The power of persuasion:

Developing a strong sales team

talentlms

CONTENTS

Introduction

Your sales team doesn't just sell a product or a service. It sells your brand and your business too.

As the public face of your organization, its remit extends far beyond smashing quotas and closing deals. From identifying new prospects to nurturing long-lasting relationships with customers, the most significant impact it makes is with the faces behind your month-end figures.

In short, your sales team forms the foundations of consumer trust, credibility, and loyalty on which long-term organizational success is built. This is quite a responsibility. And, as every sales or training manager knows, to meet that responsibility takes a broad (and ever-evolving) range of skills.

But expecting every new rep you hire to possess all of the varied skills they'll need to nail every aspect of their role - from the minute they start with you to the minute they leave - is unrealistic.

It's also unnecessary. With the right motivation, mindset, and (wait for it...) training, skills gaps can be filled, imbalances across the team evened out, and new and emerging development needs met.

The problem? Sales environments are fast-paced and focused on tackling immediate tasks and ever-present targets. (It's why over 50% of sales managers admit they're too busy to train and develop their sales teams.) The result? Rather than breaking the momentum, training typically happens in contained, concentrated bursts (for example, during onboarding). Or on an ad hoc basis (for example, when a new product, feature, or service launches).

This approach is pragmatic. But it is short-sighted. And, looking at the stats, it's not good for business.

According to the Association for Talent Development's 'State of Sales Training' report, 42% of organizations say training helps them reach their sales goals to a high or very high extent. Research from sales and marketing effectiveness research firm CSO Insights agrees.

In its fifth 'Annual Sales Enablement' study, the benefits of spending more on providing good quality sales training programs include: higher close rates, faster ramp-up times of new reps, and more deals won. Training, it says, also combats high turnover (a common byproduct of the sales profession) by helping reps meet new and emerging challenges, reach their quotas, and grow as professionals.

Still not convinced? If we said that, in general, the ROI for sales training stands at 353%, would that help?

In short, untrained or ill-trained salespeople damage companies. And this is where this study comes in.

Whether you're starting from scratch or looking to improve your current offering, this guide explores in detail how to train salespeople. But more specifically, how to design and deliver a structured sales training and enablement program that works for your team and your business.

From the skills and methodologies reps can use to reach their goals, to the tips, tools, and training techniques that will help them develop faster and more efficiently, dip in and out of sections that resonate. After all, the size, structure, and type of business you run will determine your approach.

Chapter 1.

10 essential sales skills

According to Great Man and Trait theories, "Leaders are made, not born." Which means? In essence, it implies that only a few people possess innate characteristics, qualities, and traits that, when combined, make them better suited to leadership than other people.

There may be some truth in this (no one enters the world with exactly the same abilities and talents). But subsequent psychological research (and, in many ways, common sense) suggests that, for the most part, leadership isn't intrinsic.

Broken down, effective leadership can be defined by a set of skills. To a greater or lesser extent, each of those skills can be learned. And, with practice, commitment, and the right ongoing training, they can be perfected.

Let's apply this to sales skills. There's a common misconception that salespeople all fit the same mold. Inherently extroverted and outgoing, the understanding is you're either made for sales or you're not. Not so. Like leadership, sales skills are eminently teachable. And, for both junior and seasoned salespeople, there's always room for improvement.

But what are the sales skills that you should be teaching? Spanning both knowledge and behavior, we've pinned down 10 of the most essential skills to include in a sales training program.

1. Negotiating

Selling isn't just about sending over a quote and moving on. Very few deals are closed without any queries over contracts, payments, or conditions. Which is why strong negotiation skills are a must for salespeople. Learning how to agree to terms that work for you and your prospect takes discipline, assertiveness, flexibility, and business acumen. A good training program will focus on different negotiation and closing sales techniques. And offer active learning opportunities that reinforce learning through problem-solving tasks centered around different negotiation scenarios.

2. Objection handling

Most potential customers will have one or more reasons for not buying your product or service. Competition and cost, value and relevance, and a lack of trust or interest are all strong contenders for an unwillingness to commit. Without the right training, these objections can form a major roadblock in a pipeline. With the proper training, they're often quickly resolved and can significantly boost a rep's close rate.

Objection handling training has two (sometimes three) stages. The first stage is learning how to pinpoint the problem (Pro tip: the earlier, the better). The second is helping a prospect see for themselves how your product or service addresses their concerns. The third stage is being able to acknowledge if a prospect is a poor fit and knowing when to move on. Subsets of this type of training will include tactics designed to develop motivation, listening, and persuasion skills.

3. Resilience

Whether it's a phone being slammed down mid-call, a change of mind just before a deal is signed off, or a sarcastic comment during a pitch, even the best salesperson experiences rejection and rudeness at some point. Staying optimistic, engaged, and proactive in the face of tough questioning, criticism, disinterest and, even abuse doesn't come naturally to anyone. But it's something all sales reps working in a people-focused field need to master.

Resilience training helps sales teams cope with challenging behaviors and stressful situations that could be disheartening. It offers tools, tips, and techniques designed to cultivate a more robust mindset. The outcome? Your team learns to let go of what they can't control and figure out how to reflect and learn when the going gets tough.

