



State of the Self-Employed Sales Market in the UK | 2025

What you need to know about the changing
sales employment landscape

FOREWORD FROM THE FOUNDER



“The need for effective sales professionals remains in critical demand,”

LEENA PARMAR

The data in this white paper is clear: the need for effective sales professionals remains in 'critical demand,' even as the broader UK labour market cools. This mixed picture confirms that traditional hiring models are failing to capture the grit and ambition needed to drive revenue.

For me, this is an opportunity. It is a moment to fully embrace the 'employeepreneur'. Driven by an owner's mindset, this individual is the essential driving force who views sales not as a 'job' but as the primary engine of a successful and thriving business.

Our vision at Citrus Connect is to be the leading catalyst for this transformation, creating a world where elite sales talent and businesses connect through value-driven partnerships.

This white paper is our reflection on why the self-employed model is a strategic, scalable, and rewarding path forward for every ambitious salesperson and growth-focused enterprise.”

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Introduction | A Changing Sales Employment Landscape

The UK job market in 2025 presents a mixed picture. Overall hiring has cooled – for example, the number of job vacancies fell to 761,000 in Feb–Apr 2025, marking the 34th consecutive quarterly decline in openings. Yet even in this slower market, sales roles stand out as a critical need.

Surveys show 65% of UK employers are struggling to find candidates with the right skills, a challenge that certainly extends to finding strong salespeople. In fact, “Sales accounts and business development managers” have been flagged as critical demand occupations by the government, comprising a large share of roles where talent is in short supply (nearly 37% of critical-skill occupations at one skill level).

In short, while hiring in general may be down, the hunt for effective sales talent – including those willing to work on a self-employed basis – remains as competitive as ever.

This dynamic has put a spotlight on self-employed sales professionals, essentially commission-based or freelance sales reps who operate as independent contractors rather than salaried employees.

The gig economy’s growth has made this model increasingly viable. Approximately 1.4% of UK workers (around 463,000 people) now engage in some form of gig work, and about one in six adults has participated in gig-type work. Many of these gigs are in areas like ride-sharing or delivery, but sales is emerging as a professional domain where independent work can thrive.

A Changing Sales Employment Landscape

Leena's Insight:

"While a self-employed sales model gives businesses agility and scale, its greatest advantage is the type of person it attracts. This model appeals to the 'employeepreneur', individuals with a profound entrepreneurial drive who are self-motivated, accountable, and possess a level of determination that goes far beyond what you can find in a traditional hiring pool. By offering a platform for these professionals to thrive, businesses are not just filling a vacancy; they are gaining a partner who is fully invested in their own success, which directly drives the company's growth."

Self-employed "direct sales" roles – from selling home improvement products to financial services – offer a blend of flexibility and earning potential that attracts entrepreneurial-minded people.

At Citrus Connect, we often refer to these high-performing independent reps as **"employeepreneurs,"** reflecting how they treat the business as their own, they are accountable, dedicated, and passionate.

The following sections of this white paper delve into the current state of this self-employed sales market: examining why more businesses are leveraging it, how many opportunities are out there, what individuals and employers should consider, and when it makes sense to scale up a sales team with this model.

Rising Demand for Self-Employed Salespeople (and Why)

Even amid economic uncertainty, many UK businesses are increasingly open to hiring self-employed salespeople – and several trends help explain why. A major factor is cost and flexibility. Commission-only sales representatives are typically independent contractors, meaning they are not on the company's payroll in the traditional sense.

COMPANIES PAY FOR RESULTS (SALES) RATHER THAN TIME.

In an environment where some firms face lower recruitment budgets and pressure to do “more with less,” a self-employed model lets them scale their sales force up or down with demand. Essentially, it shifts more of the risk (and reward) to the salesperson, which can be win-win if managed well.





THE WIDENING TALENT POOL AND EVOLVING WORK CULTURE

As noted, a sizable segment of the workforce now prefers flexible work arrangements. These individuals value being able to “be their own boss,” possibly set their schedule, or have the opportunity to work with multiple products.

