



Inside Sales Optimization Guide

Increase Quality Leads

EXECUTE AGAINST YOUR GOALS

Best-in-class strategies for driving revenue & reducing cost

As organizations look to drive down the overall cost of sales, optimizing the sales process has become essential. Best-in-class inside sales teams are lean, and fully aligned with corporate objectives. This tightly integrated approach is what makes them agile and positions them for success.

How can your organization reach best-in-class status? Optimizing sales processes can be challenging, but not impossible. This white paper will break down the components of a model inside sales organization including talent, operations, marketing and technology, to uncover key plays you can make to reduce cost and drive revenue.

Define sales roles to prove value

As organizations look to drive down the overall cost of sales, optimizing the sales process has become essential. When it comes to growing new markets or renewing current customers, sales is crucial to driving faster market penetration. To ensure you are poised to make the greatest impact at minimal expense, sales people must play many specialized roles in the sales process. These include:

Lead generation, development, and management. This role tackles the process-driven tasks of prospecting and qualification for deal closing sales reps (e.g. Channel or Inside). This gives the higher compensated reps more time to focus on closing the deal, especially in complex and lengthy sales cycles.

Revenue generation within a defined market segment. Some companies have identified market segments where large volumes of products or services can be sold over the phone. In situations like this, the inside sales team operates on their own, with limited involvement from the field. With the ability to organize the segments by an array of demographic data and leverage tools such as on-line chat and Marketing generated lead funnels, inside sales is equipped to drive results and carry their own quota.

Subscription renewals. In this situation, the sales rep carries a quota for the renewable revenue that can either be associated with a field or inside sales rep, or not. Increasing subscription renewals requires an ongoing strategy around Customer Success – resources that are focused on increasing usage and adoption in a subscription environment. This includes an ongoing cadence of touch points with customers, understanding what they like and don't like about the service, leveraging a value nurturing strategy, and determining ways that value can be improved over time by incorporating customer feedback.

Identifying distinct functions within the sales organization ensures that contributions to goals are measurable, predictable and scalable. Whether driving market share or achieving a lower cost of sale, defined roles help illustrate the value of education within the company.

Better results come from better talent:

Exceptional sales people are not easy to find. Top sales organizations implement programs to recruit and retain only the best talent which drives the best results. Here are a few things to consider when building a best-in-class sales team:

Environment:

Quality sales people do not have the time or patience to deal with undefined processes. Ensure you've identified roles and responsibilities for each member of the team with clear performance expectations. Strike a balance between the numbers of managers to sales reps. Simple sales processes should have a higher ratio than organizations with more complex sales programs. For on-boarding, implement training programs that will effectively train your sales team on products, markets and processes with limited ramp time. Then support growth and advancement with career path options aligned to personal and professional goals.

Compensation:

Compensation should reflect elements that the sales person can control and the results achieved based on key corporate metrics. Offer reward and recognition programs to increase motivation and earning potential.

To maximize the results of an individual or a team, create a competitive team atmosphere where sales reps are driven to outperform personal and group goals. It is important that the rep acknowledge performance objectives and understand how they control those objectives.

Align sales & marketing through automation

Improve lead quality and increase revenue with well-aligned sales and marketing teams. However, many organizations struggle with building and maintaining this alignment.

Best-in-class organizations establish alignment by assessing quantitative and qualitative aspects. On the quantitative side, teams build personal relationships and respect by taking a vested interest in each other's responsibilities. Sales becomes more involved in marketing planning discussions and early stage lead nurturing communication processes while marketing takes active roles in sales forecasting and QBRs. Shared responsibility and engagement brings the teams closer and makes each more dependent upon the other.

The quantitative aspect is often the most interesting as it deals directly with metrics. However, it is important to understand that both sales and marketing must agree on lead qualification characteristics, lead scores and lead hand-off processes before establishing measurable goals and accountability. When it comes to the metrics, reports tracking pipeline generated by marketing are the most important, followed by customer retention/renewal, cross-sell and upsell as the customer lifecycle matures.

The need to accumulate and accurately track lead scores, lead qualification and lead to sales conversion requires more than a new operational workflow and an excel spreadsheet. True alignment requires integration at all levels, including CRM and other necessary technologies. This is where marketing automation proves real value. When implemented and managed correctly, marketing automation programs simplify lead qualification and automate the lead hand-off process. Then track marketing effectiveness with lead to opportunity conversion, as well as opportunity to closed won/lost business to prove campaign contribution to the bottom line. With that much capability, it is easy to see why marketing automation programs have become a must-have for any best-in-class company.

Invest in technology to drive efficiency & maximize productivity

Technology is essential to maintaining a lean and agile sales organization. However, the systems and tools must be properly implemented to create efficiency and improve productivity. Without proper implementation, sales reps can feel burdened by process changes that lead to low adoption and utilization of the tool, which translates to lost time and money in the long run. When well implemented throughout the sales organization, technology can simplify account and opportunity management and provide more accurate insight into forecasts.

Best-in-class education sales organizations are continuously investing in technology to help them improve. Here are some basic solutions top-notch sales teams cannot operate without:

A company-wide CRM: A CRM should be accessible by all employees who have a hand in the sales process. This tool should be used to map workflows and track processes. When executed and managed correctly, this tool will:

- Give accurate visibility into pipeline, forecasts, and velocity
- Log necessary data for market insight
- Simplify reporting with real-time dashboards
- Help Operations teams with better execution for a total quality experience

A Learning Management System (LMS): This helps standardize and expedite the learning process. Student records are tracked from onboarding to advanced learning to ensure necessary skills are taught and retained.

Sales call tracking: This should track inbound/outbound call volumes as well as time on call and abandon rates. Having this data empowers the sales team to assess staffing needs more accurately, identify underperformers faster and provide analysis to determine the success of the sales model.

Prospect intelligence: These tools offer additional data on prospective accounts that can be of value to the inside sales rep prior to calling. Often these programs can supply competitive information, company financials, industry trends and more—all of which can help to facilitate more rewarding sales calls.

Online collaboration tools: Online tools like shared drives and ‘wikis’ provide a place to store important documentation—like workflows, procedures, or templates—and can be accessible to as many people as necessary. However, tools like this are only as good as the resources stored on them. To be most effective, assign dedicated Content Owners who are knowledgeable in sales processes to manage content development and updates.

Marketing automation: As mentioned in the previous section, marketing automation is a must-have for any organization looking to grow revenue through sales and marketing alignment. This tool can streamline the lead qualification process and hand-off better quality leads to sales—all while tracking marketing campaign contribution to closed business. Like many of the other tools listed above, the success of marketing automation is dependent largely on the processes and people responsible for managing it. Appoint administrators and process owners who have experience managing complex workflows and understand the intricacies of working with both sales and marketing.

Success Through Cross-Functional Teams

Best-in-class sales organizations utilize a number of processes and technologies to make them successful. However, it’s important to point out that no organization achieves or maintains best-in-class status without the help of many cross-functional teams.

From sales rep recruitment strategies to marketing alignment and technological investments, there’s a lot to accomplish. Without the involvement of people experienced in leading, managing and executing these initiatives, the sales organization lessens its ability to be successful. In the end, top-notch sales organizations must align with internal and external resources to effectively lower costs and drive revenue growth.

Next Steps

We’ve identified three of the most popular and costly education marketing mistakes, and devised some creative ways to avoid them. [Read the White Paper.](#)