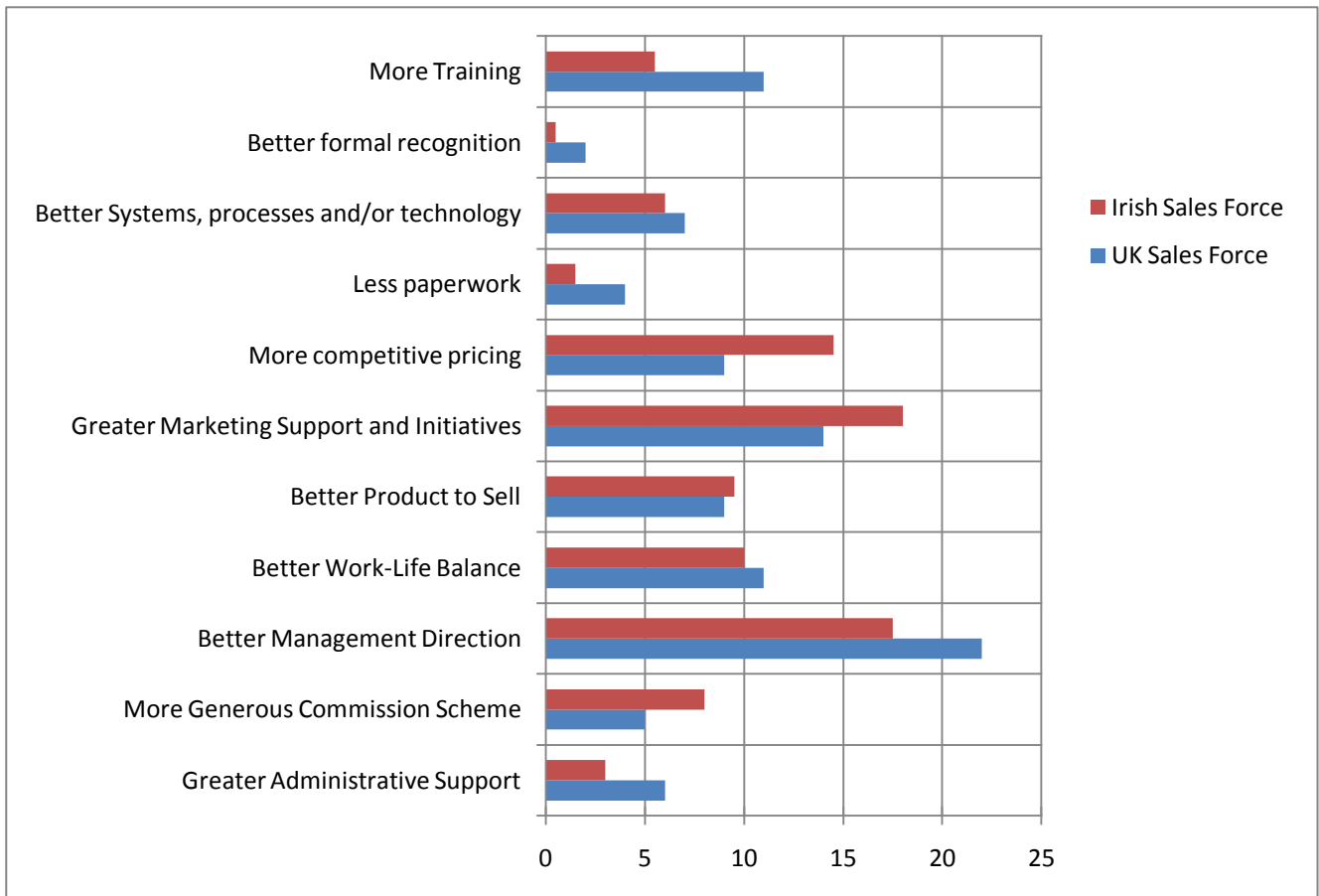
### Technology not a concern for sales professionals

Interestingly the impact of technology is not phasing the sales force in either Ireland or Britain where only 3% of respondents stated that technology was a concern for them. This comes as a surprise in light of the rise in social networking, viral marketing and non traditional sales methods.

# UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

## What can be done to ensure sales success?

In Ireland the two prominent aspects of what sales professionals believed would make them more effective in their role were 'Better Management Direction' and 'Greater Marketing support' with both generating 20% of votes for each. In the UK respondents were a little less enthusiastic about the importance of 'Greater Marketing support and initiatives' within their company with only 14% or professionals surveyed agreeing this improvement would make a difference. UK respondents were a little more enthusiastic about 'Better Management Direction' than the Irish however with 22% believing this would enable them to be more successful.



