ebook

How to Win the Love of Sales

A 25-Step Playbook to Increase the Return on Sales and Marketing Resources through Better Alignment and the Integration of Artificial Intelligence

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About the Author

J. David Green leads the marketing team and heads the LeadCrunch Labs, where he tests, optimizes and documents for clients and prospects best practices for using LeadCrunch solutions. Achievements include leading an initiative to build for Avaya a global demand generation function that developed a billion dollar pipeline in twenty months. Dave also helped re-engineer a 40-person, outsourced inside sales team for Symantec. In one year, revenues went from $2m a year to $25m/year, resulting in the best expense to revenue ratio in the sales organization. Dave has spoken at events like The Direct Marketing Association, the Business Marketing Association, and MarketingShepra as well as at private events for Salesforce, and others. He has written a book on scalable lead generation and many blogs and white papers.

Contents

The Business Case for Alignment with Sales

Alignment with sales is not the most important priority in marketing, but it's very difficult for marketing to reach its full potential without a good working relationship with sales. Alignment with sales is hard. Misalignment is much harder. The symptoms of misalignment are many:

- Complaints from sales about lead quality
- Complaints from sales about lead volume
- Concerns in marketing about rapid, comprehensive lead follow-up
- Insufficient, uneven feedback/resolution on marketing leads
- Doubts about marketing claims of ROI
- Lackluster ROI (or no measurable ROI in the most severe cases)
- Difficulty securing necessary marketing budgets
- Job longevity

At the heart of this struggle is credibility for marketing with the CEO, CFO, and COO. In too many companies, B2B marketing is a junior partner, often not getting a seat at the executive table. For marketing to realize its potential to orchestrate shareholder value, marketing must develop a working partnership with the sales organization. This ebook provide a comprehensive guide for doing just that. The guide reflects hundreds of hours of interviews with top sales reps and their leaders, thousands of hours talking to marketers about leads and their perceptions of sales teams, and the implementation of successful service level agreements in multiple enterprise organizations.

How Artificial Intelligence is Changing Best Practices

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing all manner of sales and marketing practices. Nowhere are there greater benefits than in the alignment of sales and marketing resources. While intuition and empathy will continue to be invaluable, data science is adding a new dimension to these partnerships. That said, you will still need deeply human qualities like empathy and intuition to build long-term relationships between sales and marketing. In that regard, this playbook lays out a step-by-step guide to better sales and marketing collaboration, including the areas where AI will have the greatest impact.

How to Scale Your B2B Demand Operations

The challenge in trying to scale B2B is complexity. You need to understand cause and effect. And that's never been harder.

The array of marketing technologies that were going to usher in the holy grail of marketing — the right message through the right channel, at the right time, to the right person in the right company — has made life for marketing more complicated, not less.

What makes B2B so complicated isn't just the avalanche of new go-to-market technologies but the buying behavior of businesses. Consider these factors when B2B companies make buying decisions about complex solutions:

The Complexity of B2B

- Different corporate cultures
- Multiple people influence decisions
- Multiple locations
- Some involved have no influence
- Agencies, consultants influence decisions
- Many look. Few buy
- Overlap of sales and marketing
- Decisions take months, years
- Prospect's questions evolve
- Most choose status quo
- Prospect's answers evolve

- Different types of corporate culture affect business buying behavior
- Multiple people from an account influence the final decision
- B2B accounts often have multiple locations and even different buying centers in the largest companies
- Not everyone who gets involved has influence
- Some people who have influence work for consultancies or agencies, not the brand
- Many appear to look but few buy
- During solution investigation, your prospects and customers interact with your marketing, sales, and even post sales team (where many pre-sales interactions can take place), across every medium
- Your customers and prospects take months to make a buying decision
- The questions your prospects have change as they move closer to a decision
- Their answers to your questions also can change as they move closer to a decision
- Most prospects choose the status quo, making closing out “dead” opportunities difficult

This list is not exhaustive.

The top-of-the-funnel overlap between sales and marketing makes things more complicated still, and efficient use of sales and marketing resources more problematic. For example, both sales and marketing target a set of accounts and buyer personas. Both can spark interest in those accounts, marketing with lead programs and sales with prospecting. Both can qualify those who express interest. And both can nurture those who are not quite ready. Because the sales team talks to multiple people in the same account and often more than one marketing lead, even the most diligent sales people might not take the time to sort through proper attribution so that you get the credit you deserve and can more effectively optimize your results.

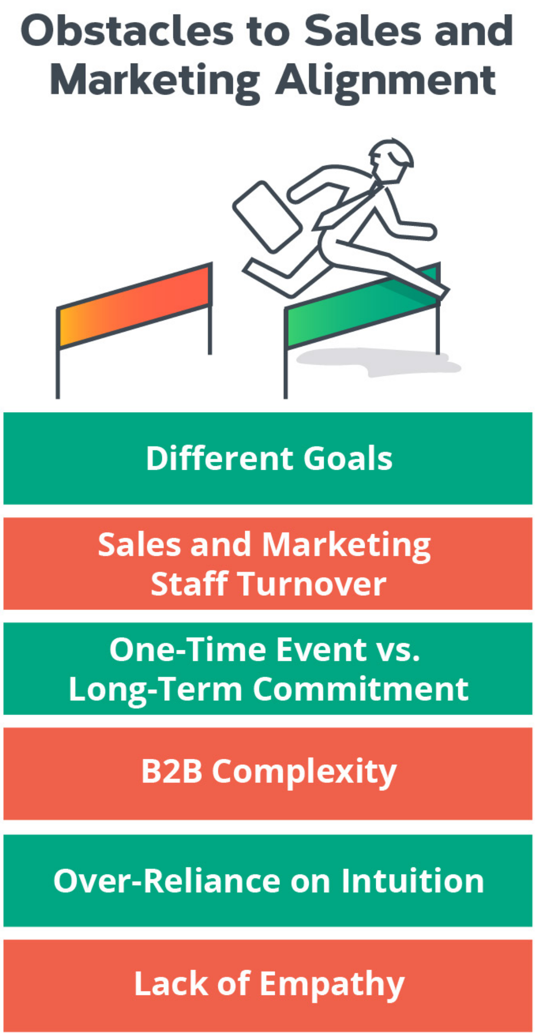
Overlap Between Sales and Marketing

Sales	Marketing
Targeting	Targeting
Sales Prospecting	Lead Gen
Qualification	Qualification
Nurture	Nurture

All these issues make sorting out cause and effect extremely challenging. It also makes revenue attribution like a game of pin the tail on the donkey. Plus, how can B2B companies avoid duplication of effort or sales and marketing avoid working at cross-purposes?

This complexity underscores the need for alignment with sales and also creates a compelling argument for using AI to help create scale and alignment.

The Obstacles to Sales and Marketing Partnership



The need for sales and marketing alignment isn't new. Getting both teams to work together each day on the ground doesn't seem to happen that often, however. The problem starts at the top, with a lack of goal alignment.
Part of the problem is that both sales and marketing experience significant turnover. Another common problem is that those initially trying to create better alignment see the issue as a one-time event, not an ongoing journey.

Alignment is also not possible through a one-size-fits-all playbook. What you need to do in a large, medium, and small company varies. The lifecycle stages of your products and services will impact the ideal approach. So will the kinds of sales channels you use.

A big part of the problem has been over-reliance on experience and intuition, especially in the areas of targeting a market and qualifying a lead. While human intuition and experience will always have an important role, you can enhance those insights considerably with data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

Perhaps more than anything, both sides need to develop — from senior leadership to entry-level people just starting their career — mutual empathy that comes from better understanding of the feelings of each side, the perceptions of each side, and the misconceptions of both sides toward each other. In other words, this isn't a date. It's a long-term commitment, akin to getting married. Start with getting executives aligned but don't stop there. You're just getting started. The real work happens when the larger sales and marketing teams, at all levels, collaborate again and again, working toward a common goal and developing a culture of respectful teamwork, based around customer buying behavioral insights.

The reason for this commitment is simple: if each side doesn't help the other, neither sales nor marketing will be nearly as successful working alone as they will be working together. The goal is to bring out the best in each other.

Measure What Matters Most

Conflict between sales and marketing happens because the two teams have completely different goals. Sales is always obsessed with surpassing quota. That's how they make money. That goal is not the goal of most marketing teams.

