

THE EVOLVING CRO MARKETPLACE

How Leading
Organisations
Are Adapting to
Increasing
Complexity



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The CRO Business Development role has changed more in the last 5 years than in the previous 15

Then (2020)

- Personal networks
- Conference activity
- Relationship-led selling
- Responding to RFPs
- Single point sponsor engagement
- Single capability discussions
- Activity based CRM usage
- Individual salesperson performance



Typical CRO Question “Can you tell us about your capabilities?”



Now (2026)

- Identifying sponsor buying signals before formal procurement
- Multi-stakeholder engagement across clinical, operations, procurement, finance & executive leadership.
 - Deep understanding of biotech funding environments & sponsor strategy
- AI-assisted prospect identification & account intelligence
- Data driven account planning
- Value based commercial conversations
- Consultative opportunity shaping
- Cross functional collaboration between BD, operation, delivery & scientific teams
- Customer success & account expansion programme



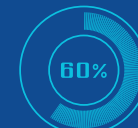
Typical CRO Question “How will partnering with you reduce risk, accelerate timelines & support our development strategy?”



Buying groups have 2-3x more stakeholders than in 2020



Sales cycles are 20-30% longer on average



60% of sponsor decisions are influenced before formal RFP release

Executive Summary

If you are leading a CRO business development function, this paper is designed to answer a simple but strategically important question:

Does your business development team possess the capabilities required to win in today's CRO marketplace, or is it still operating according to assumptions that were relevant five years ago?

The CRO sector has entered a period of profound commercial transformation. Sponsor expectations have evolved, procurement functions have become more sophisticated, buying groups have expanded, competitive differentiation has become more difficult, and the quantity of market intelligence available to both buyers and sellers has increased dramatically. As a result, many organisations now find themselves competing in a 2026 marketplace using commercial models designed for a fundamentally different environment.

Historically, business development success was often driven by relationships, networking, conference activity and the ability to respond effectively when opportunities emerged. While these capabilities remain important, they are no longer sufficient. Today's highest-performing commercial teams are distinguished by their ability to identify opportunities before formal procurement processes begin, navigate increasingly complex stakeholder environments, engage credibly with both scientific and executive audiences, and utilise data and insight to influence customer strategy.

For CRO leaders, this creates both a risk and an opportunity. Many organisations apply rigorous assessment methodologies to operational delivery, regulatory compliance and scientific performance, yet comparatively little scrutiny is directed towards the capabilities of the commercial organisation. In an increasingly competitive market, however, commercial capability is becoming a critical determinant of pipeline quality, win rates, account growth and long-term revenue performance.

This paper provides more than an overview of these market changes. It presents a practical framework for assessing whether your business development organisation is aligned with the realities of today's CRO buying environment. Throughout the paper, readers will find a series of structured assessment tools covering areas such as market intelligence, consultative selling, CRM utilisation, stakeholder management, executive engagement and commercial strategy.

These diagnostic frameworks enable leadership teams to start conversations around:

- Evaluate current business development capability against the demands of the modern CRO market.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses and capability gaps within individual team members and across the wider commercial organisation.
- Benchmark current performance against characteristics commonly found in high-performing CRO commercial teams.
- Prioritise development initiatives and investment decisions based on objective evidence rather than anecdotal observations.
- Build a roadmap for creating sustainable competitive advantage through enhanced commercial capability.

The objective is not simply to assess how well a business development team is performing today. It is to determine whether that team possesses the skills, behaviours and commercial intelligence required to succeed as the CRO market continues to evolve.

By the end of this paper, readers will have a clearer understanding of how commercial excellence is changing, how their own organisation compares against emerging best practice, and what practical steps can be taken to strengthen competitive position in an increasingly complex marketplace.

The Commercial Challenge Few CROs Are Discussing

Most CRO leadership teams would readily acknowledge that the sector has become more complex. Funding environments have become less predictable. Procurement teams are more influential. Biotech sponsors face greater investor scrutiny. Regulatory expectations continue to evolve. Discovery projects and study designs have become more sophisticated and competition has intensified across almost every service category.

