

vivun. × PreSales Collective.

The Future of PreSales: Reimagining the Profession



Vivun and PreSales Collective have teamed up to propose a new approach to naming, structuring, and imagining the PreSales profession. To start, we want to have a conversation around the word “PreSales” and propose a new title for those in the role — Solutions Consultant.

Why take on the task of rethinking the name and purpose of an entire profession? Vivun and PSC share a mission to elevate the profession and enable it to take its place as a critical, strategic business unit. The past few years has seen great strides in achieving this goal: PreSales has grown faster than ever (17% increase in LinkedIn job postings alone since January 2022, and that’s in the middle of an economic downturn). In companies with 50+ employees, PreSales is 1.6x the size of Product Management, 3.8x the size of Customer Success, and 4.4x the size of Sales Development. PreSales only lags behind Sales, which is 4.3x bigger.

Companies can’t hire PreSales fast enough. This rapid growth can be attributed to the increasing complexity of sales, and PreSales is prepared to help buyers address use cases, identify value propositions, and accurately answer questions about product capabilities.

"The lack of alignment, especially with the title, is confusing when we look at the profession from a macro perspective. The goal of agreeing on a title brings us closer to global alignment on defining what best in class looks like. Additionally, this move will aid in bringing more awareness and standardization to the profession, thus helping usher in a new wave of diverse candidates."



James Kaikis
PSC Founder & Solutions
Thought Leader

But the Naming is a Mess

If our goal is to continue to elevate the PreSales profession, then we need to ensure that the group is both highly visible and understood for its potential strategic contribution. It’s simply not possible to do that when the variations in “PreSales” titles number in the hundreds — solutions architect, sales engineering, and of course variations on “PreSales” itself. There are over 192 confirmed variants on LinkedIn alone and likely more.

To better understand, benchmark, brand, and build a community for the profession, the job title needs to be standardized and its role needs to be reimaged. Important activities like recruiting and hiring become difficult, and ensuring industry standard compensation is nearly impossible. Branding the profession, and ultimately building out a new B2B organization chart that reflects the power of PreSales, requires a new approach.

Why Not Just Go with “PreSales”?

The path of least resistance would suggest that “PreSales” is the right choice. But if the goal is to elevate the profession and reinforce its strategic importance, then it’s the wrong direction. In many companies, PreSales includes technical experts who touch the entire buyer journey from initial interest through evaluation, purchasing decision, and ongoing expansion. The very title “PreSales” implies that the profession only touches the customer journey prior to the sale. That may have been true in the 70s and 80s, when “PreSales” people were wheeled in to demonstrate mainframes to prospective customers, but it’s not true in 2022. [The Summer ‘22 Benchmark Report: PreSales Prevails in a Bear Market](#) reported that 55% of PreSales leaders were taking on more responsibilities including involvement with Post-Sales.

“Solutions” Covers the Entire Customer Journey

In a poll conducted by [PreSales Collective](#) in which over 2K LinkedIn members were asked if they could use only one job title for PreSales, Solutions Consultant came out on top with 43% of the vote, Solutions Engineer (30%), Sales Engineer (18%), and PreSales Engineer (8%). When we examined all 192 titles surfaced on LinkedIn, we found that “Solutions” is at the heart of most of those titles. Below is a word cloud of the titles, with the larger titles representing greater frequency. We found the word “Solutions” to have the highest frequency, followed by “Technical,” “Sales,” “Engineer,” and “PreSales.”

Frequency of Titles that Describe PreSales Professionals on LinkedIn.



Standardizing around the title “Solutions” moves away from the idea that these job titles represent demo assistants and rather embodies the ability to champion the buyer’s journey with expert knowledge and authentic human connection. We believe that this title is highly adaptable and will grow with the profession. Unification helps break down the barriers that exist to getting into this industry, removing the biases and barriers inherent in the “sales” and “engineering” names and helping level the playing field for new people to join the profession.

Reimagining B2B Go-to-Market: The Solutions Organization

The current org structure of modern B2B tech companies is a traditional one that reflects the B2B selling of the past and fails to represent the changes that have occurred in recent years. Buyers want access to products fast. They want their questions answered by product experts, and they only want to engage with salespeople when they’re forced to begin the buying process.

We’re proposing the addition and creation of the Solutions Organization, otherwise known as the Solutions Org, as we feel this better represents the role of PreSales and where it’s headed. Each person under the Solutions Org is a product expert who interfaces with the customer at some point in their journey. So, in addition to the actual “before the sale” team members, this group would also contain professional services, business value consultants, and the team members supporting the customer.

And the titles? Most team members would likely use a title such as “Solutions Consultant” in the newly created org. However, we recognize that certain technical professionals prefer to use “Solutions Engineer”; you might see that in a developer-focused technology or infrastructure company. In some territories (such as places in Europe and Canada), it’s not even permitted to use “engineering” if the person doesn’t hold the correct degree or certification, so we don’t believe Sales Engineer is the correct standardized title. Some organizations may find “Solutions Engineer” to be a useful title and others will prefer “Solutions Consultant,” but the point is to pick one.

“Most B2B companies have been following a similar GTM model, where Marketing tees up a call for an SDR who passes it off to an AE who qualifies the deal before bringing in a SE who then relies on Services to deliver the vision and Customer Success to keep a pulse on the renewal. This all worked brilliantly when software products were notoriously hard to deploy and use. Today, software has never been more accessible and buyers have never been more sales-proof. These changes are sunsetting traditional structures because there are better ways to operate, which not only lead to happier customers but better bottom lines for companies.”