Getting people to come to your website or fill out a lead form doesn't necessarily correlate to revenue or profit. Is there a relationship? Sure. But it's not hard to create false positives. Junk traffic to your website can bounce. Low-cost leads don't convert.

So the goal of marketing should not be to generate a certain number of leads per month. It shouldn't be to generate leads at a particular cost-per-lead, either. Neither of those things necessarily helps salespeople or the bottom line of the company. In fact, a high volume of low-cost leads could easily waste time for salespeople, lower sales production, and waste a lot of sales and marketing resources.

More sophisticated marketers want to contribute a percent of the pipeline via marketing leads. That's closer, but here is the problem. Marketing is, in a way, competing for pipeline creation credit.

The Inherent Problem with Revenue Attribution

Getting closed-loop feedback on leads is a big step in the right direction. Once marketers start closing the loop, however, the contribution to revenue is often not that high. Rarely is it above 50 percent of revenues, and often it's much lower. In fact, the bigger the company and the larger the installed base, the lower the contribution from marketing leads becomes generally. Moreover, far too many inquiries don't convert, even with lead nurturing.

That said, a casual review of closed deals against a list of marketing inquiries usually reveals cases where prior to the sale closing marketing engaged the account but got no credit for generating the lead. So to tell a more compelling ROI story, marketing started to distinguish between marketing "sourced" revenue and marketing "influenced" revenue. This approach gave additional credit to marketing touches on closed deals.

These efforts to analyze the true contribution from marketing notwithstanding, identifying true causal relationships between closed business and marketing engagement is almost impossible. The buying cycle is long. Many people may influence the decision. Some who visit a website have no influence on the decision, and others are looking for reasons to derail your sales team. And then in the daily frenzy of sales activity there is the problem of getting salespeople to track marketing leads properly.

In short, **revenue attribution gets very complicated very quickly.** Is it worthwhile? Yes. But it shouldn't be the bedrock of modern B2B marketing ROI stories.

Crediting marketing with revenue contribution in this way doesn't prove much to the skeptics, and there are many. Sales and those creating products or delivering services certainly deserve a lot of the credit for this same revenue. Then there are the arguments about how much of the revenue the company might have gotten anyway, without all the lead generation and lead nurturing activity from marketing. You've probably heard these arguments before. The CFO and CEO have the difficult job of deciding subjectively how much credit marketing deserves.

Rather than assigning credit to marketing, just look for patterns in your data. What content, channels, and cadences in marketing and sales correlate most clearly to the acquisition of profitable customers? These questions can best be answered with lots of good data and data science. Find the patterns that work and replicate those patterns. Identify the ones that don't work and dial back on those.

Because of B2B complexity, this is another area where AI can help you. Use this more sophisticated tool to detect patterns and correlations in your oceans of data. Doing so can shed light on optimal paths for different segments of your market.

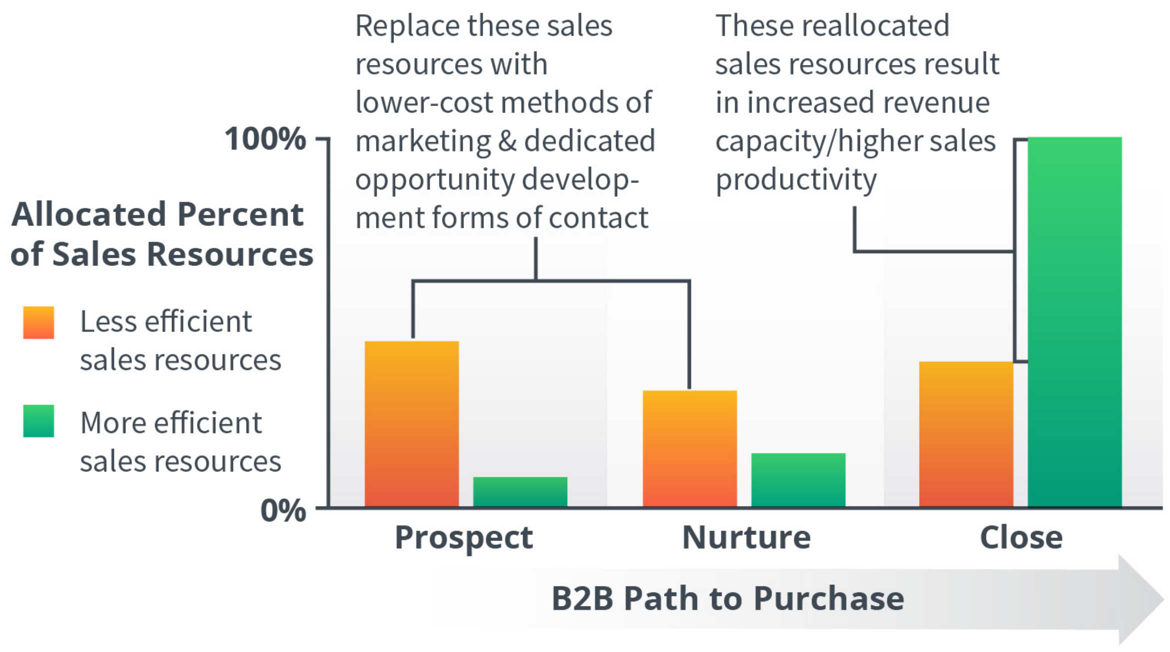
In this context, let your intuition and experience help you ask questions and inform your interpretations, but don't rely on mere experience and intuition alone. Over-measuring can provide great insights into customer motivations and help marketing improve the customer experience and results. Just make sure you a) measure what matters most and b) put marketing investments into the proper financial context for executive leadership.

The Enormous Financial Opportunity for B2B Marketing Teams

I've interviewed hundreds of salespeople and surveyed thousands more. Invariably, a lot of their time is spent looking for people to sell to.

It's not uncommon to hear that even the most highly paid salespeople are spending 20 to 40 percent of their time on this type of activity. Multiply either of those percentages by the overall sales budget and you have a considerable expense with no real measurement around effectiveness.

Lead Generation Scales Sales Profitably



Does this mean salespeople shouldn't prospect? No. If their pipeline is low, they need to prospect. And some prospecting, like referral networking, is an extremely profitable use of time when done properly.

Sales prospecting, however, provides a baseline — particularly cold calling. Research this activity to answer a few fundamental questions:

- What are the material categories of sales prospecting?
- How much do various types of sales prospecting really cost?
- What is the revenue contribution from various forms of prospecting?
- Do marketing leads offer a better return than any of these sales prospecting efforts?

From this perspective, the most important question is *whether marketing leads can drive more revenue through a sales team more cost-effectively than the team can do on its own.* If not, shouldn't a B2B company just cut investment in marketing leads and hire more salespeople? Compared to lead tracking and revenue attribution, looking at an increase in sales production is very simple.

Moreover, while there are many variables that contribute to sales productivity, it's not impossible to establish experiments that benefit one group of salespeople and not another. This concept is the basis of testing and experimentation. There is no reason you can't use it to measure the most important question.

Treasure Lifetime Value

Lifetime value is nothing new, but most marketers rarely use that metric, especially those in demand gen. There are understandable reasons. The buying cycle is often very long, and getting future commitments takes even more time. Plus, the data can be difficult to get.

That said, no metric matters more. The reason it matters is that renewing and growing customers is a lot less expensive than finding new ones. That means sales and marketing need to focus more intently on finding the right customers: the ones who will sing your praises and stay with you forever.

Reward Marketing Performance for Sales Production Increases

Aligning goals is not enough. **B2B companies should reward marketing personnel with a bonus structure tied to helping the sales organization hit and surpass its overall quota target.**

The company shouldn't use the same weighting system that sales does. But there can be an accelerator for marketing for hitting various revenue thresholds. Tying marketing compensation to the goal in this way will keep the goal top of mind and make everyone accountable for reaching and surpassing the goal. Few steps will do more to create unity between sales and marketing.

Get the Support of Your CEO, CFO, and CSO for a New Approach

If you want to make a material difference, you must get the support of the most important executives.

Meet with each executive separately, usually with the CEO first, then the CFO, and finally with the head of sales. Start by offering a hypothesis: “I believe the right way to look at sales and marketing expenditures is in combination. In this regard, for our complex products sold through inside and field sales, the primary goal for marketing should be to improve sales productivity profitably.”