COMMISSION BASED ROLES

By offering commission-based roles, companies can attract ambitious sales talent who might not be interested in a 9–5 office job. In fields like direct home sales, recruitment of self-employed agents has long been standard, but now we see the model expanding. Small and mid-sized enterprises, startups, and even large organisations are exploring commission-only sales agents to penetrate new markets or boost revenue.

For example, the UK’s leading fitted furniture company, Sharps Bedrooms, regularly advertises for “self-employed Sales/Design Consultants,” and even member organisations like the Federation of Small Businesses recruit commission-based sales roles to grow their ranks. Such examples underscore that a broad range of organisations – from home improvement firms to professional services and nonprofits – are leveraging self-employed salespeople to drive growth.



The UK’s leading fitted furniture company, Sharps Bedrooms, regularly advertises for “self-employed Sales/Design Consultants,”

Rising Demand for Self-Employed Salespeople (and Why) (cont)

MARKET CONDITIONS POST-PANDEMIC HAVE INCREASED THIS DEMAND.

After the lockdown-era slowdown, many businesses are pushing for aggressive growth to make up for lost time. However, they face a paradox: growth requires more sales outreach, but traditional hiring is hampered by skill shortages. The self-employed sales model offers a solution.

It allows companies to rapidly onboard sales talent. Because these roles are performance-based, companies feel more confident adding headcount.



All these factors have converged to make commission-only sales recruitment an appealing strategy in 2024–2025. In summary, more employers “want to employ self-employed sales people” now because it grants cost-effective scalability, access to motivated talent, and agility in an unpredictable market.

Market Snapshot | Volume of Roles and Who's Hiring

HOW LARGE IS THE SELF - EMPLOYED SALES MARKET IN THE UK RIGHT NOW?

While it's hard to pin down an exact number, as these roles are spread across industries and often not separately tallied. Several indicators show that it's a substantial and active segment. Specialised recruiting platforms have sprung up to connect companies with freelance sales agents.

For instance, CommissionCrowd – an online marketplace for commission-only sales opportunities – currently lists around 500 independent sales opportunities on offer. And that's just one platform; mainstream job boards like Indeed and Totaljobs also feature hundreds of self-employed sales job ads at any given time (Indeed's UK site recently showed 50+ open listings for “self-employed sales agents,” and regional boards show dozens of openings in areas like Yorkshire, London, etc.)

120,000

One industry analysis estimated that roughly 120,000 individuals in the UK work in sales or customer service occupations on a self-employed basis.

These figures suggest that many thousands of commission-based sales roles are live across the UK at this moment. In terms of the workforce size, one industry analysis estimated that roughly 120,000 individuals in the UK work in sales or customer service occupations on a self-employed basis. This number had dipped slightly in recent years (a 10% fall from 2023 to 2024), but the current push by companies to augment their sales through contractors could reverse that trend.

Market Snapshot | Volume of Roles and Who's Hiring (cont)

THE TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS SEEKING SELF-EMPLOYED SALESPEOPLE COVER A WIDE SPECTRUM.

A significant portion are in direct-to-consumer sales industries – traditionally known for using commission-only staff. These include home improvement and home services companies, furniture and home decor firms, and automotive services.

As an example, Hammonds uses self-employed sales designers, and many kitchen makeover franchises operate similarly. Financial services and insurance are another area: independent financial advisers or insurance agents often work commission-based, and we see job ads for roles selling things like life insurance, estate planning, or mortgages in a self-employed capacity. Membership and subscription-based organisations use freelance sales reps to sign up new members or donors.



In the B2B sector, SMEs and startups in tech or services sometimes hire freelance sales agents to expand into new markets. These independent reps might carry multiple complementary products and introduce them to their client networks. The *CommissionCrowd* listings show opportunities ranging from selling software solutions, marketing services, to industrial products – often with global territories.

WHAT THESE HIRING COMPANIES HAVE IN COMMON IS THE DESIRE TO GROW REVENUE QUICKLY AND A NEED FOR SALES EXPERTISE WITHOUT THE CONSTRAINTS OF A FULL-TIME HIRE.

Often, they are looking for seasoned sales professionals who will hit the ground running on commission.

Market Snapshot | Volume of Roles and Who's Hiring (cont)



It's also worth noting that many established sales organisations (like national direct sales companies in energy, telecom, or home security) maintain a base of self-employed field sales agents.

