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Field Sales Effectiveness, Channel-Partner Engagement, and Lead Conversion in the Indian Decorative Paints Industry

An Exploratory Internship-Based Case Study of Birla Opus Paints, Pune

Rohit Ramkrushna Lothe

MBA (Marketing), Indira School of Business Studies, Pune, India

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Abstract

The decorative paints market involves multiple participants, including dealers, painters, contractors, builders, and end customers. Their differing needs and influence make field sales, lead qualification, channel relationships, and follow-up important parts of opportunity development. This exploratory case study examines these activities in the context of an MBA internship with Birla Opus Paints in Pune. The study draws on reported internship observations, field visits, stakeholder interactions, and lead-tracking summaries previously described by the researcher. Reported field activity included more than 180 market or project-site visits and interactions with more than 20 dealers and painters, as well as engagement with contractors and other market participants. A previously discussed lead summary contained 170 records classified as Hot (120), Warm (48), and Cold (2), with 124 records reportedly containing usable contact information. These counts are treated as provisional descriptive information pending comparison with original records and should not be represented as independently audited results. Relationship marketing, customer relationship management (CRM), marketing-channel management, and the sales-funnel concept provide the analytical lenses. The study argues that field activity should be assessed not only by visit volume but also by information quality, lead qualification, follow-up discipline, and opportunity progression. It proposes a practical lead-management framework and identifies opportunities for future empirical testing. Because the design is exploratory, geographically bounded, and not based on a probability sample or controlled comparison, the findings do not establish causal relationships or company-wide performance.

Keywords: field sales; lead management; channel partner engagement; customer relationship management; decorative paints; relationship marketing; sales funnel; India.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The decorative paints category connects manufacturers with customers through a network of dealers, painters, contractors, builders, architects, and homeowners. In many project-related purchases, product choice is not made by one participant alone. A homeowner may consider appearance, price, and durability; a contractor may prioritise project specifications and timing; a painter may influence brand consideration through familiarity and application experience; and a dealer may affect availability and access. These participants can therefore shape how a prospective requirement becomes a commercial opportunity.



Birla Opus Paints, housed under Grasim Industries within the Aditya Birla Group, entered the decorative paints market in 2024. The company's public information describes a portfolio spanning interior and exterior paints, waterproofing, enamels, wood finishes, and related categories. This paper uses that public information only to establish the organisational setting; it does not evaluate the company's overall performance.

1.2 Research problem

Field teams may identify many potential projects, but a site visit does not necessarily create a qualified lead or produce a sale. Progress can depend on the accuracy of contact information, the project's stage, access to decision-makers, established brand preferences, the relevance of follow-up, product suitability, and coordination with distribution operations. The research problem is therefore how field-sales practices and channel-partner engagement can be structured to support lead qualification and sales-opportunity development.

1.3 Purpose and contribution

The paper applies established marketing concepts to an internship-based field context. Its intended contribution is practical and contextual: it develops a framework for organising lead information, differentiating stakeholder engagement, and tracking opportunity progression. It is not presented as a statistically representative study of Pune or as an evaluation of Birla Opus Paints as a whole.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Lens

2.1 Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing emphasises the creation and maintenance of business relationships rather than treating each interaction as an isolated transaction. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify trust and relationship commitment as central constructs in their commitment-trust theory. In a decorative-paints setting, repeated and relevant engagement may help a salesperson understand stakeholder requirements and maintain communication over a project cycle. This paper uses relationship marketing as an interpretive lens; trust and commitment were not measured with a validated scale in the internship.

2.2 Customer relationship management

Payne and Frow (2005) frame CRM as a strategic approach that connects customer information, processes, and organisational capabilities. In field selling, CRM principles can be operationalised through structured records that capture project identifiers, locality, project stage, stakeholder category, contact status, last interaction, next action, and lead status. A database has limited value if records are incomplete, duplicated, outdated, or disconnected from follow-up.

2.3 Channel management and stakeholder roles

Marketing channels involve interdependent participants who contribute to making an offering available to the market. Rosenbloom (2013) discusses channel design and management, including relationships and coordination among channel members. Dealers, painters, and contractors can influence different parts of a paint purchase. A differentiated engagement approach is therefore more defensible than assuming that one sales message will work equally well for every participant.