4. Research and evaluation

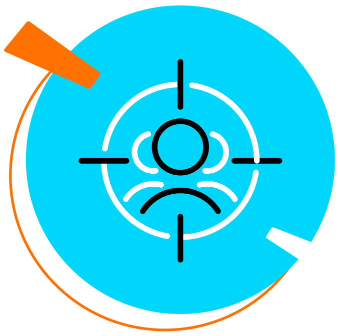
The more a rep knows about potential buyers and your product (or service), the more compelling their pitch will be. Why? Because by better understanding the two, your reps are more likely to offer the right solutions when developing pitches. Gathering insights and information (whether it's internal or external) leads to better outcomes, including a higher win rate.

Training in this area is broad. To grow product knowledge, you'll need to create a customized course that focuses on the processes, features, and concepts that make your offering unique. To develop generalized research skills, look for off-the-shelf training that covers how to record, source and analyze data, run and read reports, and produce actionable insights.

5. Adaptability

People are unpredictable. So are businesses. To accommodate evolving propositions, new requirements and ad-hoc requests that come from both prospects and the companies they represent, sales professionals have to be quick and willing to adapt. The question is, when faced with a maelstrom of change can you train someone to be more flexible?

The answer is yes! Being able to problem-solve on the spot, manage uncertainty and stress, and develop a learning growth mindset in a positive and constructive manner are all skills that can be taught through training.



6. Active listening

As a skill, it's often undervalued. But genuinely listening to what someone is saying and understanding the true message behind the words isn't easy. It takes discipline, patience, and time to observe and piece together all of the verbal and non-verbal clues that, when combined, convey meaning. For salespeople, active listening demonstrates interest, creates a connection with buyers, and establishes trust. But most importantly, it helps clarify a prospect's problems, pain points, ideas, and expectations. Which means reps can follow up with relevant questions and, ultimately, offer the right solutions to seal the deal.

7. Emotional intelligence

People remember feelings more than they do information. And forming positive and genuine emotional connections with an individual is the key to establishing fruitful, long-term relationships. In the context of sales, emotional intelligence elevates your approach, helping you stand out from the competition. Closely connected to active listening, emotional intelligence or EQ (emotional quotient) training helps reps acquire the skills they need to better read, understand and empathize with a buyer.

8. Honesty and relationship building

If your sales rep can master EQ, chances are your buyers have too. Which means there's no room for pretense or disingenuity in a pitch. Yes, your reps will be keen to make a connection. But that connection has to be based on transparency and trust.

Honesty and integrity are vital in sales. They make sure that clarity and accuracy form the basis of every deal, resulting in an outcome that's a good fit for both parties. But, more importantly, they build strong and credible relationships that grow into long-term, mutually rewarding partnerships. What does training in this area look like? Forming attachments on a human level (rather than a purely transactional basis) means developing rapport-building techniques and a growth mindset. Integrity selling includes strategies designed to reinforce consistency, confidence, and self-awareness.

9. Communication

Whether it's delivering a pitch, cold-calling, leading a demo, drafting a follow-up email, or liaising with internal teams, effective communication is central to sales. It's also relevant to most other jobs. But in sales, there is no job to do without communication. Communication training should be targeted and hands-on. From learning how to frame a conversation and developing storytelling and presentation skills to understanding about tone and delivery, communication training should be small part theory, large part practice.

10. Time management

"Time is money" is a saying that will resonate with any sales professional. But in truth, it's not simply having time that matters; it's about how your sales reps use that time. Focusing too much on non-revenue generating tasks or chasing deals that aren't a good fit can significantly impact a team's performance.

Time management training teaches sales-people to work smarter, not harder. From delegating tasks and identifying priorities to streamlining processes and learning how to conserve energy, it can significantly boost productivity and drive success.

And more...

The list above isn't exhaustive. There are, of course, other transferable (soft and hard) skills that support success, whatever your profession. Digital dexterity is a good example of this. With virtual selling on the rise, online tools are fast becoming the norm. Using technology (whether it's productivity tools, social platforms, or video conferencing) to streamline operations will only grow in importance over the coming years. To cultivate talent pipelines that leverage impactful sales technology now and into the future, having digital skills training for sales teams on your radar is a must.

Chapter 1.

Let's recap this chapter:

The skills needed to be successful in sales span both knowledge and behavior. Some are specifically targeted to the profession (objection handling, negotiation, research, and analysis). Others are soft skills that transfer across most professions but are heavily used by successful sales reps. And, as such, need to be mastered to a higher degree. These include communication, active listening, time management, honesty, and emotional intelligence. The good news for your talent acquisition strategy is that all of them can be taught. And all of them have a place in a sales training program. Not just for new hires or junior salespeople, either. Veterans in sales can also benefit too.

Chapter 2.

10 popular sales methodologies

Sales is a results-driven profession. And being able to forecast revenue informs spending decisions and helps track maturity. Having a framework to follow provides consistency of approach and guides sales reps through the sales lifecycle. It provides repeatable, scalable, and actionable tactics for each stage in the pipeline. And it benefits even high-performing salespeople.

But, just as importantly, following a methodological approach transforms goals into actionable steps that can be measured and monitored. Which means managers are better able to predict outcomes and evaluate operations. In short, applying a methodology to the sales process keeps it on track.
And gear up for success.

Testimony to this is the wide range of tried and tested methodologies available to help salespeople reach their goals. Choice is, of course, a good thing. But while it's true that to find a framework, you don't need to look far, you do need to know what you're looking for. Most models sync with one part of the sales process (for example, prospecting, qualification, or discovery). Pinpointing the right methodology for the right point in the sales process (and making sure it works for your business type) will impact your win rate. But it isn't always clear. So to help you navigate your way among the different options, here's a rundown of the most common sales methodologies available.