If necessary, get coaching from both the CEO and CFO on how to get the support of sales leadership with this approach. Ask finance for help in measuring what you will do. You’ll also want to get agreement on structuring bonuses for the entire marketing team for achieving your new goal.

You will need a much more significant and ongoing commitment from sales. Keep in mind that improving sales productivity is always a top priority for sales leadership. It’s the reason sales leaders invest in CRM and other tools. It’s the reason they invest in ongoing sales training. It’s the primary reason underperforming salespeople and sales leaders get fired. In your meeting with sales leadership, you’ll want to outline your intention to make marketing more accountable, but to do so will require a new level of collaboration and measurement. Specifically, you want the help of sales leadership as outlined in this document.

Collaborate with Sales Leadership on a Plan to Increase Sales Productivity

The sales organization is your most important internal client. It seems crazy to have to say so, but for the sake of clarity I will tell you that sales is not your enemy. You can help sales and sales can help you. It's that simple.

You want to let sales leadership know that you believe a key objective for marketing is to increase sales productivity. To do so, you will need the following help from sales:

- Sales capacity analysis to help you provide a level of valid leads to optimize
- Joint planning sessions quarterly to start and annually once viable to calibrate the volume of valid marketing leads necessary to maximize sales production profitably
- Regular interactions with salespeople to glean their insights about customer buying behavior, insights that will help you develop better messaging and content
- Assembly of a team from sales to work with marketing on a service level agreement:
    - A mutually agreeable and defined commitment from sales to follow up on and report back on leads from marketing rapidly and thoroughly
    - A mutually agreeable minimum standard for all leads from marketing
- Additionally, if such does not exist, a person or a team (depending on volumes) dedicated to lead follow up on behalf of sales

Treat Your Salespeople Like Customers

Salespeople "buy" leads with their time. They can find leads by networking. They can prospect for leads. They can, and too often do, create their own sales decks, email templates, and campaigns. Just like your customers, salespeople have choices.

In that context, the job of a sales person is not to follow up on and report back on your leads, per se. The job of sales is to hit a revenue target. If they dutifully follow up and close the loop on your leads but don't hit a revenue target, salespeople may very well get fired. On the other hand, if they exceed their revenue target without your leads, salespeople get big commission checks and live large.

To treat salespeople like customers, you need to think of your leads as a product. Like a product manager, you should research the needs of different types of salespeople, develop your product to delight them, market your product to them, and gather feedback on your product to improve it and your messaging about your product.

In short, develop empathy and respect for salespeople, just as you do for the end-customers.

Help Your Sales Organization Empathize with Marketing

Marketing teams that I have worked with often try to do too much. In part, that happens because of a never-ending stream of “emergency” requests from the sales organization. In this regard, I don’t believe most salespeople really understand how to work with marketing. And so **just as marketing can undermine sales productivity with an avalanche of unqualified leads, so too can sales undermine marketing effectiveness with these “urgent” requests and various suggestions for campaigns. Too often, the urgent overwhelms the important.** Instead of doing a few things well, you can end up doing “checkbox marketing” that doesn’t move the needle.

In this regard, there needs to be ongoing education to help the sales organization understand how to work with marketing. The help sales can provide, apart from lead follow-up and reporting, is customer insight.

Use Sales and Post-Sales Teams as a Conduit to Customer Insight

Reps in sales, customer service, professional services, account management, and customer success spend a lot of time talking to customers every day. The best people on these teams develop keen insights about customers. You can harvest this insight:

- What characterizes an ideal customer?
- What triggers consideration?
- What pains motivate customers to look?
- What beliefs do customers have that you must change?
- What questions do they have?
- What are their most common objections?
- Who gets involved in the buying process?
- What stalls decisions?

The best salespeople have wonderful intel on these types of issues. Those are all vital insights that marketing can use to target the market, craft the right message, and improve the customer experience. Find ways to harvest this collective wisdom continuously. Individual interviews, surveys, group discussions, and participation in sales calls all are great ways to do so.

Dedicate a Team to Inbound Lead Follow-Up

Thousands of innovative companies have proven over the last 30 years that a team of inside reps who follow-up on and qualify marketing leads for other salespeople will pay for itself many times over.

There are several reasons this model works so well:

9 Reasons You Need and SDR Team

Innovation Measurment ROI Culture/Organization

1. Faster tests of new approaches	2. Easier to scale innovation across the team	3. Better use of scarce sales capacity
4. Better measurement of lead follow-up	5. Greater chance of closing the loop on marketing leads	6. Deep bench for sales and marketing
7. Higher conversion rate of marketing leads into pipleline	8. More detailed resolution on marketing leads	9. Bridge between sales and marketing

- **Faster tests of new approaches.** You can experiment with different approach faster than you can with field salespeople.
- **Easier to scale innovation across the team.** You can more readily scale new approaches across the SDR team than across a field sales team.
- **More detailed resolution on marketing leads.** The SDRs will be much more diligent than salespeople about resolving marketing leads, one way or the other, so tracking is better in this stage. Plus, SDR teams generally have feature-rich cadence software (e.g., InsideSales.com, Outreach, SalesLoft, Hubspot Sales, etc.) to make highly structured follow up sequences easy to implement.
- **Greater chance of closing the loop on marketing leads.** Because sales will have a much smaller and more qualified pool of meetings to track and the SDR team will have done the tracking on their end, closing the loop is much easier.
- **Better measurement of lead follow-up.** Because conversion of leads into sales meetings is the goal, you can measure the SDR team on that specific activity, something that is harder to do with field salespeople.
- **Better use of scarce sales capacity.** Most marketing leads do not turn into meetings. So you don't want to use an expensive resource like sales to winnow out the few gold nuggets. Doing so wastes sales capacity and it's far more expensive than using sales development reps (SDRs) to perform this function.
- **Higher conversion rate of marketing leads into pipeline.** When an SDR team rapidly and diligently uses email, phone, and social media to follow up on marketing leads, far more of the marketing leads convert to meetings than happens with sales follow-up. Higher conversions mean higher ROI on the marketing investment.
- **Deep bench for sales and marketing.** This entry level position can become a feeder ground for sales and marketing.

If modeled properly, this team will become a bridge between sales and marketing, greatly increasing the velocity of information flowing between sales and marketing each day.

These operations can also do outbound activity to generate leads and set appointments (although inbound versus outbound reps may well warrant two different hiring profiles).

Pure inbound teams can be part of sales or marketing. More recently, some companies have set up a new department, often called a “demand center,” that sits between sales and marketing and treats both as clients. No matter where this team resides, the sales development function should become a high-traffic bridge between sale and marketing.

Broadly Gather Requirements from Sales

Clayton M. Christensen, the Kim B. Clark Professor at Harvard Business School and author of many profoundly influential business books, made this observation in How Will You Measure Your Life?

“Many products fail because companies develop them from the wrong perspective. Companies focus too much on what those customers need. What’s missing is empathy: a deep understanding of what problems customers are trying to solve.”

Likewise, many marketers develop lead programs and other sales support materials without an empathetic understanding of their other customer, the sales person. Understanding salespeople should include as many of the usual methods as the economies of your operations warrant, including interviews, focus groups, advisory boards, surveys, and, at the very least, periodic attendance on sales calls. Whether the salespeople are inside or in the field, direct or indirect, front line or senior leaders, develop and sustain empathy for each sales team you support to get clear on the best way to solve their most enduring problems.

Study Your Competition: Alternate Lead Sources

When you are researching the needs of the sales organization, make sure to investigate their current sources of leads, apart from those created by marketing:

- Which sources are the most effective and why?
- Which are the least effective and to what degree?

There are two big advantages to these kinds of insights:

- You may see ways to scale what the best salespeople are doing when they prospect.
- When looking at the least effective prospecting methods, you will have a baseline for measuring your own efforts to increase sales production.

Survey the Sales Organization

A simple anonymous survey, ideally repeated annually, will give you and key sales stakeholder insight into the broad perspective of the inside and field sales organizations. Key areas to cover:

Survey Insights from Sales

- Perception of marketing leads
- Current lead sources
- Revenue contribution of each source
- Capacity for follow up on qualified leads
- Nice to have information on leads
- Must have information on leads

Augment this information with basic segmentation of your sales organization if you have more than 30 salespeople:

- Inside versus field
- Time in sales
- Time at the company in sales
- Any other divisions of labor for front line sales people (e.g., an overlay sales team)
- Level (i.e., rep, manager of reps, manager of managers)

With this information, you will have data points you can use to develop your business case for lead generation funding, insights into the expectations of the sale organization, and gaps between different groups.