Matt Darrow
Vivun CEO & Co-Founder

The Chief Solutions Officer

For companies sub 100M ARR, we suggest making the title changes proposed immediately to more effectively run and scale your organization. All job functions under the Solutions Org — Services, Solutions Consultant, Solutions Architect, Solutions Specialist, and Value Consultant — should report to the VP of Solutions within the Solutions Org. In many cases, this VP will report to the CRO or the President.

For a 100M+ ARR company, a new executive leadership role called the Chief Solutions Officer (CSO) should be created to oversee the entire Solutions Org. This role will be accountable for revenue and how to get it faster and more efficiently, and will be maniacally focused on the buyer experience. From a reporting standpoint, with the CSO in place as a direct report to the CEO, the Solutions Org moves away from the purview of CRO — because while CROs are great at understanding the sale, they're typically not product experts or even highly technical.

You may see some natural tension between the newly created CSO and the CRO, but these two personas are bonded by pipeline and will work to align their respective domains in order to hit a shared number. Their situation is very similar to the tension and partnership that exists between the CMO and the CRO.

For companies that currently have a Chief Customer Officer (CCO), we expect that this role will naturally evolve into the CSO. If you have a leadership team with a CRO, CMO, and CSO, you no longer need a single executive in charge of the customer. From our standpoint, ensuring that customers are successful is everyone's responsibility.

Let's Talk Customer Success

It may be a bit of a shock to think of customer success evolving into the Solutions organization, but we see this as a natural progression that is already underway in many companies. Currently, customer success is struggling to define the role and the rules of engagement with organizations. Some departments are compensated on growth and expansion (like account managers), others with adoption and utilization metrics, and they often don't have KPIs and are focused more on customer support. The changes in SaaS have forced us to look at this role as more strategic and should have expertise in product, change management, and customer service.

That's why the requirements for supporting customers should be the same requirements as anyone in the Solutions Org: to be both technical and business savvy. Therefore, the traditional Customer Success Role should be cut. Solutions Consultants will handle the entire lifecycle from prospect to customer, and the only true difference between them is that some team members will work with customers because their strength is building relationships, whereas others will be more prospect-facing because they love the battle for the tech win.

3 Models for Deploying Solutions Teams

From enterprises to startups, we've observed that Solutions teams are typically deployed in one of three models:



Activation Model. The Solutions Consultant that sells the deal stays with the customer throughout their entire lifecycle — from initial interest through evaluation, purchasing decision, and ongoing expansion — and is focused on driving consumption. This model is deployed by Snowflake.



Milestone Model. The Solutions Consultant that sold the deal sticks around to a certain level of consumption or until a specific milestone is reached, and then the account is passed to a Solutions Consultant who focuses on driving usage and expansions. This model is deployed by AWS.



Hand-Off Model. The Solutions Consultant stays with the customer until the deal is signed and then hands the customer off to a Solutions Consultant who focuses on driving usage and expansion. This model is deployed by Splunk.

All three models have merit, and can be used effectively by the newly created Solutions org.

What's Next?

This Manifesto is meant to determine a professional title for Solutions Consultants as well as reimagine the structure of modern organizations to reflect today's B2B selling. To that end, we encourage action: if what we've said here resonates, consider taking these thoughts to your own company and asking for, at the very minimum, the title changes we've suggested.

At Vivun, for example, the company's former VP of PreSales is now VP Solutions Consulting, Sales Engineers are now Solutions Consultants, and the organization continues to make additional changes. PSC, for its own part, has also started the process of utilizing the Solutions Consulting, SC, and Solutions vocabulary on their website and in their content to embrace the "Solutions" naming. An interesting note is that PSC has experienced a tidal wave of interest in [PreSales Academy](#), its career launch program, as a result of moving away from "Sales Engineer" to "Solutions Consultant." Just that simple act has allowed new, diverse members to join the profession who might have qualified themselves out due to the word "engineering" and its implication that technical skills are a requirement.

Vivun and PreSales Collective want to engage our mutual communities to rename, rebrand, and reimagine the Solutions profession together!

vivun.

Vivun is a global provider of Buyer Experience (BX) software. Its AI-powered platform supports a family of products that enables B2B businesses to meet the demands of today's sales-proof buyer, differentiate from the competition, and accelerate revenue. With the Solutions organization at the forefront of the buyer experience, companies can align Sales with Product, provide repeatable workflows for the team, deliver on-demand product expertise, and win more deals with transparency and trust.

Leaders at Okta, Autodesk, Dell, Snowflake, Elastic, Fivetran, and Harness are powering incredible buyer experiences with Vivun. To learn more visit [Vivun.com](https://vivun.com)

PreSales Collective.

The PreSales Collective is a global community of over 25,000 PreSales professionals brought together to help one another grow and learn. We aim to elevate the PreSales profession by setting the standard of excellence, ensuring PreSales is recognized as an essential contributor to organizational growth, and supporting all PreSales professionals who are charting this course.

The PSC is designed to empower the PreSales community with the resources, relationships, and opportunities they need to become the best versions of themselves — inside and outside of work. Visit presalescollective.com