1. SPIN

Design to identify pain points and challenges while also creating a rapport with prospects, SPIN selling's all about questions. The model emerged following an in-depth analysis of 35,000 sales calls. This research established a clear link between the quality and timing of the questions that were asked and the subsequent speed and success of the process. But why 'SPIN'?

An acronym, SPIN, stands for four aspects of questioning: **situation, problem, implication, and need-payoff.** When applying the model, sales reps should frame open questions (questions that start with 'how,' 'why,' 'if,' and 'do,' for example) around these distinct areas.

Using this method, rather than being sold a solution, prospects reach their own conclusion. Why? Because by answering these question types, they form and express their own narrative, which reveals why they need a product or service.

Works best for: Any industry, but particularly B2B sales funnels and telemarketing. Any type of product, but especially high-value products or services that can't be fully "sold" using a short demo.

Works best when: Reps listen closely to the language a prospect uses and echoes it in their own statements.

Works best to: Help close difficult, complicated deals.

2. NEAT

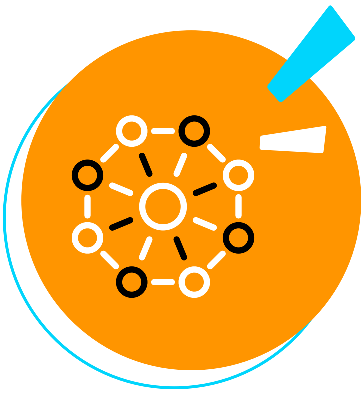
Less linear and prescriptive, more organic and opportunistic, NEAT's lead qualification framework elevates listening over asking. Rather than following a set script or series of questions, using NEAT reps guide customers to uncover a deeper understanding of their challenges. And help them establish themselves the true value of the solutions available.

With an emphasis on the human side of selling, the NEAT model emphasizes longer-term relationships over short-term deals. Yes, it's another acronym (sales methodologies are full of them)! And, broken down, it covers the components: **needs, economic impact, authority, and timeline.**

Works best for: B2Bs with complex, non-linear sales cycles and big-ticket products or services.

Works best when: It's part of a broader, more organic discussion.

Works best to: Build long-term trust while also qualifying meaningful leads and eliminating prospects who aren't a good fit for your solution.



3. Conceptual selling

Instead of investing in a tangible product or service, customers at the heart of conceptual selling invest in an idea of what that product or service represents. So instead of starting out with a pitch or statement, salespeople ask questions that dig deeper into a prospect's desired outcome.

In a customer-centric approach, these questions span three stages from getting and giving information to getting commitment. And they include confirmation, new information, attitude, commitment and basic issue questions.

Works best for: B2B companies that don't have a physical product. For example, SaaS industries.

Works best when: Buyer and seller needs align, and sales reps have a deeply embedded knowledge of the product or service they're selling. (They need this to be able to translate specific tools and features into generalized concepts or outcomes.)

Works best to: Support longer decision cycles and help foster long-term relationships and typically has longer decision cycles.

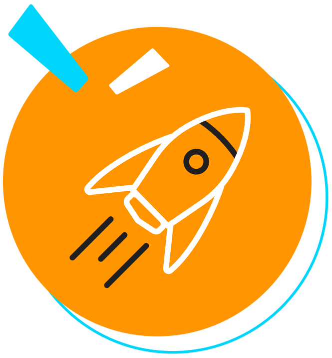
4. SNAP

Another methodology that uses acronyms to prompt actions, SNAP selling acknowledges that prospects are people too. It encourages sales pros to step into the shoes of their busy (and usually overwhelmed) prospects. And, by learning to empathize with them on a similar level, make the buying and decision-making process as easy and straightforward as possible. To achieve this, a seller's approach is clear and unambiguous: **Keep it Simple. Be i(N)valuable. Always Align. And raise Priorities**

Works best for: B2Bs selling a relatively straightforward product or service to SMB companies. (It's not for enterprise organizations delivering more complex solutions.)

Works best when: You identify decision-makers and have a clear picture of your buyer personas.

Works best to: Persuade stressed, overwhelmed or distracted buyers that a move away from the status quo can be quick and easy.



5. Challenger selling

Challenger selling focuses more on the personas of your sales pros over those of your prospects. Based on research into the different types of reps, out of the five personas that emerged, one stood out as being far more successful than all of the other types. Described as "challengers", this group had consistently higher close rates. They also represented almost half (40%) of all the top-performing reps, despite each of the five groups having an even number of people.

The reason for their success? A teach-tailor-take control process which disrupts a buyer's current thinking, frames it, and replaces it with new ideas and options. There's a catch, though. Only a fifth of all salespeople fall naturally into this category. So to make this method a viable solution, the teaching needs to be applied internally too. The understanding is that challenger sellers are made, not born. So with the right training, the remaining 80% of the team can take control of the customer conversation in a similar way.

Works best for: B2Bs with complex sales cycles that involve high investments, complexity, and risk.

Works best when: You have a well-established, high-performing sales team with mostly senior reps who know their stuff.

Works best to: Support the launch of a new product category or help companies stand out in a highly competitive, tough-selling market.

