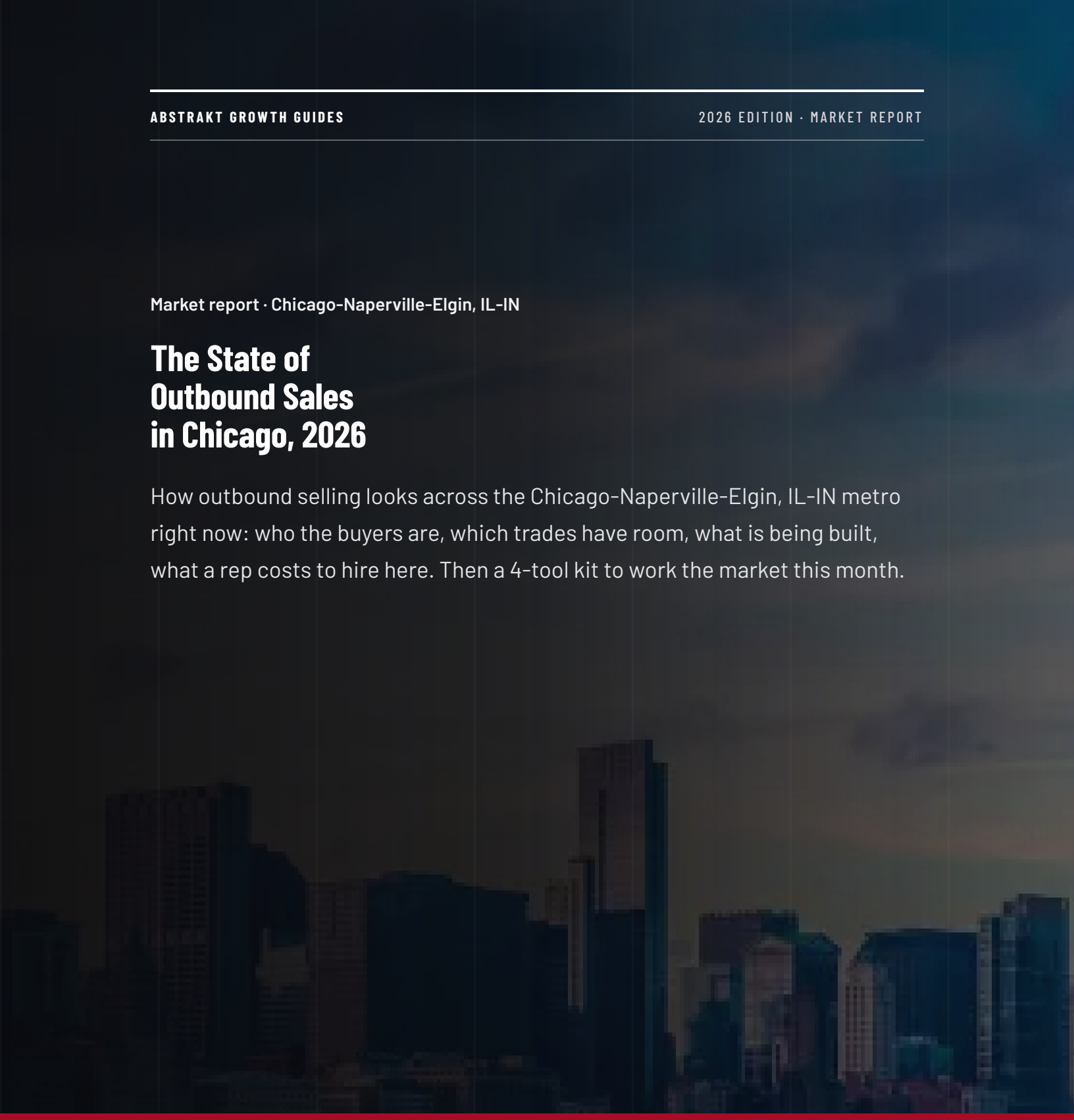
Market report · Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN

The State of Outbound Sales in Chicago, 2026

How outbound selling looks across the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN metro right now: who the buyers are, which trades have room, what is being built, what a rep costs to hire here. Then a 4-tool kit to work the market this month.