2.4 Sales funnel and lead qualification

The sales funnel distinguishes early-stage activity from later-stage outcomes. Visits and prospect identification are activity measures; usable contacts and qualified leads are intermediate measures; quotations, trials, negotiations, and confirmed orders represent later stages when such information is recorded. These measures should not be conflated. In particular, a lead labelled Hot is not equivalent to a converted customer, and the number of visits is not itself a conversion rate.

2.5 Buying behaviour and perceived risk

Customers and project stakeholders may retain an existing brand because of familiarity, prior experience, perceived product risk, availability, commercial terms, or confidence in application. Marketing-management literature stresses the need to understand customer value and buying behaviour before designing a selling approach (Kotler & Keller,



2016). A field representative should therefore identify the concern behind resistance and respond with accurate, relevant information rather than relying only on generic promotional claims.

2.6 Research gap and positioning

The reviewed concepts are established, but their practical application depends on the operating context. This paper offers an internship-based view of how field visits, lead records, stakeholder interactions, and operational exposure can be organised into a coherent sales-management framework. The paper does not claim that the topic has never been studied; its contribution is a bounded, context-specific analysis and a framework for further investigation.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

3.1 Primary objective

To examine field-sales effectiveness, channel-partner engagement, and lead-management practices in the decorative paints industry through an exploratory case study of Birla Opus Paints in Pune.

3.2 Specific objectives

- Understand the role of field visits in identifying construction and repainting opportunities.
- Examine how contact-information quality supports lead management and follow-up.
- Explore the different roles of dealers, painters, contractors, and other stakeholders.
- Identify field-level barriers that may prevent prospects from progressing towards conversion.
- Consider the relevance of depot operations and sales-distribution coordination.
- Develop practical recommendations for lead prioritisation and channel engagement.

3.3 Research questions

1. RQ1: How do field visits contribute to identifying and initially assessing sales opportunities?
2. RQ2: What role does lead-information quality play in organising follow-up?
3. RQ3: How can engagement with dealers, painters, and contractors support opportunity development?
4. RQ4: What field-level barriers may prevent identified prospects from progressing?
5. RQ5: How can lead management and coordination with distribution operations be improved?

4. Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework links field-sales activity to the progression of a sales opportunity through four connected stages: (1) prospect identification, (2) information quality and lead qualification, (3) stakeholder engagement and follow-up, and (4) opportunity progression. Channel-partner engagement and sales–operations coordination are treated as contextual enablers that may affect the process. This is a conceptual proposition, not a tested causal model.

Field visits and prospect identification
↓
Lead information quality and qualification
↓
Stakeholder engagement and structured follow-up
↓
Opportunity progression (trial / quotation / negotiation / order)

Contextual enablers: channel relationships • project timing • product suitability • operational coordination

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework. The stages should be aligned with the organisation’s actual sales process and available records before empirical testing.



5. Research Methodology

5.1 Design

The study adopts an exploratory, descriptive case-study design. This is appropriate for examining field-level processes within a specific organisational and geographical setting. It combines internship observations and reported lead-tracking summaries with secondary academic literature. It is not an experiment and does not estimate causal effects.

5.2 Setting and period

The case concerns field activities associated with the researcher's internship with Birla Opus Paints in Pune, reported as running from 15 May to 15 July 2026. The exact territory coverage should be described from the final internship documentation if the manuscript is submitted.

5.3 Data sources

The primary contextual material consists of the researcher's observations during market and project-site visits, interactions with dealers and painters, engagement with contractors and other stakeholders, and exposure to sales-related follow-up and depot processes. Secondary material includes peer-reviewed publications on relationship marketing, CRM, channel management, and marketing management, along with official company information for background.

5.4 Fieldwork and sampling

The researcher previously reported more than 180 market or project-site visits and interactions with more than 20 dealers and painters, in addition to contractors and other market participants. These figures describe reported internship activity; they do not represent a probability sample. The total number of unique sites, unique people, repeat visits, and usable lead records should be distinguished in any final empirical version.

5.5 Provisional descriptive lead summary

A lead summary discussed in earlier internship-related work contained 170 records classified as follows. These figures are reproduced as provisional and must be checked against the original spreadsheet before publication.

Lead category	Reported count	Percentage of 170	Interpretation
Hot	120	70.59%	Operational classification; not confirmed conversion
Warm	48	28.24%	Operational classification; progression not established
Cold	2	1.18%	Operational classification; criteria require definition
Total	170	100.00%	Reported total; source records require verification

A further previously reported figure was 124 usable contacts among 170 records (72.94%). This should be reported only if the original file confirms both the numerator and denominator and defines "usable contact." Contact usability is not a sales-conversion measure.