6. The Sandler Selling System

Thought selling was about convincing a buyer to buy? Think again. With the Sandler Selling System, it's more about convincing the seller to sell. With this method, a prospect's objections and obstacles, restraints and requirements are raised early on in the qualification stage. Doing this creates openness and trust between both parties. It also quickly establishes if a solution is a good fit. Acting more like an adviser or confidant than a salesperson, if the solution isn't right, a Sandler-trained rep won't waste time convincing a prospect that it is.

Works best for: B2B companies and teams with a strong client focus wanting to offer high value to each prospect.

Works best when: You need an established, low-pressure, high-return method that can be scaled up to any level of business or type of client.

Works best to: Speed up the sales process and reduce churn by selling to the right people.

7. MEDDIC

Concentrating on the qualification process, MEDDIC methodology focuses on getting the right prospects into your sales funnel. It does this by breaking the process up into six components: **metrics, economic buyer, decision criteria, decision process, identify pain, and champion.** The theory is by exploring the elements that lead up to a purchase, reps can get a better insight into a buyer's needs. And, by establishing those who are the right fit, provide a better, more successful buying experience.

Works best for: Enterprise teams selling complex products, specialized software, or high-value products or goods.

Works best when: Your company has a clear idea about its buyer personas.

Works best to: Sell products or services that require a significant change in user behavior.

8. Inbound selling

With inbound selling, organizations take advantage of the increasing crossover between sales and marketing. Whether it's through social media accounts, a page on your company website, an ebook, webinar, blog post, or case study, it allows reps to meet buyers wherever they are. And follow up on prospects who've already reached out through one or more of these channels or demonstrated an interest in a product or feature. Using insights gathered from these qualified leads (social media interactions, page views, and conversions, for example), sales professionals can reach out with a more personalized buying experience.

With the traditional sales funnel replaced by a more organic approach, inbound sales reps take four actions to steer prospects through the awareness, consideration, and decision stages. They identify (active vs passive buyers), connect (using a personalized message), explore, and advise.

Works best for: Companies with a strong and active content and product marketing function.

Works best when: Your company has the resources to plan, identify and analyze inbound leads.

Works best to: Give prospects what they want in terms of collateral - more accessible, bite-size chunks.

9. Target account selling

What kind of prospects are most likely to be most receptive to your business' solution? With target account selling, identifying the right buyers during the lead qualification stage is vital. And the answer is all in the research. By mapping out organizations, creating personas, and establishing deal value, buying signals and budget, only high-value prospects make the grade.

Works best for: Well-established businesses with sales teams looking to prioritize quality over quantity.

Works best when: There are sales automation tools in place to support the research and analysis process

Works best to: Offer a hyper-personalized sales approach.

10. Gap selling

If you don't know what the problem is, it's impossible to find a solution. Gap selling looks at where a business currently is and where they'd like to be (a.k.a. the "gap") to pinpoint the problem. Only when this is established can a sales rep start to position a product or service as a solution or a way to eliminate the gap.

Works best for: B2B businesses whose customers are happy to answer lots of questions in order to solve complicated problems. (If you're in transactional sales or retail, steer clear).

Works best when: Sales teams that have the time and flexibility to dig deep and explore in detail the prospect's situation.

Works best to: Banish old habits or assumptions about what a prospect's solution might be.

Next steps

By mapping out your sales process and aligning it with different methodologies, you can ensure it's applied consistently and correctly across your team. But it has to be supported by a training program that targets your entire sales organization, from reps through to VPs. To do this, document the different methodologies, provide play-books and guides, but most importantly, use regular, hands-on training to reinforce strategies and tactics.

Chapter 2.

Let's recap this chapter:

Sales methodologies are many and varied. They're so prolific because having a framework to follow throughout the sales lifecycle brings a number of benefits. It provides consistency of approach by providing repeatable, scalable, and actionable tactics for each stage in the pipeline. It transforms goals into actionable steps that can be measured and monitored. And it empowers managers to better predict outcomes and evaluate operations. Most models sync with one part of the sales process (for example, prospecting, qualification, or discovery). Pinpointing the right methodology for the right point in the sales process (and making sure it works for your business type) is important because it correlates directly with your win rate.

Chapter 3.

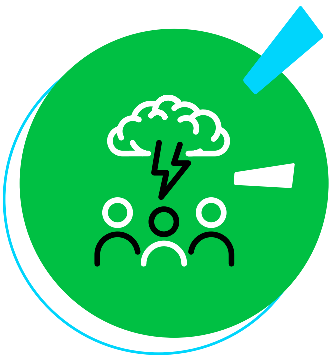
10 (9+1) useful sales tools to seal the deals

You've got people with the right mix of skills. And they've got methodologies they can use to progress effectively through the pipeline. But they need more than that. They need tools to help them manage tasks more effectively and optimize their time.

Whether it's speeding up day-to-day processes, automating repetitive tasks, tracking communications, managing accounts, or storing and analyzing data, the right tools can help drive efficiencies. How? Well, 90% of salespeople say technology cuts down on closing time, and a staggering 94% say it helps them close more deals, for example.

But you can't just give them access to a number of tools and expect them to know how to use them - and get the most out of them. Similarly, if you throw too many different tools at your reps, chances are they will start throwing them back at you. In fact, according to Salesforce, two-thirds of sales reps are overwhelmed by too many apps and platforms.

Which means providing a streamlined tech stack, and the training to match. So, what software categories should sales operations prioritize? And what kind of training should your L&D teams include in your sales training program? To get the balance and coverage right, here's how you might consolidate your portfolio.