22,535

business sites with 20+ people across the categories trades sell to, #3 of our 100 metros

71

buyer sites per fire protection contractor, #10 of 96 markets: the best rank of any trade here

Sites: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023; rank among the 100 metros on our market pages. Room: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023 sites per contractor in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, private ownership, 2026 Q1, among markets with at least 10 contractors.

Executive summary Read this if nothing else

5 things to know about outbound sales in Chicago

1

Biggest buyer pool

Restaurants: 6,092 sites

with 20 or more people, the largest buyer category in Chicago-Naperville, ahead of retail stores (4,626).

2

Where the metro leans

Trucking companies: 3.49x the U.S. mix

Also over-represented: private K-12 schools (1.48x) and manufacturing plants (1.38x). Trades that serve these buyers have more of them here than the national average suggests.

3

Most room

Fire Protection: #10 of 96 markets

71 buyer sites with 20+ people for each of 188 local fire protection contractors. The most crowded is commercial landscaping, #78 of 100.

4

Biggest reason to call

Bally's Chicago Casino & Resort, Anchor development

Under construction. One of 2 named, sourced projects in this report.

5

Hiring locally

$124,700 for an in-house SDR's first year (illustrative)

At a $55,000 base salary, once commission, payroll taxes and benefits, tools, recruiting and training, turnover and manager time are added, before ramp time.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, private ownership, 2026 Q1; project

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sources as of 2026-07; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), May 2025. Full list at the end.

01

Chapter 01 The market

Who buys in Chicago-Naperville

22,535 business sites in Chicago-Naperville have 20 or more people on site in the categories commercial trades sell to. That ranks #3 of the 100 metros we publish. Here is what those buyers are and where they sit.

The largest buyer categories

Sites with 20 or more people are the ones worth an SDR's time: big enough to have a facility lead, a service budget and a contract that comes up for renewal. The "vs. U.S. mix" column compares each category's share of local employment with its national share (1.00x is the U.S. average).

Business sites with 20+ people in Chicago-Naperville, top 10 categories

CATEGORY	SITES WITH 20+	ALL SITES	VS. U.S. MIX	1-YR CHANGE
Restaurants LARGEST POOL	**6,092**	21,071	1.33x	+626
Retail stores	**4,626**	25,308	1.07x	+71
Manufacturing plants	**3,247**	9,298	1.38x	+174
Wholesale distributors	**2,321**	12,261	1.01x	+24
Medical, dental and outpatient offices	**2,177**	22,475	1.21x	+956
Grocery stores	**844**	4,521	1.33x	+54
Senior living and nursing	**772**	1,797	0.59x	+43
Trucking companies	**575**	12,968	3.49x	+313
Bank and credit union offices	**502**	4,437	0.90x	+14
Auto dealerships	**464**	1,073	1.05x	+14

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023 (sites by size); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, private ownership, 2026 Q1 (concentration and one-year change in establishments). Suppressed size classes count as zero.

Chicago-Naperville leans toward trucking companies (3.49x), private K-12 schools (1.48x) and manufacturing plants (1.38x). A trade that already sells to those buyers elsewhere has a deeper pool here than the national numbers suggest, and a case study from one of them travels well on the phone.

It is thinner than the U.S. mix in colleges and universities (0.50x) and hosting and data processing companies (0.58x). A program built around those buyers runs out of fresh accounts sooner here.

Growing fastest over the past year, by establishment count: medical, dental and outpatient offices (+956), restaurants (+626) and trucking companies (+313). New sites have no incumbent vendor yet.

The metro

Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN: 13 counties in this report's counts.

Cook County, DuPage County and Will County hold 73% of the larger business sites, so most programs start there.