THE AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION (AA) FAMOUSLY EXPANDED ITS DIRECT SALES FORCE BY USING SELF-EMPLOYED SALESPEOPLE, A STRATEGY CITRUS CONNECT HELPED IMPLEMENT BACK IN 2009.

Today, that approach continues across numerous sectors. From our vantage point, the self-employed sales model is prevalent in industries where personal selling is key and margins allow for high commissions – and it's gaining traction elsewhere as companies seek flexibility. The market for these roles in the UK is robust, with opportunities available in virtually every region and industry vertical, powered by businesses of all sizes aiming to boost sales without traditional hiring hurdles.

Preparing for Success as a Self-Employed Sales Professional

For individuals considering a leap into a self-employed sales role, preparation is crucial. The prospect can be exciting – uncapped earnings, possible freedom over your schedule, and a clear link between effort and reward – but it comes with unique challenges. Here are key considerations and tips based on market data and Citrus Connect's experience supporting candidates:

FINANCIAL READINESS

Before starting, make sure you have a financial cushion. Since these roles are commission-only, it may take a few months to build a pipeline and start closing deals consistently. Having savings to cover 2-3 months of living expenses is a common recommendation, so you're not panicking if you don't earn much in the first weeks. Treat this as starting a small business – initial income can be low or uneven. However, the upside is significant: the average self-employed direct salesperson earns around £40k–£60k per year, and top performers can surpass £100k annually. Knowing that potential, plan your finances to weather the ramp-up period and then reap the rewards.

MINDSET & SKILLS

Working as an independent salesperson demands a strong entrepreneurial mindset. You must be disciplined in managing your time, setting your own schedule to reach enough prospects each day. There's no boss checking if you made your calls – you are your own boss. Successful “employeepreneur” salespeople share traits of resilience and proactiveness. You have to handle rejection well and keep motivated without the structure of a normal office. Ask yourself honestly: Can I stay driven and positive if a week goes by with no sales? If the answer is yes – or you relish that kind of challenge – you may thrive in this environment. On the skill side, communication and people skills are paramount. The good news is that formal sales experience is not always required; many companies now value attitude over experience. In fact, many Citrus Connect clients don't require prior sales experience at all – they've seen great success hiring ex-teachers, ex-police officers, ex armed-forces and many other career changers who bring work ethic and coachability. Be prepared to learn a proven sales process and follow guidance. If you are a good listener, a persuasive communicator, and willing to learn, you can excel even if you're new to sales.

Preparing for Success as a Self-Employed Sales Professional

BUSINESS LOGISTICS

Remember that as a self-employed person, you are running your own business of one. This means taking care of things like registering as self-employed with HMRC, keeping track of your income and expenses, and setting aside money for taxes. Take advantage of the tax benefits of being self-employed – for instance, you can often deduct work-related expenses (fuel, phone, home office costs, etc.), which effectively lets you keep more of what you earn. It's wise to consult an accountant or mentor on how to manage your books and ensure you comply with regulations. Also, consider how you'll replace the benefits that a normal employer would provide. You might need to arrange your own pension contributions, insurance (e.g. life or income protection), and holiday planning. These factors aren't deal-breakers – the higher earning potential can more than compensate – but they require personal responsibility. Planning for them up front will set you up for long-term success and stability.

SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SALES SUCCESS

Treat your new role professionally from day one. That means doing your homework on the product you'll sell and the company you represent. If you can, speak to other employees or read testimonials (like those on Citrus Connect's site) to understand what strategies work. Many direct sales roles come with comprehensive training and ongoing support – take full advantage of any training program, because it can dramatically shorten your path to making consistent sales. It's also wise to prepare your home office or work setup: ensure you have reliable internet, a good customer relationship management (CRM) system or at least a spreadsheet to track leads, and a quiet space for phone calls or video meetings if needed. Essentially, you want to hit the ground running, treating this like launching a new venture. The most successful self-employed salespeople act like owners: they diligently prospect for new leads, maintain their client relationships, and continuously sharpen their sales tactics. With the right preparation and mindset, a career in self-employed sales can indeed offer “the lifestyle that you want” with “the opportunity to have multiple holidays a year, pay off debt, and even invest in property,” as one Citrus Connect guide puts it. The effort is substantial, but so are the rewards and personal growth that come with carving your own path in sales.