To get the best feedback, promise absolute anonymity.

Size Your Market for Pipeline Development

Just like a product manager, you want to have a sanity check on your own planning efforts. In that regard, you want to first find out about the impact of sales prospecting on revenue production:

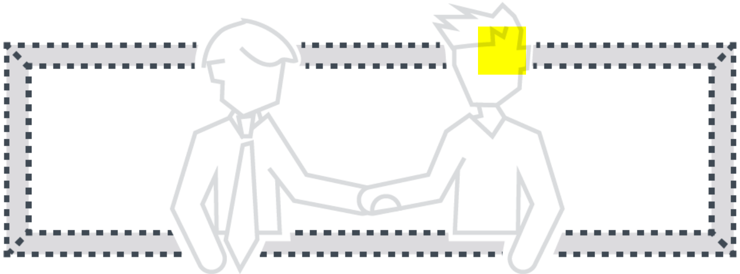
- How much time are salespeople spending on the least productive sources of leads?
- What is the estimated revenue contribution from these efforts?

Then research what impact you might have by asking these kinds of questions:

- **What sales capacity exists for consuming phone-qualified opportunities?**
- **What impact might the right volume of qualified opportunities have on sales production?**

Use these findings to inform your plan to increase sales production and to market that plan to the sales organization at large.

Outline the Framework for the Partnership



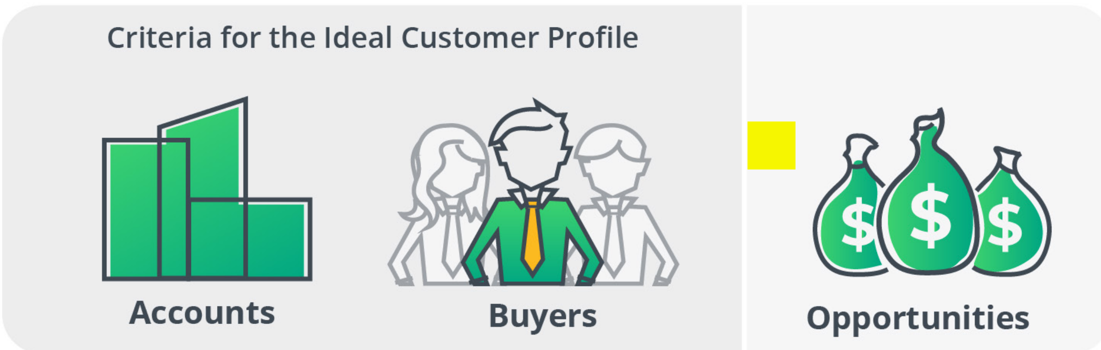
While some elements of the partnership between sales and marketing will change from month to month and quarter to quarter — based upon your editorial calendar, new product releases, and the like — other aspects of the partnership will remain more constant (though still subject to continuous, steady improvement). To that end, make sure sales and marketing establish a true partnership, creating a working, evolving framework between these departments.

Some people call these frameworks a “service level agreement.” I prefer “partnership framework.” While a given company will need to tailor this framework to markets, sales channels, and product and service portfolios, the outline below will provide you with a roadmap of the key elements for getting started.

Define the Ideal Customer Profile

The ideal customer profile contains the key criteria for targeting and qualifying the accounts and the people within those accounts who influence decisions

3 Areas of Qualification



These profiles need to exist for every product and service. Key considerations:

- Get stakeholders from product, sales, and customer success/support.
- Define the characteristics of the accounts.
- Define the characteristics of the people in those account who make decisions, including typical titles.
- Identify a list of best and worst customers for every product (at least twenty-five of each, if possible).
- Deeply profile those best and worst customers.
- Use those insights to build predictive models for targeting your market.

This exercise should happen for every one of your products and services. The analysis should be both qualitative and quantitative. Make sure someone from finance helps vet the ideal custom list from a profitable/unprofitable standpoint. The qualitative exercise should be an input into the AI models you build in which you deeply profile groups of clearly best and worst customers to find more like them and avoid unprofitable segments. The AI exercise may then find additional attributes that add additional accuracy to your profiles and eliminate bias.

The end result should be a profile that helps sales and marketing target the market and qualify accounts and buyer types. These profiles will become baseline criteria for lead and opportunity scoring. Broadly distribute this profile to the sales, sales development, and marketing teams and educate them on its use and value. Update this profile with each new product or service launch, as appropriate, and review the criteria annually and re-release to sales and marketing as appropriate, including making sure new hires understand the criteria.

Use a Common Language

It's hard to have alignment if sales and marketing have entirely different definitions of key demand generation concepts. The big ones are the stages of the sales and marketing funnel and the definitions of things like accounts and customers.

Probably nothing in the B2B lexicon has created as much misunderstanding as the word "lead." To marketing, these can be lists, people who subscribe, people who download, and people who register. To sales, "leads" are akin to opportunities, which means sales thinks the prospect has a reasonable chance to buy something.

For that reason, the name of these macro-level funnel stages needs to be easy to remember and descriptive of the stage. Here then are my suggestions for the top-level funnel stages for sales and marketing:

The handoffs between your marketing automation system and your SDR team (i.e., Conversation Leads to First Sales Meetings) and between your SDR team and your sales team (i.e., First Sales Meetings and Opportunities) are invariably where companies leak the most revenue. For an in-depth discussion of these stages — their definition, purpose, and key practices — see the e-book, “How to Scale Your Demand Operations.”

Distinguish between Two Key Stages of Qualification

There are two of these stages of qualification that sales and marketing should talk through and define.

Stage	Definition
Conversation Leads	Prospects that marketing qualifies prior to someone following up
First Sales Meetings	Prospects for which the sales development team sets a meeting on behalf of other salespeople, qualifying the account and the person but possibly the opportunity

Feedback loops at these stages will do more to help marketing fine-tune its lead generation efforts than any other stages in the funnel.