Where the sites are

Business sites with 20+ people, by county, Chicago-Naperville

COUNTY	SITES WITH 20+	SHARE OF METRO
Cook County START HERE	**11,566**	51%
DuPage County	**3,326**	15%
Will County	**1,649**	7%
Lake County	**1,638**	7%
Kane County	**1,356**	6%
Lake County, Indiana	**1,205**	5%

COUNTY	SITES WITH 20+	SHARE OF METRO
McHenry County	**587**	3%
Porter County, Indiana	**397**	2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023, summed across the buyer categories above. Census withholds some county-level size counts, so 284 of the metro's 22,535 sites are not assigned to a county.

02

Chapter 02 The competition

Which trades have the most room in Chicago

Buyer sites per contractor is a rough read on how crowded a trade is: more sites for each local competitor means more doors nobody else is knocking on. Each trade's Chicago figure is ranked against the other markets we track.

How Chicago ranks for each trade, by buyer sites per contractor (longer bar = more room)

TRADE	RANK AMONG MARKETS	SITES PER CONTRACTOR	CONTRACTORS	1-YR CHANGE
Fire Protection MOST ROOM	**#10 of 96**	71	188	+8
Commercial Electrical	**#17 of 100**	13	816	+11
Commercial Roofing	**#20 of 89**	82	147	+11
Commercial Construction	**#23 of 100**	6.2	1,182	+36
Commercial HVAC & Mechanical	**#25 of 100**	12	676	+14
Managed Service Providers	**#29 of 100**	3.8	3,474	+87
Paving & Asphalt	**#29 of 94**	48	231	+9
Commercial Cleaning & Janitorial	**#37 of 100**	4.2	2,192	+94
Commercial Painting & Coatings	**#45 of 86**	67	185	+1
Commercial Flooring	**#52 of 68**	56	125	+5
Commercial Landscaping	**#78 of 100**	2.9	3,878	+130

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023 (each trade's own buyer categories, 20+ people); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, private ownership, 2026 Q1 (contractor establishments and one-year change). Each trade counts different buyers, so compare ranks across trades, not the raw ratios. Ranked among markets with at least 10 contractors in the trade.

Fire protection (#10), commercial electrical (#17) and commercial roofing (#20) rank best in Chicago. For those trades a program can work longer before it calls the same building twice, and fewer competitors have already pitched each owner.

Commercial landscaping is the most crowded trade here, #78 of 100: 2.9 buyer sites for each of 3,878 local commercial landscaping contractors. Winning there takes a sharper reason to switch than a lower price.

Open programs

Our availability workbook does not cover Chicago yet. We take one client per trade per territory, so ask before you plan around it.

Check whether your trade is open

03

Chapter 03 The projects

What is being built, and who owns the buildings

2 named, sourced projects and 6 anchor owners in Chicago-Naperville. Each one is a reason to call that has nothing to do with your company and everything to do with the buyer's building.

The projects

01 · Anchor development

Bally's Chicago Casino & Resort

Under construction

The permanent casino complex is one of the projects pushing Chicago's crane count upward.

HVAC · electrical · fire protection · cleaning · construction

rlb.com

02 · District-scale development

Fulton Market District Build-Out

Multiple active projects

Chicago's fastest-transforming commercial district keeps adding office, residential, and hospitality inventory.

HVAC · fire protection · cleaning · construction · flooring

rlb.com

Projects current as of 2026-07; each source is linked on its card. Values are as reported by the source.

The anchor owners

Health systems, campuses, large employers and industrial parks hold the biggest concentrations of commercial buildings in Chicago-Naperville. One relationship with a facilities team here can cover many buildings.

Health system · Chicago, Cook County

Northwestern Medicine

Northwestern Medicine says it has more than 5,400 physicians and hundreds of locations

Campus · Chicago, Cook County

University of Illinois Chicago

UIC calls itself the largest university in Chicago and reports 35,869 total students for Fall 2025.

throughout the Chicagoland area, anchored by Northwestern Memorial Hospital downtown.

> Hospitals from Streeterville to Central DuPage, Delnor, Lake Forest, McHenry, Palos and Woodstock run central plants, sprinkler systems and patient floors that need constant service.