1. Prospecting and intelligence

Primarily designed to help populate a pipeline, prospecting software generates potential leads for outbound sequence campaigns based on pre-programmed criteria. For each lead, it also provides contact information and background data. This enables reps to prioritize accounts based on potential value and qualify accordingly.

One step on from prospecting software, sales intelligence software adds a rich and vital layer of data and analysis to basic lead scoring and contact tracking. A strategic tool in the context of sales, intelligence software, enables salespeople to source, track and digest commercial information about prospects and existing customers. This could range from their purchase history, contract commitments, and revenue to business objectives and online presence. Using this data, reps can pinpoint who to reach out to and when. And better frame the conversation so it resonates on an individual level. As well as gathering data, intelligence software will organize and analyze to deliver actionable insights and help reps make more data-driven sales decisions.

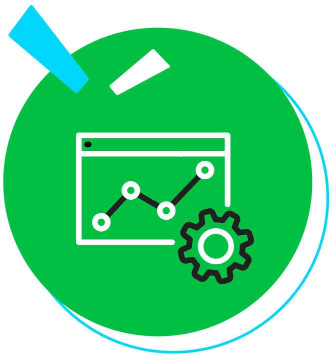
And it matters because... 62% of sales professionals say sales intelligence software is "very important" in helping them close deals (See LinkedIn's Global State of Sales 2021 report above). This also explains why 74% of organizations plan to invest more in sales intelligence tools in the future.

2. Automation and productivity

Underpinning the more glamorous side of sales (closing deals, smashing targets), sales involves numerous admin-heavy tasks and processes. Individually they may seem small and relatively low-level. But ignore them at your peril! Combined, they carry significant weight and can make or break a rich pipeline. The problem is, focusing purely on these tasks takes reps away from the space where they really add value - connecting and converting prospects and building relationships.

Sales automation and productivity tools pick up the workflow and admin involved in different parts of the sales cycle. These include: placing calls and sending emails, scheduling appointments and signing documents, pipeline management and data entry, quotes and proposals, and renewals and reminders.

Pro tip: A particularly powerful piece of automation, configure, price, quote (CPQ) software takes the time and complication out of product pricing. As well as speeding up sales cycles, quotes are more accurate, and upsell and bundle opportunities are identified more easily and frequently.



3. Forecasting and analysis

In sales, performance is paramount. But it's not just the performance of your team that matters; it's how that ranks against your competitors. And its future trajectory. Sales forecasting and analysis tools amalgamate intel and information to assess current performance and predict future sales and revenue. That information can range from internal factors, such as product and team performance, campaigns, and costs, to external considerations, such as market trends, buying processes, and customer behaviors.

Using revenue intelligence and reports produced by the software, sales leaders can visualize relevant metrics in real-time. With a granular view, they can break the sales process up into manageable chunks of actionable data. And use this to set appropriate benchmarks and track progress.

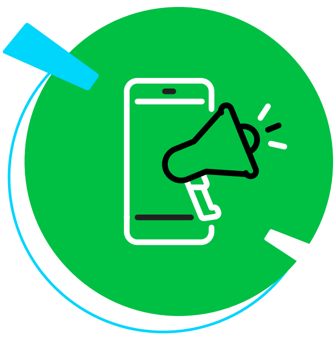
4. Enablement

We've already touched briefly on [the crossover between content marketing and sales.]() By providing extra resources and enriched information about products, features, and processes, win rates rise and conversions boost. [Sales enablement tools]() recognize this link by providing a centralized location for all of the materials, content, tools, and information your reps will need to add value and close deals.

With access also available to marketing teams, both parties can collaborate on content, making it more relevant and engaging for end users. And control the timing to ensure content is only shared with prospects when it's ready and relevant.

5. Management

For sales managers, having a clear, current, and accurate view of the activities and achievements of individuals within their team is crucial. Using sales management software, team leaders can assign and monitor tasks, oversee productivity and workflows, track KPIs, and analyze performance metrics against goals. They can also oversee and manage the status orders, individual pipelines, quotes, and contacts.



6. Marketing and lead generation

Inbound marketing generates [three times more leads and has a higher conversion rate] than its counterpart, outbound sales. It costs 62% less too. The result? An overall 25% increase in ROI.

A by-product of this, account-based marketing (ABM) uses inbound data to create tightly targeted, personalized campaigns for high-value, strong-fit accounts. And its returns are even more impressive, with 96% of respondents in an [ABM-focused benchmarking report] confirming its impact on marketing success.

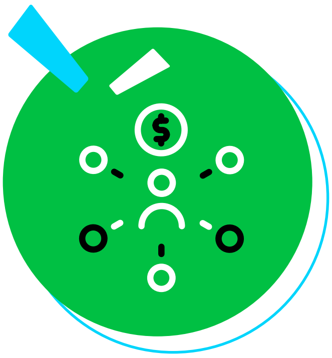
The returns may be good (great, in fact), but the workflows required to support and sustain multiple lead generation and marketing campaigns are complex and unrelenting.

Thankfully there are plenty of tools available that can streamline the regular and potentially time-consuming tasks associated with this strategy (email marketing, ads, and social media interactions, for example). Plus, gather the data to analyze trends and boost conversions.