5.6 Analysis plan

The analysis uses descriptive frequencies and percentages, supplemented by thematic interpretation of field observations. If the source records permit, further tables may examine lead status by locality, project stage, contact completeness, follow-up status, or final outcome. Excel pivot tables can support this analysis. Inferential statistics should be used only where variables, sample size, measurement quality, and assumptions justify them.



5.7 Ethics and confidentiality

Before publication, the researcher should follow institutional guidance on ethics approval and consent, obtain company permission where required, and remove personal contact information and commercially sensitive details. Project names and individual names should be anonymised unless explicit permission supports disclosure. The manuscript should not reveal confidential sales data or imply company endorsement.

6. Findings and Interpretation

6.1 Field visits support early-stage prospect identification

The reported volume of field activity indicates substantial exposure to project-site identification and market interaction during the internship. Site visits can provide a first view of project existence, location, likely painting needs, and possible stakeholders. Yet a visit should be treated as an early-stage activity, not evidence that a commercially qualified opportunity has been created. The next step is to establish the project stage, identify a relevant contact, and document a practical follow-up action.

6.2 Lead classification is useful only when criteria are clear

If the reported 170-record summary is confirmed, the dataset was heavily weighted towards leads classified as Hot. This distribution may reflect the team's initial assessment or the intern's field classification. Without an explicit definition and comparison with later outcomes, it cannot establish that 70.59% of prospects were likely to buy or that the field process achieved a particular conversion rate. A lead-scoring system should define the evidence required for each category and update the status as information changes.

6.3 Contact quality can affect the practicality of follow-up

The previously reported 124 usable contacts out of 170 records would correspond to 72.94%, if verified. The interpretation depends on how usability was defined. A record may contain a phone number but still lack the project stage, decision-maker, or next action needed for effective follow-up. Data quality should therefore cover completeness, accuracy, timeliness, duplication, and actionability rather than contact presence alone.

6.4 Different stakeholders require different engagement

Dealers, painters, and contractors participate in different parts of the market system. Dealers may provide access and information about local demand; contractors may coordinate project requirements; painters may influence brand consideration through familiarity and application experience. A practical sales approach should adapt the information shared and the next action to the stakeholder's role. The available evidence does not quantify the relative influence of these groups, so their contribution should be treated as a managerial interpretation and a topic for future research.

6.5 Existing preferences create a need for consultative selling

Some field situations involved established brand preferences or reluctance to share information. Such resistance may reflect familiarity, perceived risk, prior experience, availability, or relationships. The appropriate response is to understand the concern, establish the requirement, and provide accurate information or an authorised demonstration where relevant. The study does not have sufficient outcome data to claim that any particular approach caused a lead to convert.

6.6 Follow-up turns a contact into a managed opportunity

Follow-up is most useful when it is linked to a recorded purpose, a prospect's timeline, and a next action. A disciplined record should capture the last interaction, the concern or requirement raised, the response, and the next planned step. This reduces reliance on memory and can help prioritise time. Follow-up frequency should remain appropriate to the prospect's preferences and the organisation's policies.

6.7 Depot exposure highlights the sales–operations connection

The researcher reported exposure to order processing, invoice scanning, stock management, dispatch planning, and movement of material to project sites. These activities illustrate that a commercial opportunity must ultimately connect with fulfilment processes. Accurate information about availability, order status, and dispatch can support coordination



between field sales and operations. However, the internship observations do not establish actual delivery performance or operational efficiency; those outcomes require separate data.

7. Discussion

The findings can be interpreted through the combined lenses of relationship marketing, CRM, channel management, and the sales funnel. Relationship marketing explains the relevance of continued, useful interaction. CRM explains why information should be organised into actionable records. Channel management explains the different roles of market participants. The sales funnel distinguishes field activity from later commercial outcomes.

The main managerial implication is that activity volume should be paired with quality and progression measures. A high number of visits may be valuable for coverage, but its contribution is clearer when linked to unique sites, usable contacts, qualified leads, completed follow-ups, trials or quotations, and final outcomes. Each measure requires a defined denominator and a consistent reporting period.

A second implication is that lead data should be managed as a decision-support resource. A record is useful when it helps the salesperson determine whom to contact, why to contact them, and what action should follow. Third, stakeholder engagement should be differentiated rather than generic. Finally, the field process should be connected with operational coordination, while avoiding unsupported claims about service performance.