HVAC · fire protection · cleaning · flooring · electrical

Northwestern Medicine

> East and west campuses on the Near West Side combine classroom buildings, labs, residence halls and the university hospital, with parking structures and grounds to maintain.

cleaning · HVAC · flooring · paving

University of Illinois Chicago

Airport · Chicago, Cook County

Chicago O'Hare International Airport

Wikipedia, citing the airport's own statistics, lists 84,851,825 passengers at O'Hare in 2025 and notes the airport covers 7,627 acres.

> Terminals, garages, cargo buildings and airline maintenance facilities across a 7,627-acre site run by the Chicago Department of Aviation need cleaning, HVAC, electrical and pavement work.

cleaning · HVAC · electrical · paving

Wikipedia

Logistics hub · Elwood and Joliet, Will County

CenterPoint Intermodal Center

Wikipedia calls it the largest inland port in North America, with a 785-acre Union Pacific Railroad complex south of Joliet and a 770-acre BNSF Railway complex to the southwest.

> Rail yards surrounded by large distribution centers create demand for dock-area paving, warehouse roofing, lighting and sprinkler work.

paving · roofing · electrical · fire protection · construction

Wikipedia

Major employer · Gary, Lake County, IN

U.S. Steel Gary Works

Wikipedia, with citations, calls Gary Works the largest integrated mill in North America and Gary's largest single employer, with 2,246 employees in 2023.

> A lakefront steelmaking complex with furnaces, rolling mills and support buildings carries heavy electrical, roofing, coatings and fire protection needs.

Retail center · Schaumburg, Cook County

Woodfield Mall

Wikipedia, with citations, calls Woodfield the largest shopping mall in Illinois; it opened on September 9, 1971.

> A large enclosed mall with anchor stores, food court and acres of surface parking needs janitorial, HVAC, lot paving and landscaping work.

electrical roofing painting fire protection

Wikipedia

cleaning HVAC paving landscaping

Wikipedia

Anchor facts checked 2026-10; each source is linked on its card.

Which trades the work touches

Projects and anchor owners in this report that buy each trade, Chicago-Naperville

TRADE	PROJECTS AND OWNERS
Commercial HVAC & Mechanical	6
Commercial Cleaning & Janitorial	6
Fire Protection	5
Commercial Electrical	5
Paving & Asphalt	4
Commercial Construction	3
Commercial Flooring	3
Commercial Roofing	2
Commercial Painting & Coatings	1
Commercial Landscaping	1

Count of the projects and anchor owners above whose scope includes the trade, from the sourced descriptions.

04

Chapter 04 The calendar

The Chicago selling calendar

Outbound runs every month, but the weather changes what a buyer wants to hear. These are the NOAA records for the Chicago-Naperville metro's counties, month by month.

Chicago by month: storm reports, degree days and average highs

MEASURE	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Hail and damaging wind reports total, 2015 to 2024	2	80	137	212	209	409	603	505	94	16	43	7
Cooling degree days average month	0	0	1	1	62	171	267	223	76	6	0	0
Heating degree days average month	1,288	1,055	846	484	215	33	7	19	84	389	756	1,121
Average high (°F) average month	31	35	47	60	71	81	84	82	76	63	48	36

Sources: NOAA NCEI Storm Events Database, 2015 to 2024: reports of hail 1 inch or larger and thunderstorm wind of 58 mph or more, by month, across the market counties. NOAA NCEI nClimDiv county monthly series, 1991-2020 averages. Degree days count how far the daily average sits above (cooling) or below (heating) 65°F, summed over the month.

NOAA logged 537 hail reports of 1 inch or larger and 1,780 damaging wind reports across the metro's counties from 2015 to 2024: #7 of 100 markets for hail and #5 for wind. June, July and August carried 65% of the reports. Storm calls are a real door-opener here, and the contractor who is already known before the season gets the inspection.

The metro averages 806 cooling degree days a year (#62 of 97 markets) and 6,296 heating degree days (#23 of 97). Cooling load peaks in June, July and August; heating in January, February, March, November and December. Peak months are when HVAC calls lead with service and response times; the rest of the year they lead with planned work and budgets.