7. Engagement and presentation

Whether it's through email, phone, or a screen, every interaction throughout the customer journey matters. And choosing the right method makes all the difference. Which is where sales engagement solutions come in. Bringing a full range of channels together and making them available from one centralized platform, reps better organize and structure communication with customers. And empower them to switch seamlessly between different channels to suit the preferred needs of different buyers. Want to streamline further? Many also come with personalization and automation features.

After contact comes content. And the sales deck your reps use to support their pitch can either keep engagement levels high or see them plummet. Which is why it helps to have the support of a good video presentation or slide production platform with built-in templates and tools.



8. Mapping

Generally speaking, mapping tools gather data collected from different sources and bring it together in a visual way to highlight data points and show the relationships between them.

When it comes to data mapping, software solutions work in two ways: one for sales and one for accounts.

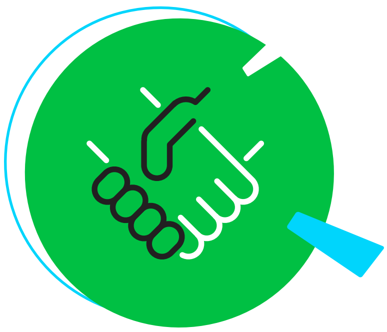
Sales mapping platforms show data related to prospects, customers, and sales territories. Using this information, salespeople can evaluate success according to different geographical locations. They can identify and follow up on opportunities and focus attention on areas that aren't performing well or need attention.

Account mapping tools show data related to people who work at a specific account. They're helpful for identifying key players and can be used to create organization charts and map out sales persona relationships.

9. Success

Your rep's reached the end of their funnel. They've closed the deal and are at the post-purchase stage. Time for a health check.

How satisfied are they? Would they recommend your company (and your product or service) to others? Are they likely to become repeat customers? Are there cross or upsell opportunities? Success software answers these questions (and more) by capturing and measuring customer data and feedback to provide insights into buyer behavior and attitudes. With this information, businesses can extract success scores, forecast growth, pick up on red flags, create customer profiles, and better engage customers throughout the lifecycle



10. (9 +1) Relationships (and more)

So far, we've focused on nine specialist sales training software technologies, each of which supports different stages and aspects of the selling lifecycle. If you look closely, though, you'll see that many of the tools overlap and include features that perform tasks associated with other sales training software categories.

But that's nothing compared to a CRM. Customer relationship management (CRM) software is the decathlon equivalent of sales training software. Why? Because as well as managing all aspects of your business's relationships with customers, it has the potential to compete in all nine of the other (sales training software) events too.

For most companies, their introduction to sales technology comes through a CRM. Looking for a way to manage the most important part of the sales process—relationships with customers—it's usually the first big investment that's made. But CRMs have matured. They're now multifaceted, multi-functional systems. And, whether it's through native features or third-party integrations, they now have the potential to support everything from intelligence gathering and task automation to customer success and social media management. And they do this on top of their day job, which is providing a central repository for organizing contacts, recording customer interactions, and managing outreach.

It's so powerful, in fact, that despite 68% of reps saying their CRM is "very important" to closing deals. Only 37% believe their organization maximizes the functionality of their platform. The key takeaway? The biggest challenge of having a good CRM is making the most of what it has to offer.

Putting it into practice: The role of tech training

Good sales performance takes more than having the right platforms. It's about having the knowledge to use those platforms effectively. And the ability to develop and perfect the skills and techniques that breathe life into the process.

A sales learning management system (LMS) brings everything together under one roof. Creating and publishing training content and courses in one space, it's easy for teams to access. And by integrating it with Salesforce or another CRM, you can sync up and streamline both training and business processes. With microlearning modules, busy reps can self-serve, dipping in and out when their calendar allows. They can put sales principles into practice using videoconferencing tools and assessments. And provide feedback on pitches and exchange ideas with the team through built-in audio, forums, and discussion boards.

Chapter 3.

Let's recap this chapter:

Having the right tech stack makes sales teams more efficient. It reduces closing times and significantly increases win rates. Covering everything from prospecting, intelligence gathering, and forecasting to engagement, lead generation, and success, there are tools for every stage in the funnel.

Then there's customer relationship management software (CRM). A central repository for organizing contacts, recording customer interactions, and managing outreach, CRMs have the potential to do so much more. Using native features and third-party integrations, they can also tick off all of the other tasks performed by other specialized platforms. Which is why they're often top of the list when it comes to choice. But it's not enough to provide the platforms. To get a proper ROI, you need to provide training too.

Chapter 4.

Optimizing sales training through coaching

Whether it's to brush up on existing skills or develop new ones at the point of need, a pre-prepared package of training your sales reps can access through a centralized LMS during onboarding and beyond is vital. But, it's not the only type of training they'll need. Add structured and consistent sales coaching into the mix, and your ROI starts to soar.

An iterative and non-prescriptive process, sales coaching supports reps individually. It helps them grow in confidence by focusing on improving skills and techniques that support individual and team performance. With the emphasis on quality over quotas, coaching means reps can practice ways to improve their performance without having to worry about meeting immediate targets. Usually led by a qualified sales manager, its bespoke, in-house approach complements off-the-peg eLearning.

But surely taking time out for coaching means quotas take a hit? Not so. The business case for coaching is convincing. Direct benefits include: securing bigger deals, increasing ramp rate and productivity (research puts this at up to 88 percent), and improving performance (for 96% of respondents, according to a 2021 Sales Coaching study by SecondNature). Indirect benefits include higher retention rates, a higher ROI in training (linked to better knowledge retention), and the eradication of performance disparities across teams (thanks to sharing of best practices).