Yet despite recognising these realities, many organisations have not fully considered the implications for their business development teams.

There remains a tendency to evaluate commercial effectiveness through traditional metrics such as activity levels, pipeline size, proposal volume and revenue generation. While important, these measures provide limited insight into whether a commercial team is genuinely equipped to compete in today's environment.

This distinction is critical.

A business development team can achieve reasonable results despite possessing capability gaps, particularly during periods of strong market growth. Conversely, a team operating within a more challenging market may appear to be underperforming when, in reality, its capabilities are highly aligned to the future needs of the organisation.

The question therefore shifts from a narrow assessment of performance towards a broader assessment of capability.

Put simply, CRO leaders must begin asking whether their teams possess the skills required not only to succeed today but to remain effective as buying behaviour continues to evolve.

How Sponsor Buying Behaviour Has Changed

Perhaps the most significant shift over the past decade has been the increasing complexity of decision-making.

Historically, successful CRO sales professionals often developed relationships with a relatively small number of decision-makers. While multiple stakeholders were always involved in outsourcing decisions, influence frequently remained concentrated within operational or clinical functions. Today the buying process is substantially more fragmented.

A typical purchasing decision may involve clinical operations, biometrics, medical affairs, regulatory affairs, procurement, finance, programme leadership and executive management. Each stakeholder enters the process with a different set of priorities, concerns and success criteria.

As a result, modern business development increasingly resembles stakeholder orchestration rather than traditional relationship management.

The most effective professionals are those capable of understanding not only individual stakeholders but also the interactions between them. They understand where influence resides, where resistance may emerge and how decisions are ultimately made.

This represents a fundamentally different capability from relationship building alone.

The Rise of Commercial Intelligence

Another major shift has been the increasing importance of commercial intelligence.

Historically, commercial advantage often came from superior networks. Information asymmetry favoured organisations with strong relationships and market visibility.

Today information is abundant.

Sponsors have immediate access to competitor information, industry benchmarks, market intelligence and peer recommendations. Business developers can similarly access unprecedented quantities of information regarding funding events, pipeline progression, hiring trends, organisational priorities and strategic initiatives.

The challenge is no longer information acquisition.

The challenge is information interpretation.

Increasingly, the highest-performing commercial teams distinguish themselves not through greater effort but through better insight. They identify buying signals earlier. They recognise strategic inflection points sooner. They engage customers before opportunities become formalised. They understand not only what customers require but why those requirements exist.

Commercial intelligence is therefore becoming as important as commercial activity.

This transition mirrors trends already observed in other industries where data-enabled commercial decision making has become a significant source of competitive advantage.

Why Traditional Capability Models Are Becoming Obsolete

In many organisations, competency frameworks have changed remarkably little despite significant shifts in market dynamics.

Business development professionals are still frequently evaluated according to criteria such as networking effectiveness, relationship management, opportunity generation and proposal activity.

While valuable, these measures fail to reflect the broader capabilities increasingly required for success.

Modern CRO commercial leaders require a blend of strategic insight, market awareness, scientific credibility, business acumen, executive influence and data literacy. Increasingly, they must be able to move comfortably between conversations regarding clinical development strategy, investor priorities, operational risk and commercial outcomes.

In effect, the role is becoming more multidimensional.

The stereotype of the relationship-driven salesperson is gradually being replaced by a commercially sophisticated advisor capable of helping customers navigate uncertainty and make better decisions.

This evolution has important implications for recruitment, development and performance assessment.

Many organisations continue to hire and develop individuals according to historic success profiles while simultaneously expecting them to operate effectively within a more demanding environment.

The result is often a widening capability gap.

Assessing Commercial Readiness

One of the most common mistakes CRO leadership teams make is assuming that commercial capability can be evaluated through outcome metrics alone.