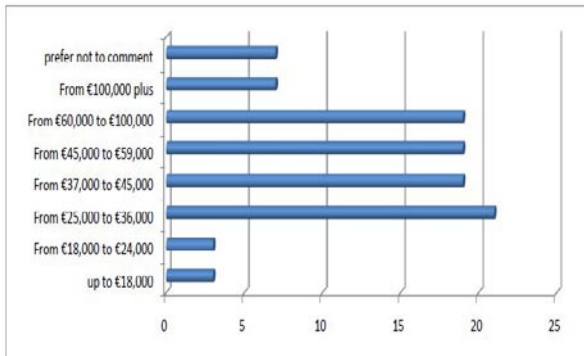
What can be done to ensure sales success according sales professionals in UK and Ireland



## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

### How do UK and Irish Sales salaries compare?

In Britain it was found that the most common salary bracket that people fell into was the £25-36k- the corresponding salary bracket of €25,000 and €36,000 in Ireland also proved to be the typical salary bracket for a large percentage of respondents.



UK and Irish salaries according to survey respondents

It does appear that in Ireland there are more people experiencing higher salaries than there are in Britain and most surprisingly in both countries it was found that 1 in 5 in Britain and 13% in Ireland had received a pay rise in the last 12 months

In both Ireland and Britain most respondents would prefer to take a £10k increase in commission instead of a £5k increase on base salary, both opting for a greater reward and risk. However a massive 70% of overall respondents in Britain and 48% in Ireland stated they would also be happy to sacrifice their work/life balance in return for a 50% pay rise!

In both countries we also saw a dramatic increase in pay rises throughout 2008 and then a significant drop in 2009 with pay rises dropping from around 35% down to between 13-19% between the two countries in 2009.

## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

### Sales professionals want to grow!

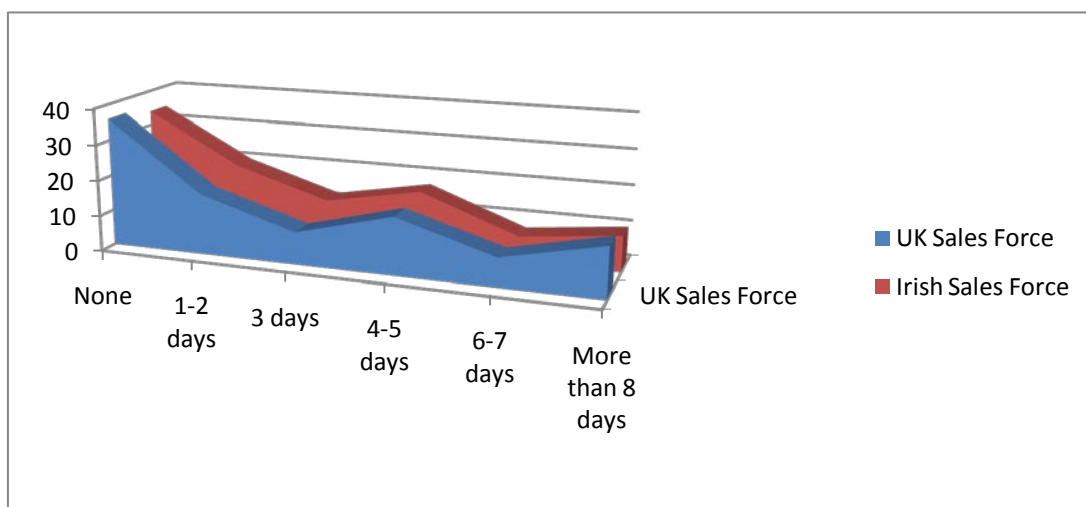
The opportunity progress and develop their career was stated by respondents from both the UK and Ireland as being the number one thing they would look for in a job. This was substantially higher than any other consideration they might take into account in searching for a new position although in both countries the next most important issue was the company's reputation/competitive edge and Company's products reflecting a concern that there needs to be basic qualities about the company in place before a sales professionals believes they can cultivate success.

### Worrying trends regarding sales training in the UK and Ireland

Over half of Irish and UK respondents believe that they are not receiving enough training in their role in a year and with a massive 36 and 34 percent (respectively) receiving none at all it is unsurprising! Only 10% of respondents in Ireland and 14% in the UK had received over 8 days of training per year.