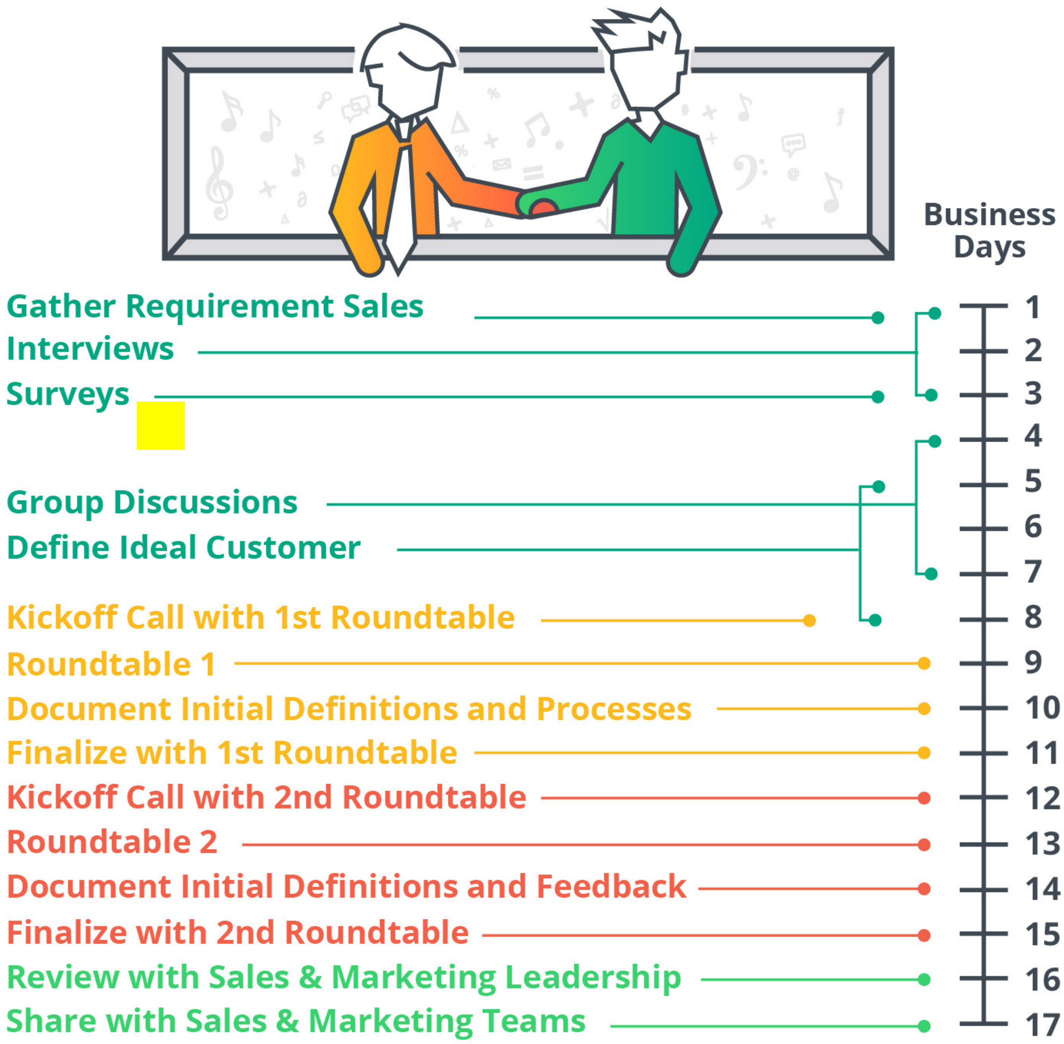
Form Two Revenue Roundtables

A revenue roundtable is a group of four or five salespeople, one sales leader, and two people from marketing, including a marketing leader, who collaborate to define, document, and optimize the following:

- The criteria for Conversation Lead and an initial phone meeting
- The follow-up processes
- The hand-off process between the sales development team and salespeople
- The feedback requirements

Because the methods of qualification are so different from each other, establish one revenue roundtable for the team that follows up on and qualifies Conversation Leads and another for the sales teams who follow- up on First Sales Meetings. You can use the output from the initial roundtable as a starting point for the second roundtable, if desired. The timeline below is for a larger enterprise organization. In smaller organizations, you can compress the timeline to seven to ten business days, if necessary.

Key Steps to Establish the Partnership Framework



Keep in mind that these sessions are negotiations between sales and marketing, not a dictation by one side or the other. As such, both departments get one vote each (no matter the number of participants in the roundtable) and must work through disagreements. This small group will form a standing committee that will continue indefinitely, but with the primary work occurring in the initial workshop. Rotating new people into the revenue roundtable periodically is beneficial (to get broader buy-in with other sales stakeholders) and inevitable (due to attrition).

In a larger company (e.g., more than 500 salespeople), with sales segmented by function, there may be some value in forming one or more additional revenue roundtables for sales teams handling a segment or a product portfolio. Examples would include inside sales, field sales, named/global accounts, and so on. That said, if you lead this workshop properly, you will find that good salespeople are generally in wide agreement with a common set of qualification criteria, so be sure doing additional roundtables is truly worth the effort.

Pick the Right People

Select people for each revenue roundtable with these characteristics:

- An intelligent, insightful view of customer buying behavior
- A realistic view of the right sales behavior
- The respect of their peers

The last point warrants clarification. You want the type of sales person who holds court at sales meetings. He or she is someone other salespeople admire and respect. People with this stature will help build with other salespeople the credibility of your new initiative.

For the roundtable overseeing the follow-up of Conversation Leads, you'll want people from the sales development team (if they are not too junior), perhaps with one or two people from the field, as well as the two people from marketing. In some companies, there may also be an inside sales function that closes smaller deals over the phone. In such cases, especially when marketing can create campaigns that are targeting accounts that likely belong with the inside sales team, then routing Conversation Leads directly to that team and bypassing the sales development team might make sense. In that case, make sure to include some members of that inside sales team in this initial roundtable.

For the other roundtable, you'll want salespeople, a sales leader, and the same two people from marketing. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, you'll want to make sure that the various types of salespeople are represented if possible (e.g., field sales, inside sales, indirect sales, etc.).

Asking any sales leader to take people off the phones and out of the field for a half-day costs a lot of money in lost revenue production. Asking for the best salespeople costs even more. So this is not a request to make lightly. Be prepared to defend your request to use these resources for the roundtables.

Prep the Roundtable Participants

About two weeks prior to the workshops, it's helpful to talk to the participants about the purpose of this initiative and what you expect from them. The participants need to identify what they need (and perhaps why they need it) but not how to achieve that end.

Use this conference call to share key findings from your research of the sales organization. You should also share with them a high-level overview of ways that marketing (and sales) can and cannot qualify leads:

- **Targeting.** In addition to traditional media and list targeting, you can use big data and AI to develop look-alike models, based on ideal customers.

- **Messaging.** In a limited way, your messaging can qualify prospects. For example, your messaging can position a product or service as a solution for “growing mid-sized businesses” and attract more of those types of companies. Key words in a search term are examples, as well.

- **Calls to Action (CTAs).** CTAs are another mechanism for qualification, akin to messaging. A CTA to get a demo, pricing, or to talk to an expert is especially helpful in identifying the small set of leads who are ready for a conversation with sales.

- **Implicit Behavioral Data.** Marketing automation systems and other user tracking can qualify prospects based upon their behavior. This implicit behavior is usually a key input into lead scoring models. Key word search terms and other types of intent data all fall into this category of qualification.

- **Friction.** The more mildly difficult you make lead forms and chatbots, the more motivated the prospect must be. The correlation between friction and motivation is an important one for everyone to understand and leverage as appropriate. Friction will decrease the number of people filling out forms and using chatbots, but it will often increase the percentage who convert into sales.

- **Explicit User-Supplied Data.** You can ask for information in web forms and chatbots, including qualifying questions. It’s important to get sales to understand the limitations of gathering information in this fashion, a) because asking too much will decrease lead volumes and b) because prospects may not know the answer or may provide bogus information. There are now also options like Conversica that do simple levels of qualification via follow up email to leads.

- **Data Hygiene.** You can clean up leads, standardizing fields, validating phone and emails at the point of capture or shortly thereafter. You can use these types of data to identify bogus emails and phone numbers and to improve match rates with existing leads and external data sources.

- **Data Enrichment.** You can enrich data by extrapolating from existing data (e.g., identifying the company domain from a work email address) or from external data append services, typically firmographics or technographics but increasingly other more useful data about the company and the contact, all of which can help qualify a prospect.

- **Duplicate Consolidation.** Prospects often respond multiple times during the buyer's journey. Looking at each instance as a new lead is not always useful (the response behavior, however, is useful in determining qualification). Companies also get duplicated, especially without ongoing data hygiene and enrichment services. Getting an aggregate view of response behavior for an account can help qualify the account and the contact.

- **Lead Scoring.** Traditionally, lead scoring has involved intuition. How much value should we assign to an open? How much to a click? This area is rapidly evolving as the new domain of predictive analytics, based not merely on the response behavior but on the aggregate behavior and the resemblance to ideal customers. Implicit, explicit, data hygiene, and data enrichment, and ideal customer profiles are all inputs into a lead score.

- **SDR qualification.** The important thing here is to stress the big difference between qualification by a person and all the other ways that marketing has. A person can clarify and confirm, probe, and connect dots on a much greater level than all the above methods. The goal of the above methods is to screen out the most likely unqualified prospects, not attempt the more nuanced levels of qualification until Artificial Intelligence and natural language processing evolves.

- **Sales Qualification.** The best sales reps hyper-qualify an account, clarify, for example, the steps in the decision process, the decision at each step, the stakeholders in each step, and so on. This is the most expensive and thorough form of qualification.

Encourage the participants to talk to their colleagues about any considerations the roundtable team should discuss. Distribute the deck used to share the findings from the research marketing has done. Include the agenda and key questions for the forthcoming discussion.

Conduct the Workshops

Once together, quickly recap the key points made in the set-up meeting:

- The goal
- The agenda
- Key findings from the research marketing has done with sales
- For the roundtable focused on following up on Conversation Leads, a very high-level overview of key issues related to scalable methods of qualification:
  - What marketing can do to qualify leads, including the pros and cons of each approach
  - What happens as lead qualification gets more stringent (e.g., the volume goes down and, in the case of lead forms, the accuracy of the information declines)

- Then for both roundtables, lead a two-to-three-hour discussion around the following issues:
- What the criteria should be before prospects move to these two stages:
  - Conversation Leads
  - First Sales Meetings
- What the minimum follow-up processes should be for inside sales, field sales, channel partners, and key account salespeople
- What the minimum feedback should be from salespeople

For the roundtable overseeing phone-qualified meetings and phone-qualified opportunities, discuss what the handoff process should be with sales.