All of which explains why scaling sales coaching is considered the number one priority among sales teams, according to 2021 research from Revenue.io.

7 common sales coaching techniques

But what kind of coaching works best in a sales environment? Let's take a look.

1. On-the-job training

Often used as a catch-all phrase for coaching in general, on-the-job training (OJT) is fairly self-explanatory. Guided and observed by their peers or by one designated person, reps perform tasks that form part of day-to-day operations. They are then given feedback, tips, and techniques to help them improve.

The benefits of on-the-job training are two-fold. As well as helping reps develop their practical skills and overall knowledge of the role in a realistic environment, it nurtures strong connections between colleagues. Being supported on the job by a more seasoned professional makes a junior rep feel valued and worth investing in. The coach, meanwhile, receives respect and validation of their skills, experience, and knowledge. Both parties benefit from time spent together.

2. Job shadowing

An extension of OJT, job shadowing (OJS?) gives junior reps the chance to learn through observation how other people do their jobs. By watching colleagues perform different tasks associated with their day-to-day roles, junior reps can witness first-hand different techniques and styles. They can see how they organize, manage and prioritize their varied workload. And by opening the experience up across the wider team (for example, account executives, sales development reps, sales specialists, support, and customer success), gain a greater understanding of how other roles impact their own,

Job shadowing is a great way of sharing and spreading best practices. It's also good for breaking down barriers and creating a better mutual understanding of how different sales divisions perform and overlap.

3. Role-playing

A common practice in most sales teams, role-playing gives sales reps the opportunity to practice and adapt their in-person sales technique. Using different customer personas and situations based on real-life selling scenarios, this two-way interaction is more than just an improvisation exercise. It's a training tool that coaches can use to assess performance and technique. It's an opportunity for coaches to share feedback on areas for development (as well as skills ably demonstrated). And it's an effective way of reinforcing learning - as humans, we learn by doing, and role-playing is a powerful way of solidifying knowledge.

4. Listening to calls

An integral part of their job, sales reps spend a large part of their time on calls with prospects. Listening to these calls and providing feedback is an important part of the sales coaching program. And, thanks to developments in tech, your manager or coach can do this in several different ways. It is, of course, perfectly feasible for a sales coach to listen to a recording of a sales rep's call and then provide feedback during a one-to-one session afterwards. The benefits of this are that the coach has time to prepare structured and targeted feedback. Plus, the call, the feedback, and a transcript can be saved in a searchable library. And used on a wider scale to demonstrate best practices and techniques. But it means that feedback can only be delivered after the event. And this delay can make feedback less effective. Using the right call coaching software, a third party can listen live to a rep's call and, using 'Whisper' functionality, coach them incognito, in real-time.

5. Sharing best practices and knowledge

Having fixed methodologies to guide each stage of the sales pipeline keeps the sales process consistent, measurable, and on track. But outside of this, most reps will have devised their own hacks and creative ways of working that they know are effective. And it's this (among other things) that sets teams apart from their competitors.

On their own, best practices help individuals improve their own performance. But when they're shared with peers through a formal coaching program, they breed success on a wider scale, making teams more open and innovative, collaborative and high-achieving.

For this coaching method to be successful it needs to be uncomplicated and embedded in your organization's culture. So, introduce it during onboarding, schedule regular group sessions, and provide a simple, clear process with a loose set of guidelines.

6. Practicing upselling and cross-selling techniques

Cross-selling and upselling increase revenue. 2022 HubSpot Blog survey, for example, shows that 72% of salespeople who upsell and 74% who cross-sell say that it drives up to 30% of their intake. It also increases customer retention. Whether it's through upgrades or add-ons, the more invested a customer is in your product or service, the less likely they are to churn. And that's not all. Selling to existing customers also takes significantly less time and resources than selling to new ones.

The business case backing this particular sales strategy is strong. But, despite the returns, many reps either struggle to find time for it. Or, whether it's through lack of skills or confidence, they are reluctant to pursue it in case it damages existing relationships.

Including cross-selling and upselling in a formalized coaching program puts it back on the agenda. It reminds reps of its importance. And it gives them the tools they need to make it a success. But it needs to be practical and achievable. The following short-burst techniques are suited to time-poor reps and colleagues:

Rep: Schedule short sit-downs with a different colleague each week to discuss strategies for up-selling and cross-selling.

Rep: Observe a different colleague each week to see how they deliver up-selling and cross-selling pitches.

Rep: Keep an ongoing log (bulleted list) of successes and challenges.

Coach: Spend 30 seconds to 1 minute each day checking in with reps, acknowledging efforts, and reviewing progress.

7. Mentoring

Sales mentoring initiatives benefit both parties. Senior reps are able to develop leadership skills, while new hires or junior reps can fast-track their development. Part of your coaching program, mentoring is an opportunity for junior reps to learn more about wider sales strategies, as well as hone their sales messaging and day-to-day skills. And by sharing personal experiences, challenges and success stories, mentors can humanize the process for newer reps. While also reminding themselves of their own achievements and progress.

Chapter 4.

Lets recap this chapter:

Structured and consistent sales coaching takes training to another level. While supporting reps individually, coaching allows them to test and try new skills and techniques away from the pressure of quotas and targets. And it can be applied in different ways, from mentoring and role-playing, to sharing best practices and job shadowing. It requires reps to take structured time out from their day-to-day. But the business case for it is strong. Positively impacting win rate, ramp rate, productivity, performance, and retention, it's considered the number one priority among sales teams.

