

A GUIDE TO SALES PIPELINE OPTIMIZATION

Pipeline management is a key factor in sales success. A sales pipeline management strategy is critical for evaluating and improving the sales process to close more deals. A bigger pipeline is not necessarily a better pipeline – the ideal pipeline is filled with high-quality opportunities.

Not every company has optimized their sales pipelines, and they may be following opportunities that ultimately are a waste of time and effort. How, then, can sales representatives ensure they're making the most of their leads and opportunities? First, it's essential to dissect the sales pipeline as a whole.

CHECK YOUR FUNNEL DESIGN

The best companies set employees up for success by setting a plan according to data and analysis. Strong organizations measure inputs – a representative's sales pipeline or time spent prospecting, for instance – as well as outputs. Additionally, companies shouldn't ignore functions outside of sales, such as R&D, human resources, accounting, and finance. It's important to consider: Are other teams efficiently utilizing their time spent assisting the sales function?



~46%

of representatives receive data insights on whether or not a customer is likely to buy



76%

of B2B buyers want content that speaks directly to their company



75%

of B2B lead generation strategies focus on improving the quality of leads

UPGRADE YOUR OPERATIONS

To prevent the pipeline from shrinking, it's crucial to focus on pipeline flow, ultimately creating more opportunities won than lost. Are leads stalling in specific stages? Companies should look at the average sales cycle both by individual employees and as an aggregate. Addressing those problems will lead to more success.



27%

of sales teams spend up to an hour performing data entry and other manual tasks



20%+

of sales operations teams develop strategic plans and priorities



68%

of marketers believe their sales team isn't leveraging marketing content to its full potential

It's worth considering automation within lead management. Lead-nurturing emails boost conversion rates. When this is done automatically – for instance, when an email is sent after downloading a piece of content – leads are more likely to respond positively. This allows both sales and marketing teams to focus on bigger priorities, resulting in smoother operations across the company. However, marketing automation is only useful when done right, which means tailoring thoughtful content directed at the individual audience versus distributing blanket and generic messages.

MEASURE AND EVALUATE

Regularly measuring a sales cycle can ensure whether teams are closing opportunities quickly. Decision makers should look beyond monthly lagging indicators (revenue and profit) and consider leading indicators.

For example: “Proposals submitted” is a lagging indicator, while “customers requesting proposals to review together” is a leading indicator. The latter is a measure of customer commitment and engagement. Not every organization will have the same set of metrics, and it may take most businesses a few tweaks before getting to the right spot, but it's a worthwhile investment.



30.6%

of organizations don't use leading and lagging indicators consistently



60%

of organizations track customer satisfaction metrics, like their net promoter score (NPS)



28%

of companies view marketing automation as critical to lead generation

Consider asking former leads – now customers – what they thought of the sales process and the content they were provided. Would they change anything? Listen to the organization's executives as well. If they noticed a gap or obstacle in the pipeline, give them the opportunity to share areas for improvement. It's important to remember that it's impossible for sales representatives to close 100% of all deals.