Specify the Criteria for a Conversation Lead

Conduct this workshop first and use the resulting criteria as a starting point for the revenue roundtable working on First Sales Meetings. Define the minimum criteria for a Conversation Lead based upon what's true of the account, what's true of the individual, and what's true about the opportunity. Frame the discussion in terms of information that is nice-to-have (optional), must-have (required), or unnecessary. As possible, incorporate the criteria for the ideal customer profile. (The degree to which you can do so will depend on the criteria and on whether you use a third-party data source to append data to Conversation Leads.)

It's very important to note that, while you should respectfully share a high-level overview of best practices and limitations of qualification techniques available to marketing, you want to keep the discussion with sales focused on what information they must have and what information they would like to have and not on how marketing should get the information.

That said, there is no reason to discuss these fields, apart from the fact that they need to be valid:

- First and last name of the person
- Name of the company
- Area of interest (if possible)
- A website address for the company

Discuss whether the information below is optional, required, or unnecessary:

- Work or personal email
- Phone number (required or optional)

- Title of the individual vs. functional area (IT vs. marketing, etc.) vs. level (VP, Director, Manager, etc.)
- A geographic indicator to help with lead routing (postal code, country, etc.)
- An explicit desire to talk to someone
- Industry and/or segment information
- Size of company (You can append revenue but otherwise asking the user about employment or revenue generally leads to inaccurate information.)

Unless you have highly commoditized products or services, push back on some these requirements, if they arise:

- Authority
- Timeframe for a decision
- Various budget questions

These types of questions will often result in bogus answers on lead forms and are generally better left to discovery via sales or the sales development team. For a deeper discussion of this topic, see this article on BANT qualification.

For the members of the roundtable concerned with Conversation Leads, it’s essential to understand the problems with asking for more and more information on web forms:

- The more you ask, the lower your conversion rate will likely be; and
- Marketing can append a variety of information to leads in real time through various third-party services and through internal data extrapolations (e. g., creating a company website address from an email domain).

A common discussion area for the roundtable will be around phone numbers and emails. If allowed to do so, many prospects will provide private email addresses like Gmail or Yahoo. Others will provide bogus email addresses. Determining who the person works for gets much harder without a work email address. There are ways to mitigate this issue, like smart forms with automated rules to identify and alert the user to problems with email and phone number provided, sending via the email the user provides a link to the asset, phone and email validation services, and so on. In fact, one way to qualify leads is through friction on the lead form. For example, asking for work email or a phone number will usually decrease the lead volume but increase lead conversion to opportunities. So educate the members of the revenue roundtable on these issue and let them know the trade-offs before they decide what the criteria should be.

Define the Criteria for an First Sales Meeting

With dedicated sales development reps, new possibilities open up:

- Researching, validating, updating, and enhancing the information about the person and the account (e.g., review social media, the company website, keyword searches, and so on);
- Asking the prospect more subjective questions (e.g., “What problem are you trying to solve?”) that are open to interpretation and give context to the answer through background notes;
- Talking to multiple people in the organization; and
- Discussing what scenarios might be useful for getting phone-qualified meetings versus phone-qualified opportunities.

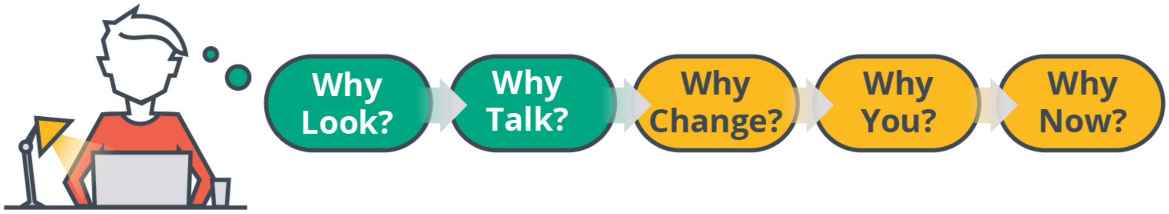
Given the opportunity to further qualify and even educate the buyer, the questions for this revenue roundtable include these:

- What will the minimum threshold of qualification be?
- What would be helpful but optional?
- What level of information should the SDRs capture in the CRM?

Part of this discussion should address these common scenarios:

- The qualification requirements for new rep or reps whose pipeline is empty
- Account-based marketing
- Key accounts and especially the senior executives in them
- Ecosystem partners you need to recruit
- A new product or service in a new category, early in its lifecycle

In each of these cases, the sales organization might benefit from more meetings, even if they are less qualified. A useful framework would be the five key questions buyers ask during their journey.



Marketing owns the first question (why look?). Leads that marketing and sales believe are open to a conversation define the second question (why talk?). Sales generally handles the remaining questions. One exception: when a product is later in its lifecycle, an SDR team will qualify and educate the buyer sufficiently to address the “why change” question.

That First Sales Meeting should generally be about mutual exploration. Both sides are asking themselves the simple question, should we continue talking? This stage differs from a brushoff from the prospect. Rather, this agreement to continue talking means the prospect is seeing sufficient promise in a product or service to want to investigate further, with a legitimate interest in buying the product or service. In a complex sale, such a commitment invariably means involving others and committing a lot of organizational time, whether the company buys anything or not. Likewise, the rep should be qualifying the opportunity. Is this a problem we can solve? Is the problem big enough to justify at least the minimum dollars necessary to buy our product or service? These are the kinds of questions to talk through with the roundtable.

Seen from this perspective, the second and third questions correlate to the two types of phone qualification: meetings and opportunities.

Obviously, the conversion rate from phone-qualified meeting to closed-won business is much lower than it would be for the conversion of phone-qualified opportunities to closed-won business. Everyone needs to understand this trade-off.

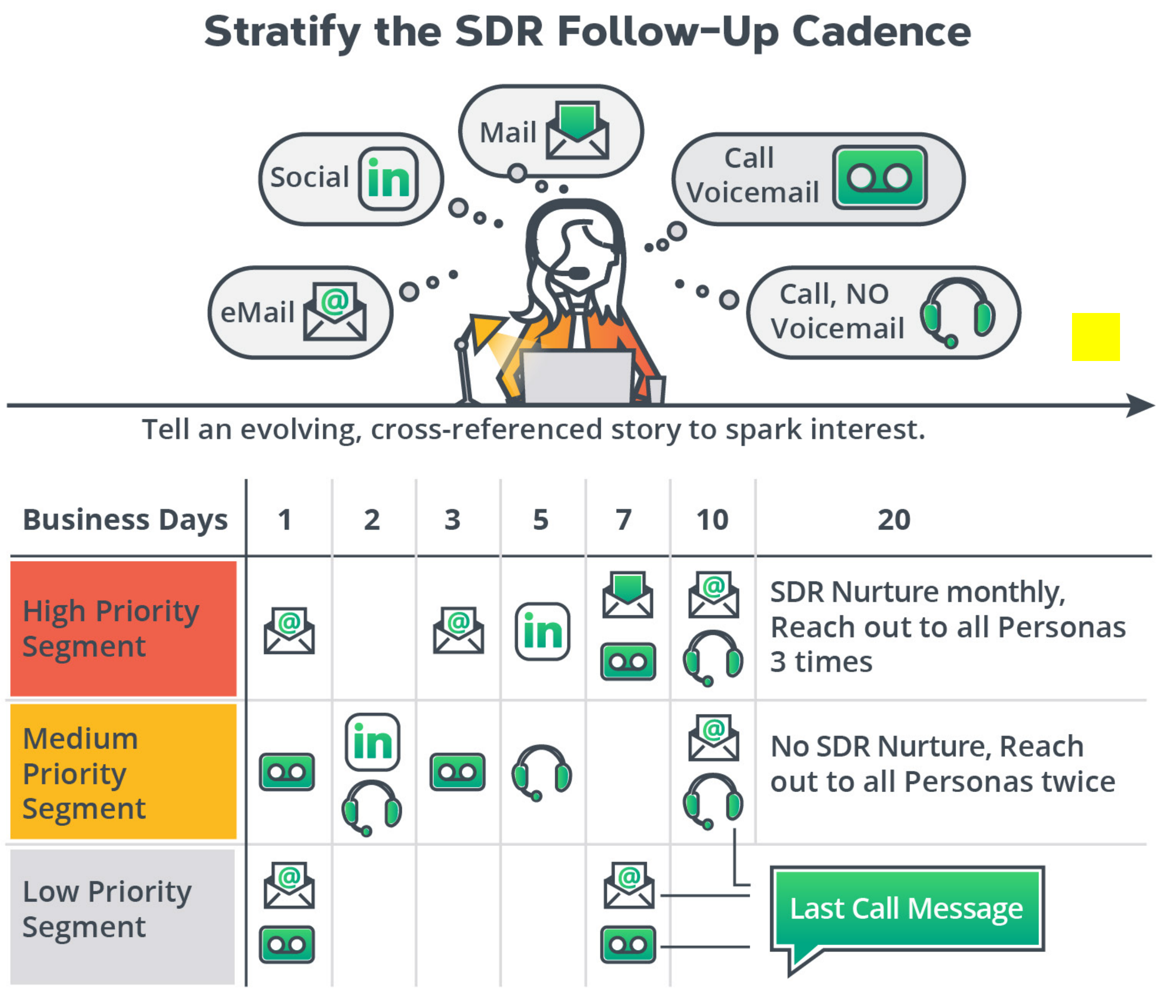
For both scenarios, be sure to include the ideal customer profile information as part of the qualification process.