Considerations for Employers Adopting a Self-Employed Sales Model

If you are an employer thinking about transitioning your sales team to a more self-employed (commission-only) model, there are important factors to weigh to ensure it's a strategic success. Many companies have thrived with this model, but it requires a shift in how you recruit, manage, and support your salespeople. Here are key considerations:

LEGAL & COMPLIANCE FACTORS

First and foremost, understand the legal distinction of using self-employed agents. In the UK, simply calling someone “self-employed” is not enough – their working arrangements must genuinely reflect independent contractor status. IR35 rules and other employment laws can come into play if contractors are effectively treated like employees. To avoid misclassification, ensure your contracts clearly state the commission-only, independent nature of the role, and avoid imposing employee-like working hours or micromanagement. You'll also need to handle things like not providing statutory benefits (holiday pay, etc.), since these individuals are running their own venture. It's wise to consult legal guidance on structuring commission-only sales positions. That said, when done properly, engaging salespeople as independent contractors can reduce your liability and paperwork – you won't be processing PAYE taxes or national insurance for them, for example. Just make sure you set it up correctly to protect both parties.

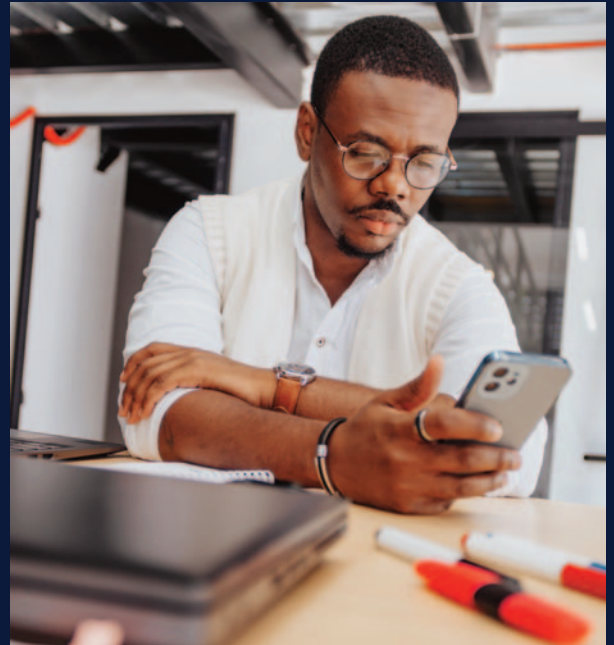


Considerations for Employers Adopting a Self-Employed Sales Model (cont)

ATTRACTING & RETAINING TALENT

One challenge employers sometimes face with commission-only roles is attracting high-quality candidates. The proposition has to be right – talented salespeople will weigh the risk vs reward. To draw them in, you need to offer a truly compelling earning potential and support system. Highlight the uncapped commissions and provide realistic On-Target Earnings (OTE) figures (e.g. “earn £50k+ if you meet modest targets, with top performers earning six figures”). Data shows that such earnings are attainable – Citrus Connect’s candidates routinely achieve £60k+ and beyond in these roles.

Ensure your commission structure is generous enough to make up for the lack of base salary. Some companies even choose to offer a small initial retainer or guaranteed minimum for the first few months to ease new hires in – this can widen your candidate pool. Additionally, emphasise non-monetary benefits: flexibility, autonomy, and growth opportunities. Many salespeople choose self-employment for lifestyle reasons, so market the role as a chance to “run their own venture” with your product and to grow into leadership (perhaps top performers could become regional managers or trainers, for instance). It’s also crucial to invest in training and onboarding. Just because they are contractors doesn’t mean you should use a “sink or swim” approach. Providing strong training not only helps them succeed (which directly benefits your revenue) but also makes them feel valued and part of a team.