Trades with no weather season

Cleaning, construction, electrical, flooring and fire protection sell on contract end dates, budgets and inspection cycles. Learn each account's date on the first call and come back before it.

7 months average a high of 60°F or more (April, May, June, July, August, September and October). That is when exterior painting, paving and landscaping crews are busiest, so in-season calls catch owners while they can see the work that needs doing. The contracts themselves are bid on each property's own dates, so the selling runs all year.

> "Roofing demand spikes after hail and wind events, when owners want an inspection and documentation for their insurer, so be the known contractor before the storm, not one of many calling after it. Planned work follows each owner's budget: inspections feed capital requests, and replacements are approved ahead of installation. Outbound runs every month, keyed to each building's roof age and budget date."
>
> — How roofing timing works, from our roofing talk track

05

Chapter 05 The numbers

What one meeting takes, trade by trade

What booking a meeting has taken on our own calling floor for the trades we run in Chicago, next to the records we can prospect here. The sales center figures are national; it does not break them out by city yet.

Dials per booked appointment, by trade (lower is faster), national

TRADE	DIALS PER APPOINTMENT	REACHED PROPOSAL	PROPOSALS WON	DIALS FOR 10 MEETINGS
Fire Protection FASTEST TO BOOK	**78**	21.6%	13.2%	about 780
Paving & Asphalt	**86**	32.2%	7.4%	about 860
Commercial Landscaping	**88**	18.8%	12.7%	about 880
Commercial Electrical	**96**	14.6%	21.1%	about 960
Commercial HVAC & Mechanical	**98**	16.6%	24.9%	about 980
Commercial Painting & Coatings	**115**	31.2%	14.4%	about 1,150
Commercial Flooring	**122**	30.8%	9.8%	about 1,220
Commercial Roofing	**140**	25.9%	16.1%	about 1,400
Commercial Cleaning & Janitorial	**142**	23.9%	21.7%	about 1,420
Managed Service Providers	**162**	10.0%	20.5%	about 1,620

All of these trades together: 122 dials per appointment

Source: Abstrakt sales center, Performance Intelligence, national, as of October 2026. Dials per appointment = prospecting calls divided by appointments set. History, not a promise. Full benchmarks and method.

The records behind a Chicago program

Before a program starts we size the list: the decision-maker records Abstrakt can prospect for each trade in the Chicago-Naperville territory.

22,975 Commercial Roofing	**22,975** Commercial Construction
11,824 Commercial HVAC & Mechanical	**7,760** Commercial Cleaning & Janitorial

Source: Abstrakt territory record counts, as of October 2026: estimated decision-maker records Abstrakt can prospect for each program in the territory. Shown for the programs the count covers.

Read it this way

Divide the records by the dials one meeting takes and you see how long a list lasts before it repeats. A thin list means a program has to work every record well, not just call more.

06

Chapter 06 Build or buy

What an in-house SDR costs in Chicago

Before you hire a sales development rep in Chicago, price the whole job, not just the salary.

The salary is the smallest part of the decision. About 55,730 people hold the role in the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN metro, and every one of their employers is competing for the same hires.

An in-house SDR's first year, at a $55,000 base salary (illustrative model)

COST	YEAR ONE
Base salary	$55,000
Commission and bonus	$15,000
Payroll taxes and benefits (25% of pay)	$17,500
Tools and data ($550 a month)	$6,600
Recruiting and training	$7,000
Turnover (35% a year, rehiring)	$2,450
Manager and QA time (5 hours a week) and admin (4 hours a month)	$21,150
Total, before ramp time	**$124,700**

Headcount: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), May 2025. Sales representatives of services, except advertising, insurance, financial services and travel (SOC 41-3091). The cost lines are the starting values of our SDR cost calculator: $15,000 commission, 25% payroll taxes and benefits, $550 a month in tools, $7,000 recruiting and training, 35% yearly turnover, and manager, QA and admin time. Change any of them there.

$124,700

for one in-house SDR's first year at a $55,000 base salary.