In both surveys carried out we have seen an undeniable link between 'number of days training received' and 'performance against targets' however despite this nearly 60% of respondents still aren't receiving the training they feel they need.

Three of the most popular training topics that respondents believe they could benefit from include New Business generation/cold calling, Time Management and Motivational Training.



Number of days training received in the last year

Considering government initiatives in the UK available to most employers to carry out training it seems that companies are still not realising the importance of employee training in their businesses.

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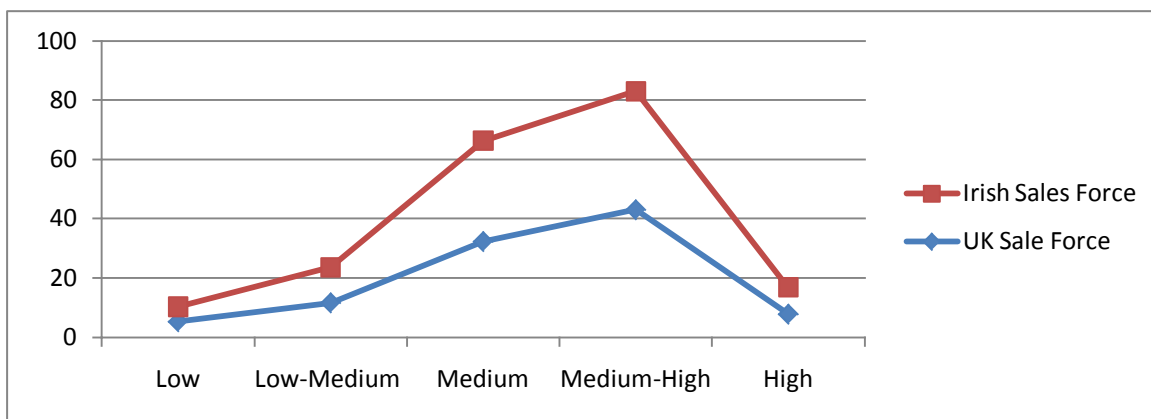
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## UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

### Stress levels 'Medium to High'

Respondents in Ireland and the UK consider themselves to be working at medium to high stress levels in their roles with around 40% of people in their respective countries citing this as the level of stress they experience. Around 8% of people of people who responded to the survey in both countries considered themselves to be working under a 'high' stress level.

The finding that stress levels are medium to high in most sales positions directly links to the statistics on 'Management and Direction' in that most people believe their managers to possess a didactic approach to their management. This approach could well be attributed to the perceived pressure that the candidates experience in their roles.



Level of stress according sales professionals surveyed

### Overview

The comparisons made between Ireland and the UK throw up some interesting insights into how sales professionals experience the industry, particularly how they have dealt with the past 18 months. Individually the surveys provide us with a good basis for understanding a number of elements of the sales industry including opinions, pressures and daily life as well as giving us an understanding of what you can expect as a sales professional in the industry.

Sales people in both the UK and Ireland appear to remain fairly positive about their careers and trends within the profession even appearing to be pointing in an upward direction for most aspects of the industry. Whilst most industries are battling the negative vibrations that have been felt throughout many industries, Sales people are tackling the difficult economic times with enthusiasm and a positive mental attitude.

Aaron Wallis Sales Recruitment and Salesjobs.ie have a found a courageous and forward-thinking sales force in their respective countries

# UK and Irish Sales Survey Comparisons

## About Aaron Wallis

Aaron Wallis is a leading UK based sales recruitment specialist with offices in [Milton Keynes](#), [Bristol](#), [London](#) and [Leeds](#).

### For sales employers

For employers they offer the most inclusive recruitment service to ensure that the very best sales talent is sourced for every business. The service embeds psychometric profiling, skills testing and competency interviewing and is proven to increase staff effectiveness and lower staff attrition. The service is backed by an unparalleled 12 month rebate scheme. Aaron Wallis offers a wide range of recruitment services including:

- Database Recruitment
- Search and Selection
- Assessment Centre Provision
- Recruitment Training

Discover how Aaron Wallis can source the top sales talent for your business

### For sales candidates

For sales candidates looking for new employment Aaron Wallis offers the most comprehensive career advice tools of any sales recruiter that are written with the sales professional in mind. These are available free of charge by registering for the monthly news letter, [SalesPeak](#).

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