Considerations for Employers Adopting a Self-Employed Sales Model (cont)

MANAGING PERFORMANCE AND CULTURE

With a self-employed sales model, you'll desire to maintain control over brand and customer experience. This is a balance – you cannot dictate every move, but you can set guidelines and training about how your product is represented. Make sure to have a solid agreement on exclusive vs. non-exclusive representation that aligns with your business needs. Many companies choose non-exclusivity to attract more agents (letting them carry other non-competing products can be a perk), but you might require exclusivity if your sales process is intensive. Additionally, consider your payment systems: you'll need a reliable way to track sales coming from each agent and pay commissions accurately and on time. Nothing will sour a self-employed rep faster than incorrect or delayed commission payments. Treat them like respected partners in terms of payment and communication. Lastly, be mindful of the perception of commission-only roles in the broader market. Some job seekers are wary of them. Combat this by being transparent about the opportunities and successes of current team members. Share success stories of individuals who have thrived in your commission structure. By openly celebrating these wins, you'll demonstrate that the role isn't a risk but a genuine opportunity for the right candidates.

IN SUMMARY, MOVING TO A SELF-EMPLOYED SALES TEAM CAN BE A POWERFUL GROWTH STRATEGY FOR BUSINESSES IN THE UK

It offers cost savings, scalability, and access to entrepreneurial sales talent, but it requires thoughtful implementation. Companies should ensure legal compliance, craft attractive commission plans, and continue to invest in their people's success even if they're not on payroll. When done right, your self-employed salesforce can become a driving engine of revenue and a source of innovation – these reps often bring fresh ideas from their diverse experiences and relish proving their worth through results.

When to Scale Up: Indicators It's Time to Grow Your Sales Team

How do you know when it's the right moment to start expanding your sales team in earnest, particularly by leveraging self-employed roles? Timing can be critical. Push too early and you risk inflating costs or having idle reps; wait too long and you may miss market opportunities or strain your existing team. Here are several key indicators and scenarios, informed by current market insights, that signal "now is the time" to scale up your sales efforts:



1. RISING DEMAND OR MARKET OPPORTUNITY

If your business is experiencing an uptick in demand – say, inbound inquiries are up, or you're launching a new product line – it's a classic sign to add sales capacity. You never want potential customers to slip away because your team is overbooked. Launching into a new region or targeting a new client segment is another trigger; a self-employed salesperson in that territory can help you grow without long hiring lead times. Essentially, when you see concrete growth opportunities on the horizon, or your current team has more leads than they can handle, it's time to bring in additional sales talent.

When to Scale Up:

Indicators It's Time to Grow Your Sales Team (cont)

2. YOUR CURRENT TEAM IS OVERSTRETCHED

Are your existing salespeople complaining about too many accounts or not enough time to follow up on all leads? If so, you're likely leaving money on the table. An overburdened team can only do so much – and worse, customer service may slip if reps are spread thin. Metrics to watch include lead response times and sales cycle length. If response times are growing or deals are slowing down because reps are juggling too much, you need reinforcements. Adding self-employed sales agents is a flexible way to increase capacity and relieve pressure on your core team before burnout or missed targets occur.

3. FAVOURABLE TALENT MARKET (TEMPORARY WINDOW)

The state of the wider labour market can actually dictate an ideal timing for you. For instance, as of early 2025, the market was relatively balanced after a period favouring employers – but expert projections suggest it could tilt back to a candidate-driven market by mid-2025. What does that mean? In the present moment, businesses have an opening to hire high-calibre sales talent (many strong candidates have been job-hunting due to earlier economic uncertainty). As one recruitment manager put it, “now is the time to secure top talent before competition intensifies.” In practical terms, if you notice an abundance of quality sales candidates available – perhaps you're getting great applicants or there have been industry layoffs – it could be smart to scale your team now, ahead of the curve. Bringing people on during a buyer's market for talent will only get harder if you wait and the power shifts back to candidates who then have multiple job options.

When to Scale Up: Indicators It's Time to Grow Your Sales Team (cont)

4. BUSINESS READINESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

On the flip side, an internal indicator is your business's readiness to support more salespeople. If you have the operational capacity (production, delivery, customer support) to handle more sales, and your processes (CRM, training materials, sales playbooks) are in place, that's a green light. Often, companies hold back hiring because they worry about fulfilment capacity – but if you've invested in scalability (perhaps automated some operations or increased inventory for a product), then you should simultaneously scale sales to capitalise on that readiness. A well-timed push is when your back-end can absorb more customers, and the front-end team can be expanded to bring those customers in.