Chapter 5.

10 tips for a successful sales training program

Sales training's a big investment. And when it comes to getting a return, the bigger is—of course—the better. To really optimize your investment, there are a few strategies it pays to consider when planning your program.

1. Play the game

When it comes to training, sales reps can be a tough crowd. With the promise of a new or bigger deal always a call or a quote away, taking time out for training has to be worth their while. To help get maximum engagement from your team, you need to play them at their own game. Align training with your salespeople's competitive streak by using gamification. Built into your LMS, features such as levels and leaderboards, badges, rewards, quizzes, and points turn training modules into competitive learning opportunities.

2. Mix it up

When it comes to training, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. Different types of learning demand different approaches. People learn in different ways too.
By offering a blended learning approach, you can accommodate both requirements. Whether it's video for role plays and how-to demonstrations, audio recordings for call reviews, forum discussions for best-practice tips, or live online lectures or conferences for theoretical debates and Q&As, diversity drives engagement and higher completion rates.

3. Keep focused

Delivering training in short, easily-accessible bite-sized chunks, microlearning can be completed over time, as and when. Which makes it ideal for learners with short attention spans and busy schedules (aka, your sales team). When it comes to ad-hoc learning, interactive workshops and hands-on projects keep distractions at a minimum and focus levels high.

4. Stay agile

Whether it's mentally or physically, your sales team's always on the move. Which means your training materials need to be ready and available whenever they're free and wherever they are. So, make sure they're agile and mobile and can be streamed or accessed via download on smartphones and tablets.

5. Embed learning

Learning can be short-lived. In fact, according to research by Gartner, sales reps forget 70% of the information they've been taught within one week of training and 87% within one month. Reinforce learning by repeating and re-presenting learning materials. And by using frequent role-plays and other interactive activities.

6. Provide resources

If your reps have questions, being able to access a self-serve repository of resources means they don't have to wait for help. Or wonder where to find it. Using a wiki, Trello board, or playbook, they can quickly seek out guidance around tools and processes and pinpoint the answers to commonly asked questions. Keen to include more? Why not save industry articles, scripts, and competitor reviews?

7. Lead the way

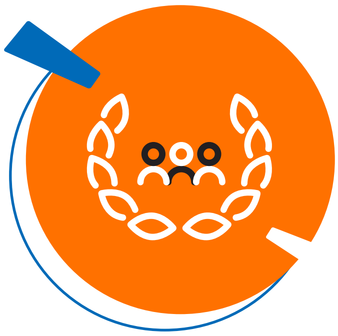
For your sales reps to take training seriously, there needs to be visible and evident buy-in from the top. Engage senior executives so they understand the ROI. Encourage them to become active advocates and even attendees, where possible. And make sales an official part of the operational calendar.

8. Communicate expectations

Setting KPIs, goals, targets, and measurable actions is part of the training cycle. So make sure to clearly communicate what you expect each salesperson to complete and achieve. And use reporting functionality built into your LMS or CRM (or both) to evaluate different aspects of the customer life cycle.

9. Gather feedback

Evaluation works both ways. Asking your reps for [feedback on their training] (what works, what doesn't, what's missing) and taking action based on that feedback increases a sense of ownership. And gives your reps a stake in the process. Again, with native survey tools, [an LMS can help with this.]



10. Create a collaborative culture

The best training isn't confined to a formal program. It's interwoven into the fabric of the workplace. From day-to-day workflows, workshops, and webinars to ad-hoc discussions, group projects, and casual social exchanges, continuous learning is versatile, economical, and effective. It supports the development of new skills and knowledge while also reinforcing what has been previously learned. To be effective, there has to be the right culture in place. Which means leading by example, keeping training front of mind, and promoting values that underpin collaboration, respect, openness, and development.

Chapter 5.

Let's recap this chapter:

To optimize engagement and get a better return on your investment in sales training, there are a number of strategies to consider when planning your program. Including gamification feeds off your reps' competitive streak, making learning fun and interactive. Micro, mobile, and blended learning make training inclusive and accessible. Repetition and access to resources boost retention. And creating a collaborative learning culture, setting objectives, and sourcing feedback creates ownership and breeds long-term success.

Bringing it all together

Content development is key to successful employee training. But it doesn't need to be all-consuming. Adopting a pragmatic and resourceful approach can free your L&D professionals up to focus on generating content in areas where they can really add value. Here's where an eLearning content library comes in.

Paying for access to an expertly-generated, one-size-fits-all course content library means you're equipped to provide a large proportion of your training (especially mandatory learning) whenever you need to. No fuss. No delay. And no drain on your team or your internal resources.

Instead, your L&D leaders can focus attention on identifying weak spots, addressing skills gaps, and creating bespoke training content in areas where they are the experts. After all, no one knows your vision, values, people, and processes better than they do.

The LMS designed for your **success**

TalentLMS is the LMS built for success, enabling organizations to create a culture of continuous learning by delivering training designed with adoption in mind. With an experience that's fully customizable, easy to manage and a joy to use, teams embrace training while feeling right at home.

TalentLMS makes it easy to provide the right training for any team and context while giving expert guidance and support every step of the way. Backed by Epignosis, a global leader in learning technologies, TalentLMS is on a mission to democratize training, serving over 70,000 organizations worldwide.

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