Flow Chart the Follow-up Process(es)

There are two follow-up processes to define for the complex sale:

- The process the sales development team will use when qualifying leads
- The process salespeople will use when following up on phone-qualified meetings and phone-qualified opportunities

The processes for both scenarios should stipulate the timing and frequency of emails, voicemails, and phone calls without voicemails. Often, it makes sense to stratify the level of effort, depending on the potential of the account, including extra effort and even outreach to other buying influencers, as in the example below:



Rapid and persistent follow-up, combined with multiple, cross-referencing forms of outreach and an evolving story that sparks curiosity, will result in a higher conversion rate and a better ROI.

Research should inform this discussion:

- Speedy follow-up increases conversion rates (see "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads" in the Harvard Business Review)
- Creative follow-up and persistence pays off (see "Lead Response Report" by Insidesales.com)

Given the importance of rapid, persistent, and creative follow-up, an elaborate follow-up cadence would typically apply to the sales development team only because such teams have the capacity and the technology to deliver rigorous, standardized cadences. If for some reason having a sales development team isn't possible, then keep in mind that field salespeople often can't follow up as rapidly as can inside reps. Reps in the field may be traveling or in all-day on-site meetings. Furthermore, getting this type of compliance from the field is much more difficult to implement and monitor than it is for an SDR team. Nonetheless, getting a prospect to either of these stages is very expensive. Wasting the opportunities is not a good idea.

In the cases where the sales development team is not setting First Sales Meeting for the field but rather passing the leads to the sales person to schedule the initial meeting themselves, the sales development team needs to take these leads back within five to eight business days if the sales person has not set up the meeting. Talk this scenario through with the revenue roundtable, including escalation procedures, lead reassignments, and the best way for the sales development reps to monitor this situation and take back control.

Outline the Handoff Process

As mentioned previously, a lot of revenue leaks because of poorly thought out handoff processes between the sales development team and the sales team. As such, as with feedback, the handoff process is not a negotiation but a requirement. To give sales what they want in terms of qualification, specific feedback and follow-up are the price.

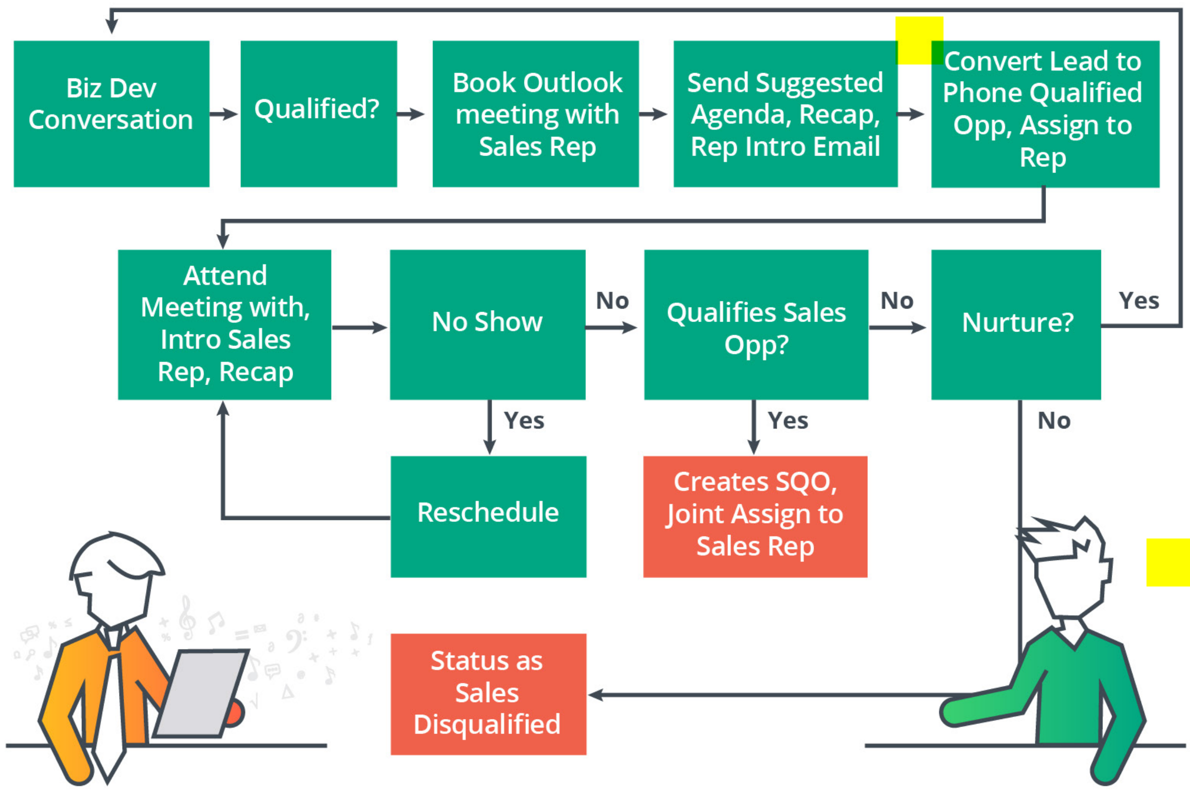
That said, there may be any number of limitations that prevent the framework outlines for convenience in this section from working for a particular organization. So share a version of this process with the roundtable and listen to their feedback on its practicality. To be sure, many salespeople do not like others to schedule meetings on behalf of any sales person. Without such a step, however, many valuable opportunities will be lost to neglect. Plus, the feedback that occurs as a direct result of the process outlined in this section will help the sales development team and marketing improve the quality of opportunities rapidly.

To increase conversion of Conversation Leads that the sales development team has phone qualified, a version of the following process will help:

- Have the sales development rep schedule with the prospect time on the calendar of the sales person (salespeople need to keep their calendars up to date, including the location of each meeting);
- After the call, ask the sales development rep to send an email to the prospect (copying the sales rep) to do the following:
  - Recap the conversation
  - Introduce the sales person
  - Most importantly, suggest an agenda for the upcoming call, asking for feedback from the prospect

- At the same time, have the sales development rep send a meeting invite to both the customer and the sales person in whatever email capability the team uses
- The day before the call between the sales person and the prospect, ask the sales development rep to send a confirmation email to the customer, copying the sales person, and including the suggested agenda (note: you may be able to automate this step)
- Have the sales development rep attend the call with sales person and the prospect, introducing everyone, recapping the last conversation, outlining the purpose of the call and the agenda, asking the customer to confirm or modify the recap and the agenda (For less expensive solutions or more commoditized solutions, having an SDR attend the call will not be economically feasible. Even in those cases, the practice can be useful – if only on a limited basis -- for new SDRs as a means of accelerating his or her ability to properly qualify prospects)
- Ask both the sales person and the sales development rep to have a short conversation after the call to clarify whether the opportunity was in fact qualified, and if it was not, why not, and what if anything the Sales development rep should do (like nurture the lead).