5. ADAPTING TO ECONOMIC PRESSURE

Over the last 18 months, UK businesses have faced significant pressure from rising costs, unpredictable demand and a cooling labour market. With inflation pushing up wages and operational expenses, many companies are re-evaluating how they scale their teams while staying financially agile. For employers looking to grow without locking into long-term overheads, the self-employed sales model offers a leaner, more flexible alternative. It provides access to motivated professionals without the ongoing commitment of full-time headcount, allowing you to adapt more quickly to changes in the market.

This shift is not just reactive, it is strategic. For sales-driven organisations, deploying a self-employed salesforce can offer better margin protection and faster go-to-market opportunities. If your revenue targets are clear but your resource model needs to remain adaptable, now may be the right time to explore this route.

When to Scale Up: Indicators It's Time to Grow Your Sales Team (cont)

6. COMPETITIVE PRESSURE

Keep an eye on your competitors. If you notice rival firms expanding their sales presence or new entrants in your market aggressively hiring salespeople, it may be a sign that demand is expected to rise. Don't let competitors outpace you in reaching customers. A classic indicator is if you start losing deals or hearing "we went with so-and-so because they engaged us first" – that suggests your sales coverage might be lacking. Proactively scaling your team can ensure you maintain market leadership and exploit opportunities before others do.

7. NEW FUNDING OR BUDGET AVAILABILITY

Over the last 18 months, UK businesses have faced significant pressure. Lastly, if your financial situation has improved – say you've received new investment, or recent sales have boosted cash flow – consider channelling that into sales expansion. Often after a funding round, startups will ramp up their sales teams immediately, because they know that's the engine that drives revenue to justify the investment. Even if you are using commission-only roles, which require less upfront cost, having some budget for recruitment, training, and possibly modest starter guarantees can accelerate the scaling process. When you have resources to grow, use them to build a sales machine that will generate the next wave of revenue.

In practice, the decision to scale a sales team should be a balance of data and intuition. Look at metrics like pipeline volume, conversion rates, and customer acquisition cost

– if adding reps can improve those or keep up with rising demand, it's a strong sign.

Trust your business instincts too; if you feel momentum, don't let it falter for lack of personnel.

Importantly, scaling with a self-employed model can be faster and lower-risk, so you have the option to grow in increments. You might onboard a few commission-based agents, see the impact, then add more, rather than committing to a large fixed hiring all at once.

By paying attention to the indicators above, you can time your sales team expansion to maximise growth while the conditions are optimal.

Conclusion

The self-employed sales market in the UK is evolving into a formidable force, reshaping how businesses and sales professionals connect. We've seen that while the broader labour market faces headwinds – with vacancies down and skills in short supply – the demand for effective salespeople remains as strong as ever.

In response, companies are innovating their sales strategies, increasingly taking advantage of commission-only and self-employed agents to gain agility and reach. There are hundreds of such opportunities active right now across diverse industries, underpinning a vibrant ecosystem where driven “employeepreneur” individuals can thrive.

For professionals, a career in self-employed sales offers unparalleled upside: true autonomy, performance-based rewards, and the chance to build something akin to your own business within a business. But preparation and the right mindset are key to harnessing that opportunity. For employers, embracing a self-employed sales model can unlock growth and efficiency – but it requires a thoughtful approach to legal structure, talent management, and support. Those who get it right can on-board motivated sales talent quickly and cost-effectively, which might be the decisive advantage in today's competitive marketplace.

Ultimately, the state of this market in 2025 reflects a new paradigm of work. Sales is

an arena where the contrast of employed vs. self-employed is blurring into a spectrum of hybrid arrangements. As this whitepaper has explored, independent sales roles are no longer a niche or last resort; they are a strategic choice for many and a preferred lifestyle for a growing cohort of sales professionals. Businesses and individuals alike should take note of the trends and insights discussed. Whether you're considering hiring your first commission-only sales rep or debating taking a commission-based role yourself, the data suggests that this segment will continue to expand and mature in the coming years. With informed preparation and the right partnerships, both companies and sales candidates can ride the wave of the self-employed sales movement to new heights of success.



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