8. Managerial Recommendations

8.1 Standardise lead-entry fields

Use a consistent lead template covering project identifier, locality, project stage, stakeholder type, contact status, estimated potential where evidence exists, lead status, last interaction, next action, and follow-up date. Define what constitutes a complete and usable record.

8.2 Make lead categories evidence-based

Document the criteria for Hot, Warm, and Cold. Possible indicators include a confirmed requirement, purchase timeline, access to the relevant stakeholder, product suitability, and an agreed next step. These criteria should be approved by the sales team and aligned with its actual process.

8.3 Establish follow-up discipline

Require an active lead to have a next action and a follow-up date. Record the outcome of each interaction and update status when new information is available. Review overdue follow-ups regularly and respect stakeholder preferences.

8.4 Differentiate stakeholder engagement

Adapt discussions to the role of the dealer, contractor, painter, or end customer. Use accurate product information and, where authorised and appropriate, samples or demonstrations to address specific concerns. Evaluate these activities through documented outcomes rather than anecdotal impressions.

8.5 Build a funnel dashboard

A practical dashboard could track total visits, unique sites, usable-contact rate, qualified-lead rate, follow-up completion, trial or quotation counts, order conversion, and recorded reasons for loss or delay. Conversion rates should be calculated only when the start and end populations are clearly defined.

8.6 Coordinate with distribution operations

Where appropriate, share reliable forecasts and requirements with depot or operations teams and maintain visibility of order status, availability, and dispatch schedules. Any improvement initiative should be evaluated against actual measures such as processing time, fulfilment accuracy, and delivery reliability.

8.7 Use field observations for structured learning

Record recurring objections, information gaps, stakeholder needs, and reasons for delayed opportunities. Review patterns periodically and base process changes on repeated evidence rather than isolated anecdotes.



9. Limitations

- Geographical scope is limited to the field activities associated with Pune and cannot represent all Birla Opus markets.
- The observation period is limited to a two-month internship; some projects may convert outside that period.
- The fieldwork is not based on probability sampling, and the number of unique sites and people must be distinguished from repeat visits.
- The lead categories are operational labels whose criteria and relationship with actual outcomes have not been validated.
- Previously reported numerical summaries require comparison with original records before publication.
- The design does not establish causal effects or company-wide performance.
- The researcher's participation in the activities may influence which observations were recorded and how they were interpreted.
- Confidentiality, consent, and company-permission requirements may limit the information that can be published.

10. Future Research

A larger study could survey dealers, painters, contractors, and homeowners to assess how each group influences brand selection. A longitudinal design could track qualified leads from initial identification through final outcomes and examine whether contact completeness is associated with follow-up completion or opportunity progression. Comparative studies across localities could investigate differences in project timing, stakeholder relationships, and competitive preferences. Further research could also test whether distribution reliability is associated with customer satisfaction using verified operational data. Hypotheses and statistical tests should be selected only after the constructs and available variables are clearly defined.

11. Conclusion

This exploratory case study uses an MBA internship at Birla Opus Paints in Pune to examine field-sales activity, channel-partner engagement, lead management, and sales–operations coordination. The internship provided practical exposure to project-site identification, stakeholder interactions, contact collection, follow-up, and depot-level processes. The analysis connects these activities to relationship marketing, CRM, channel management, and the sales-funnel framework.

The central conclusion is that field-sales effectiveness should not be assessed solely through the number of visits or prospects identified. It also depends on information quality, appropriate lead qualification, relevant stakeholder engagement, disciplined follow-up, and the progression of opportunities towards documented outcomes. Coordination with distribution operations is a related consideration because commercial commitments must ultimately be fulfilled.

The study is exploratory and bounded. Its numerical summaries should be verified before publication, and the available evidence does not establish causal relationships or company-wide performance. With transparent reporting, confidentiality safeguards, and appropriately defined outcome measures, the case provides a useful foundation for further research into field sales and channel management in the decorative paints industry.

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Publication Readiness and Research Integrity Note

This manuscript is a structured submission draft, not a guarantee of acceptance or a claim that all empirical checks have been completed. Before submission, the author must verify the lead counts against the original records, ensure that all cited sources have been consulted and accurately represented, confirm the target journal's formatting and ethics policies, and obtain any required institutional or company permissions. Any statement that implies statistical significance, causality, or company-wide performance must be supported by appropriate evidence. The author should disclose the internship context and any required conflicts of interest or acknowledgements according to the chosen journal's policy.