That buys one rep. It does not buy the list, the manager's coaching system or cover when the rep leaves.

Ask us what a program would cost for the same work

Part two Apply this

The Chicago market toolkit

4 working tools built from the chapters above. Tick the boxes as you go (they stay ticked in this browser), copy the scripts into your CRM, or save the whole guide as a PDF and print this part as a worksheet.

01

Account scorecard

Score an account before anyone dials it.

02

Discovery question bank

The questions that qualify a meeting.

03

Trigger watchlist

The changes that make a buyer take the call.

04

30-day action plan

Four weeks of steps you can start Monday.

TOOL 01

Account scorecard

Before an account goes on the call list, check every line that fits. Call the accounts with the most ticks first, and leave the ones with none for later.

- [ ] **It sits in Cook County, DuPage County and Will County**
  73% of the metro's larger business sites are in these counties.
- [ ] **It has 20 or more people on site**
  One of the 22,535 sites this report counts. At that size a facility lead usually owns the building decisions.
- [ ] **It is in a category Chicago over-indexes on**
  trucking companies (3.49x the U.S. mix), private K-12 schools (1.48x the U.S. mix) and manufacturing plants (1.38x the U.S. mix).
- [ ] **It belongs to an anchor owner or a named project**
  Northwestern Medicine, University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago O'Hare International Airport and CenterPoint Intermodal Center.
- [ ] **You can name the person who signs**
  A name and a title before the first dial, not just the main line.

- [ ] **You are calling a business line**
  A business line, not a personal phone. Look up the calling laws for Illinois before you dial.

0 of 6 checked

TOOL 02

Discovery question bank

Ask fewer, better questions. Pick three or four for the call and save the rest for the meeting. Each one comes with the reason it earns its place.

Restaurants: 6,092 sites here

From our fire protection talk track. Staying open and passing inspection. Multi-unit operators are worth more than single locations.

1. **When was your hood suppression system last inspected, and when is the next one due?**
   Due dates tell you when to call and what to offer.
2. **Have you had a failed inspection or a citation recently?**
   Failed inspections threaten the ability to stay open and create urgency.
3. **How many locations do you operate, and does each one use a different vendor?**
   Multi-unit operators are more valuable and often want one vendor across locations.

Retail stores: 4,626 sites here

From our electrical talk track. Lighting cost and fast repair. For chains, decisions often sit in a regional facilities office, so find who owns vendors for your area.

1. **Who handles electrical service for this store, the store, a regional facilities office or a national provider?**
   For chains, decisions often sit outside the store, so this tells you who to call next.
2. **Is a lighting retrofit or remodel planned for this location?**
   Remodels and retrofits are defined projects with budgets.
3. **How fast does your current electrician respond when lights or signs go out?**
   Slow response during business hours is a common reason to add a vendor.

Manufacturing plants: 3,247 sites here

From our fire protection talk track. Insurer recommendations and process hazards. The safety manager often owns the relationship, not facilities.

Any first meeting

Plain practice that works in every market.

1. **How are you handling this today, and what would you change about it?**
   The gap between today and what they want is the whole reason to meet.

1. **Who owns the fire protection relationship here, facilities, maintenance or the EHS manager?**
   The safety manager often owns it rather than facilities, so this tells you who to meet.
2. **Has your insurer's loss-control visit produced any recommendations?**
   Insurer recommendations create deadlines and defined scope.
3. **Do you have special-hazard suppression on any processes, and who services it?**
   Special-hazard systems need specialized service and are often a separate opportunity.
2. **What happens if nothing changes this year?**
   Tells you whether there is a cost to waiting, or only curiosity.
3. **Who else would need to agree before anything moves?**
   Names the people who can stall the deal, while you can still invite them.
4. **When does the current contract or budget come up for review?**
   Gives you the date to plan around, even when the answer today is no.
5. **What would make a first meeting worth your time?**
   Lets the buyer set the agenda, which is the agenda they will show up for.

TOOL 03

Trigger watchlist

Each of these changes gives a buyer a reason to take the call this month instead of next year. Tick the ones you will track, and set a news alert or CRM field for each so you hear about it first.