Handoff Process



This process will prevent leads from falling through the cracks. It will also greatly accelerate the ability of the sales development rep to learn the nuances of qualification. Finally, this process will build a relationship between the sales development rep and the salespeople he or she is supporting. For these reasons, there may come a point when the SDR can simply schedule the meeting and get feedback on the meeting quality later.

Finally, keep in mind that prospects will sometimes agree to meetings just to get the SDR off the phone. For that reason, you need to measure meetings that occur, not the meeting booked. Booked meetings that fall through should go back to the SDR for rebooking. High rebooking rates are a reason for coaching. Confirmation emails the day before the meeting can reduce the number of meetings that are set but not held.

Define the Feedback Requirements

In exchange for delivering Conversation Leads and First Sales Meetings, marketing needs rapid feedback on the viability of these leads, meetings, and opportunities, and eventually closed-loop feedback on everything. Those feedback requirements usually differ for the sales development team versus sales teams.

While getting feedback on closed leads is important, getting rapid, directional feedback from the sales development team and the sales team is just as important because of the time lag from handoff to a final resolution. Note that the directional feedback should be faster for field salespeople (assuming the sales development team is setting up meetings) than it will be for the sales development team.

In both cases, keep in mind that these reps are not data entry clerks. Marketing should ask for the least amount of information necessary. Overburdening any rep with too many tracking responsibilities is counterproductive.

For a sales development team qualifying leads for others, you'll want to capture an outcome for each Conversation Lead. These outcomes generally fall into two groups:

- A stage equivalent to an First Sales Meeting
- A status of disqualified/unqualified, with a separate field with reason codes like these:
  - Unreachable (after several email, phone call, and voicemail attempts over an appropriate period of time)
  - Non-compliant with your SLA (make sure the SDR documents the specific reason(s), like account not in target market, missing must-have information, bad information (e.g., wrong/bad phone, bogus contact/ account, etc.)
  - No acknowledged need
  - Other (it's always good to have a catch all)

Occasionally, the prospect will refer the SDR to someone else in the account. Ideally, you would make sure linkage exists in your CRM between any newly created lead and the original lead source, for tracking and analysis purposes.

On most leads, the sales development team should provide the above information within about ten to fifteen business days. Two common exceptions will be high potential accounts that warrant additional outreach and cases where verified interest exists (e.g., the prospect replies to an email) but not yet a resolution.

In addition to the lost-reason codes, create for the sales development team a short text field in the lead record where reps can type a few words for further context, information someone in marketing would review regularly to better understand how to tune campaigns. Additional feedback from frontline reps via conference calls or other live interactions may also be useful, especially when involving a new approach, a new product or service, entry into a new market, etc.

For the sales team following up on phone-qualified meetings or opportunities, a sales rep would indicate in the CRM system one of two statuses for the meeting or opportunity:

- Non-compliant with the SLA
- Conversion of First Sales Meeting to an opportunity
- Unqualified

Non-compliance would typically occur before the meeting occurred. Make sure the sales person documents in the CRM the reason(s) for non-compliance.

While you may choose to have a field of reason codes for unqualified meetings or opportunities eventually, it's very important, especially when the sales development team is starting out, that managers review each disqualified case, including non-compliance. Doing so will help you in several areas:

- Dentify needs for further training for an individual sales development rep or the entire team;
- Detect problems with the qualification definitions agreed to with the revenue roundtable, an issue that would require some level of review and approval by the revenue roundtable and an updating of the rules; and
- Recognize a misunderstanding in the field about what a reasonable level of qualification is.

For any meetings or opportunities that are qualified, the sales person would simply track them through to closure. Keep in mind that many opportunities "go dark" (i.e., unresponsive). Often these would-be buyers choose to do nothing. As such, marketing will need a means of discounting projections from those marketing-sourced opportunities that are unresolved and have aged.

Finally, you should discuss lead scoring. The resulting insights on qualification nuances may help your data science team find correlations. Ideally, you will base your lead scoring model on quantitative analysis and not subjective criteria. Frame lead scoring as a tool for identifying likely buyers, whether they have explicitly asked for sales follow-up or not. Make sure that sales understands that for lead scoring models to improve the accuracy of the prediction of which leads will close, the model will need both positive and negative feedback. The more feedback the merrier. Positive feedback includes any conversion as well as the final closed-won result. Negative feedback includes automation-qualified leads and any opportunities from them that are closed out as unqualified, unresponsive, closed-lost, etc.

Document, Review, and Finalize the Partnership Framework

Once the revenue roundtables have worked with marketing to define the above criteria, marketing should document and circulate the partnership framework to the revenue roundtables for review, correction, and approval. Next, review the agreement with sales and marketing leadership. The review should include these elements:

- Rolling out this new approach, including educating the rank and file in sales and marketing;
- Reviewing the new approach with leadership in 90 days and then twice a year.

Inspect What You Expect

Nothing you have done so far will matter if both sales and marketing lack a means of reviewing how well both groups are complying with the partnership framework. There should be consequences for non-compliance by either party. Talk these policy issues through with sales and marketing leadership and put them into effect.

A few issues warrant special consideration:

- The speed and cadence of follow-up by the sales development team on Conversation Leads
- The percentage of Conversation Leads that are disqualified, especially those that have bad/missing information or are outside of the target market
- The reason codes and notes related to disqualified Conversation Leads from marketing
- The percentage of Conversation Leads that have no resolution after 15 business days
- Conversion percentage of First Sales Meetings into opportunities
- The elapsed time between the initial meeting with a sales person and a status update in the CRM (generally, this should happen immediately after the call or, at the very least, within one business day)

- Each disqualified meeting or opportunity (a front-line manager should review each one, right away)

- The conversion of Conversation Leads to Closed-Won deals.

Obviously, there are many areas for review, but making sure to check on the above areas will help you spot most problems quickly and resolve them.

For example, in the event the sales development rep does not understand why a sales person has disqualified an opportunity, management can review and arbitrate. Sometimes this outcome might lead to a group training session for the sales development team, the sales team, or a clarification of the definition of an Conversation Lead and an First Sales Meeting.

For this reason, the revenue roundtables should be available to quickly rule on changes and should review the Service Level Agreement each quarter to improve it, based upon the experience of the teams.

It’s important that everyone understands that partnership between sales and marketing is an ongoing commitment and that both parties need to work in good faith to help each other succeed. Success will be a learning process, with continuous refinements.

About LeadCrunch[ai]

The Problems We Solve

Despite technology advancements, even the best marketing teams get very low conversion rates throughout the funnel. Plus, most marketing teams must argue constantly to get revenue credit for marketing influenced leads. Conflicts with sales over lead volume and lead quality are never ending.

These problems stem from B2B complexity. B2B buying behavior involves multiple stakeholders, evolving buying criteria, and an elongated consideration cycle. The sales and marketing tech stack has thus far only increased this complexity.

Our Experience Design

We think differently about how to find and grow lasting B2B relationships. Scaling relationship development with Artificial Intelligence (AI) necessitates a data model that describes the B2B ecosystem. The data must not be a snapshot in time but a network of everchanging people, ideas, and companies. Mere firmographic models are too inaccurate and simplistic.

Scaling relationship development also means analyzing not just your hand-raisers, who convert infrequently, but your ideal customers. With such profiles, AI can predict who will buy and their buying capacity and buying longevity, not just who will respond.

Because the B2B ecosystem is constantly changing, your marketing model must learn continuously, too. The LeadCrunch always-on AI platform adapts to competitive threats, ideas that are changing market perceptions, and changes to your solution portfolio and business strategy. This continuous learning means tightly integrating content marketing with audience targeting, delivering a stream of proactive insights, and feeding outcomes back into the platform to improve targeting and insights.

Above all else, the design must simplify the complexity and make marketers the new maestros of shareholder value.

Our Services

We make it easy to pilot our AI-driven B2B marketing system. No complicated tech stack integrations. No long-term commitments. Only pay for qualified leads who engage with your content. We can also nurture the leads with your content, identify additional personas within an account for your sales team to engage, or even engage and nurture those additional personas in each account. Each lead is multi-touch verified and guaranteed to meet your campaign criteria and contain valid data.