- Revenue growth is important.
- Win rates are important.
- Pipeline generation is important.

However, these measures are lagging indicators.



More useful insights are often obtained through examination of the underlying capabilities that produce those outcomes.

The framework to the right of the page provides a practical method for evaluating commercial readiness across eight capabilities increasingly associated with high-performing CRO sales organisations.

Capability Domain (Assessment Questionnaires)	Key Question
Market Intelligence	Does the team understand the market better than its customers?
Consultative Selling	Can individuals create value before discussing services?
Stakeholder Navigation	Can they influence complex buying groups?
Scientific Credibility	Can they engage confidently with technical stakeholders?
Commercial Acumen	Can they discuss business outcomes rather than features?
CRM Intelligence	Are they extracting insight from data rather than recording activity?
Executive Influence	Can they engage credibly with senior decision makers?
Cross-Functional Leadership	Can they mobilise internal expertise effectively?

Rather than scoring individuals in isolation, organisations should first evaluate capability across the entire commercial function to identify systemic strengths and weaknesses. Patterns often emerge quickly. Some organisations demonstrate strong relationship skills but weak account planning. Others possess excellent scientific credibility but limited executive influence capability.

As part of the Remtec training we recommend pre evaluation of your team is carried out on the 8 key criteria. This will inform any actions you then subsequently need to take. As an example of the types of Assessment Questionnaires we use, included in this paper is one for Market Intelligence.

Market Intelligence Assessment

How to use: Rate your team for four capability areas below. Select the statement that best describes current state & record the score (1-5). Add the score to calculate total.

Capability Area	1 - Developing	2 - Basic	3 - Competent	4 - Strong	5 - Leading Practice	Your Score (1-5)
Funding awareness Understanding of sponsor funding environment & investor activity.	Reactive. Unaware of customer funding or market conditions	Aware of funding news occasionally but limited insight into implications.	Understands major funding events impacting accounts & portfolio strategy.	Proactively tracks funding activity & understands implications for customers.	Anticipates funding trends & investor sentiment; uses insights to influence account strategy.	
Pipeline Awareness visibility of customer pipelines, programmes & development milestones	Limited visibility. Little understanding beyond active projects.	Understands stated projects & near term milestones	Tracks key programmes & understands development opportunities.	Proactively monitors portfolio developments & strategic objectives.	Uses pipeline intelligence to identify opportunities before competitors & RFPs emerge.	
Competitive Intelligence Knowledge of competitor capabilities, positioning & performance	Ad hoc. Knowledge gained only through customer discussions.	Basic awareness of major competitors & service offerings.	Understands competitor capabilities & market positioning.	Systematically gathers & analyses competitor intelligence.	Consistently uses competitor insight to shape strategy & create competitive advantage.	
Strategic Trend Awareness Understanding of industry trends & their impact on customers	Basic. Focus on immediate opportunities only.	General awareness of industry developments & trends.	Understands key industry trends & their potential impact.	Regularly uses market trends to inform customer conversations & account strategy.	Recognised internally & externally as a trusted source of market insight & perspective.	

SCORING GUIDE

- 1. DEVELOPING** - Significant gaps. Limited insight & reactive approach.
- 2. BASIC** - Early stages. Awareness exists but inconsistent.
- 3. COMPETENT** - Satisfactory capability insight & regularity.
- 4. STRONG** - Well established practices driving better outcomes.
- 5. LEADING PRACTICE** - Best in class. Proactive, predictive & influential.

Total team score (out of 20)

/ 20

EVIDENCE REQUIRED FOR SCORES OF 4 or 5



Funding awareness evidence of tracking investor activity & funding implications.



Pipeline awareness documented visibility of future programmes & milestones



Competitive intelligence competitor profiles, win/loss analysis & positioning insight.



Strategic trend awareness market updates, thought leadership & customer discussions.

INTERPRET YOUR SCORES

4-8

DEVELOPMENT NEED
Market intelligence is a weakness. focus required.