- [ ] **Bally's Chicago Casino & Resort**
  Under construction. The permanent casino complex is one of the projects pushing Chicago's crane count upward.
- [ ] **Fulton Market District Build-Out**
  Multiple active projects. Chicago's fastest-transforming commercial district keeps adding office, residential, and hospitality inventory.
- [ ] **Storm season: June, July and August**
  65% of the 2,317 large-hail and damaging-wind reports NOAA logged across the metro, 2015 to 2024, fell in these months. Owners want an inspection after an event; call the ones you already know first.
- [ ] **New sites: medical, dental and outpatient offices**
  QCEW counted 956 more medical, dental and outpatient offices in Chicago-Naperville than a year earlier. Every new site has to choose its service vendors; call before the choice settles.

- [ ] **New sites: restaurants**

  QCEW counted 626 more restaurants in Chicago-Naperville than a year earlier. Every new site has to choose its service vendors; call before the choice settles.

0 of 5 on your watchlist

TOOL 04

30-day action plan

4 weeks, 15 steps, nothing you need to buy. Tick each one off as you finish it; your progress stays in this browser.

Week 1
Draw the territory

- [ ] Start in Cook County, DuPage County and Will County, which hold 73% of the larger business sites.
- [ ] Pull the sites with 20 or more people in restaurants, retail stores and manufacturing plants.
- [ ] Score every account with the scorecard above and sort the list by score.
- [ ] Put the accounts tied to Northwestern Medicine and University of Illinois Chicago at the top.

Week 2
Check the rules, then write the talk track

- [ ] Look up the calling laws for Illinois and every state you call into, and confirm them with your own counsel before the first dial.
- [ ] Pick four questions from the question bank for every call and print them next to the phone.
- [ ] Write one opening line per account type that names something local: a project, an owner or the season.

Week 3

Make the calls

- [ ] Call business lines during business hours, 8am to 5pm in the buyer's local time, in the same blocked hours every day.
- [ ] Log every dial, every conversation and every meeting set, so you know your own numbers.
- [ ] Open with the trigger when you know it: bally's Chicago Casino & Resort.
- [ ] Close every good conversation with two specific meeting times.

Week 4

Measure and decide

- [ ] Divide your dials by meetings set and compare it with the 78 dials per appointment our sales center averaged on fire protection calls (national, as of October 2026).
- [ ] Put a return date on every "not now", tied to the contract or budget date they gave you.
- [ ] Before you hire, price an in-house rep with the Chicago pay figures in this report.
- [ ] Keep what worked, rewrite the line that drew the most pushback, and run the next 30 days.

0 of 15 steps done

Sources and notes

- U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns 2023: business sites by category, size and county, Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, private ownership, 2026 Q1: contractor establishments, one-year change and concentration (location quotient).
- Projects: named public sources linked on each card, current as of 2026-07.
- Anchor owners: sources linked on each card, checked 2026-10.
- NOAA NCEI Storm Events Database, 2015 to 2024: hail and damaging wind reports by month across the metro's counties.
- NOAA NCEI nClimDiv county monthly series, 1991-2020 averages: degree days and average highs by month.
- Abstrakt sales center, Performance Intelligence, national, as of October 2026: dials, appointments, proposals and wins by trade. Method.
- Abstrakt territory record counts, as of October 2026: decision-maker records per program in the Chicago-Naperville territory.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), May 2025: Sales representatives of services, except advertising, insurance, financial services and travel (SOC 41-3091).
- Cover photo: Chicago skyline across Lake Michigan, by Jeff Brown on Unsplash, Unsplash License.
- The toolkit's discovery questions come from our trade talk tracks; the plan and checklists are sales practice, not data.

Keep reading

Market page
Appointment setting in Chicago

Territory
Check whether your trade is open in Chicago

Benchmarks
The full sales center benchmarks and method

Calculator
Run the in-house SDR numbers yourself

Nearby market
The State of Outbound Sales in Milwaukee

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