9-12

ADEQUATE RISK
Basic awareness but insufficient to gain commercial advantage.

13-16

COMMERCIALLY STRONG
Good capability. Focus on deepening insight & consistency.

17-20

INTELLIGENCE LEADER
Strong, proactive market intelligence driving competitive advantage.

21+

MARKET LEADER
Industry leading insight, influences customers & shapes decision.

Building Competitive Advantage

The strongest CROs are not necessarily recruiting fundamentally different people from their competitors. Rather, they are creating environments in which commercial excellence can develop more systematically.

Their approach tends to combine capability development, process optimisation and technology integration.

Training remains important, but it is rarely sufficient on its own.

The most successful organisations supplement training with structured coaching, robust account management disciplines, improved CRM utilisation and clearly defined commercial methodologies.

Importantly, they also recognise that commercial development is not solely the responsibility of the sales function. Operations leaders, scientific experts and delivery teams increasingly play a vital role in customer engagement and account expansion.

The distinction between commercial excellence and organisational excellence is becoming increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

The CRO sector has changed dramatically over the last five years, yet many commercial capability models remain rooted in assumptions developed during a very different period. As buying processes become more complex, competition intensifies and data-driven decision making becomes increasingly important, many traditional approaches to business development are becoming less effective.

The organisations most likely to outperform during the coming decade will not necessarily be those with the largest commercial teams or the longest customer lists. They will be those capable of systematically developing commercial intelligence, strengthening strategic customer engagement and continuously evolving the capabilities of their people.

The fundamental question for every CRO leadership team is therefore simple:

If you were designing a business development organisation specifically for the CRO market of the future, would it necessarily look like the one you have today?

For many, and probably most organisations, that question reveals a significant opportunity for improvement. And in an increasingly competitive market, commercial capability may prove to be one of the few remaining sources of meaningful and significant differentiation.

Moving from Assessment to Action

Following capability assessment, organisations should resist the temptation to pursue broad, unfocused transformation initiatives.

The most effective programmes target a small number of high-impact areas. For many CROs, improving stakeholder mapping and account planning capability may generate significant benefits. For others, the greatest opportunity may lie in CRM optimisation, executive-level engagement or the development of stronger commercial acumen within otherwise technically capable teams.

The objective should not be to create perfect business developers.

Rather, it should be to create commercial organisations that are continuously adapting as market requirements evolve.

The highest-performing CROs increasingly view commercial capability as a strategic asset requiring ongoing investment and governance. In doing so, they position themselves not only to compete more effectively today but also to respond more rapidly to future market changes.

ADVANCED COMMERCIAL SALES CRO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (2 DAYS)

The most successful CRO business development professionals are trusted commercial advisors who understand science, strategy, relationships and customer psychology equally well. The CRO market is one of the most commercially complex and competitive sectors.

Success is driven by scientific capability, ability to influence strategy, build credibility, and win long-term partnerships.

This advanced programme equips experienced business development professionals with the commercial skills required to navigate complexity, differentiate effectively, and secure high-value, multi-year opportunities.



COURSE OUTCOMES

By the end of this programme, participants will be able to:

- Position CRO service effectively within a highly competitive outsourcing market.
- Build compelling, value led commercial narratives around scientific capability.
- Identify, qualify and prioritise high value opportunities.
- Navigate complete stakeholder environments with confidence.
- Influence outsourcing strategy and decision making.
- Develop and grow strategic client partnerships.
- Improve bid strategy, proposal quality and conversion rates.
- Negotiate more effectively while protecting margin and value.
- Strengthen personal credibility and executive presence.



Expert-Led, Practical Delivery

All programmes are delivered by highly experienced learning and development professionals with deep commercial expertise. Sessions are high-energy, interactive and practical, creating a safe environment for discussion, skill development and application. Learning doesn't stop at the workshop. We focus on immediate application in the workplace, with clear takeaways that support ongoing development and performance improvement

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