Nutshell

Sales Pipeline: The Complete Training Guide

Perfecting your sales pipeline provides the scaffolding your sales team needs to do the real work of building customer relationships and driving business growth.

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Before You Begin

Your company's sales pipeline is a critical part of its success. Every potential customer goes through your pipeline, and the better you plan and structure the path they take, the more you increase the chances of a won deal.

The 13 lessons in this training guide will provide you and your team with the tools you need to build an effective sales pipeline. By following the steps outlined below, you'll set your sales team up to optimize every opportunity that comes their way and reap the rewards of a calculated sales pipeline.

> Remember: Optimizing your sales pipeline will take collaboration, communication, and lots of work. Sales processes aren't a one-size-fits-all affair. What works best for another business may not be what propels your team's growth, and one approach will resonate better for some customers and industries than others.

Chapter 1:

Buying in

The importance of effective sales pipeline training

Every company has a sales pipeline, though some are more efficient than others. Whether you're a one-person sales team using a series of reminder sticky notes on your desk or you're part of a large team with years of experience working leads through a detailed pipeline, one thing is the same: the more effort you put into optimizing your pipeline, the more success you'll have.

Your sales pipeline is a visual representation of every stage a prospect goes through on their way to becoming a customer and every action your team takes to get them there. And sales success is dependent on how well you can anticipate and meet your prospects' needs at every stage.

It's a process that takes time, attention to detail, and a customer-centered mindset.

> The good news? Everything in this sales pipeline training guide can help any sales team reach higher levels of sales success, like increasing the flow of prospects through your pipeline and closing bigger deals.

Benefits of sales pipeline training

You may think that some sales representatives just have "it"—the secret sauce of sales success—and some don't. While the strategies outlined in this training guide might come more naturally for some reps than others, the reality is that every sales representative has what it takes to improve their sales pipeline management skills.

Here are a few benefits of sales pipeline training:

More effective sales representatives

If your sales team is spending time and effort on activities that aren't ultimately leading to sales, it's a sign your pipeline isn't working as it should. By honing in on the most valuable activities, assigning ownership of leads, and standardizing the sales process, your sales team can make better use of their time and become more effective sellers.

Increasing your profit margins

A highly effective sales pipeline generates a high number of valuable sales for a relatively low cost. If your average cost for a lead is $400, but half of your leads are slipping through your pipeline, you're spending too much money on the wrong leads. Stopping leaks in your pipeline helps you protect your profit.

Better use of resources

Your company's resources are limited. Training your sales team to use an efficient sales pipeline helps them prioritize the activities and tasks most likely to result in a sale and helps your business invest in the tools you need to succeed.

Improved planning and forecasting

Sales is a constant game of readjusting to see what strategy works best. Your team may be selling more to a specific customer segment than the one you initially focused on, or your sales cycle is consistently taking longer than expected. Keeping an eye on changes like these in your sales pipeline helps you plan ahead based on how your sales process is actually working, not how you wish it were.

Higher revenue

At the end of the day, the way you manage your sales pipeline directly impacts your bottom line. Knowing the best places to spend your time and resources to make the most valuable sales revolutionizes your sales approach and grows your business like never before.

Chapter 2:

Pipeline Stages

Perfect your pipeline stages

The first step in building an effective sales pipeline is outlining your pipeline stages, the phases prospects go through from your first conversation to signing the contract. Defining pipeline stages gives your sales reps a clear visual of where prospects are in the buying process and what it will take to close the deal.

Designing pipeline stages gives your reps the same path to follow, saves time during the selling process, and prevents anyone from putting the cart before the horse. You wouldn't want to send a proposal to a lead without identifying the stakeholders who will make the buying decision.

Example sales pipeline stage

There are many potential stages you could include in your pipeline. Many pipelines follow this general path:

1. **Qualify**
   Often, the first stage involves determining whether a prospect is a good fit for your company's products or services. If the lead has needs you can't fulfill or doesn't have the budget for your offerings, now's a good time to move on to a better prospect.

2. **Pitch**
   In the pitching stage, a sales rep demonstrates why their products or services can solve the prospect's problems or provide value. This is the phase where reps address any objections the prospect may have.

3. **Close**
   And finally, closing—the most exciting part of the sales process. It's when a prospect converts to a customer and signs on the dotted line. At this point, sales representatives may still need to manage the delivery of the product or the customer might be passed off to the customer success team.

The stages above are the bare bones of an effective sales pipeline. Pipelines can have any number of stages depending on your industry, company, offerings, and customer needs. A few other examples include:

- Prospecting
- Review incoming leads
- Make an initial phone call
- Determine key stakeholders
- Research prospect
- Deliver proposal
- Pass customer to onboarding or customer success team
- Oversee order fulfillment
- Complete post-sale check-in
- Schedule additional follow-ups

Steps to outlining your company's pipeline stages

So, how do you know which sales pipeline stages will actually fit your business? Follow these steps to get to the bottom of your ideal sales pipeline:

1. Consider your customers' needs

Base your sales pipeline stages on your typical buyer's journey to ensure you meet their needs in each stage and keep the sale moving forward.

Do customers test several solutions before selecting the one that best meets their needs? Are in-person or virtual demos of the product important for decision-makers? Determine the thought processes and needs that drive your ideal customer's purchase decision.

2. Start with what you have

Your current sales pipeline is a great starting point, even if you're not using a formal pipeline right now.

Has your team found that identifying and looping in other stakeholders in the very first conversation sets the lead up for greater success? What's the ideal length of time after the sale to follow up or attempt a cross-sell?

3. Get feedback

In outlining your ideal sales pipeline stages, make sure to consult the rest of your sales team. Your team should agree on the stages you've outlined and ensure they work for various sales scenarios.

4. Create documentation

Finally, document your sales pipeline stages closely, so your team can consistently work prospects through the same process. A pipeline roadmap will also help you train new sales reps on your company's best practices.

Chapter 3:

Activity-Based Selling

The key to a more effective pipeline: activity-based selling

Just because a lead enters a particular stage of your pipeline doesn't mean they'll make it to the next one on their own. It's a sales representative's job to say and do the right things to work the lead forward through each stage, hopefully with a closed-won result.

But how? **The answer: activity-based sales.**

Activity-based sales, or next-action selling, is a sales methodology that focuses more on the actions salespeople take to advance their leads than the desired outcome itself. Why does focusing on activities over outcomes matter? Because when you focus on the activities that really drive results, you're more likely to win the sale.

Sales activities will vary greatly depending on your industry and customer needs. But when you nail down exactly which activities work best for convincing leads to take the next step and can then repeat those activities for every opportunity, you've hit the sales jackpot.

Define your most important activities

Getting started with activity-based sales requires some planning. You'll need to consider what goals you want sales reps and leads to accomplish in each stage of your pipeline.

But you can't control everything that happens during the sales process, least of all how your leads will act. All you can do is set your team up for success by helping them focus on the actions within their power that will make the most significant impact on sales success.

Start by defining which activities sales reps should focus on to get leads from point A to point B. These activities should be:

- **Specific:** "Complete a sales call with key stakeholders where you discuss available solutions and pricing" is a better sales activity than "Make a call." It provides team members with specific guidelines for completing the activity.
- **Measurable:** The example above also gives team members a measurement of success. Logging the sales call successfully completes the activity. An activity that would be impossible to measure would be "convince the prospect to buy our solution."
- **Proactive:** Good sales activities are also proactive rather than reactive. Being proactive helps your team stay on the offense and keep the prospect moving down the funnel.
- **Timed:** Give sales activities a timeline to keep everyone involved accountable and prevent deals from slipping through the cracks.

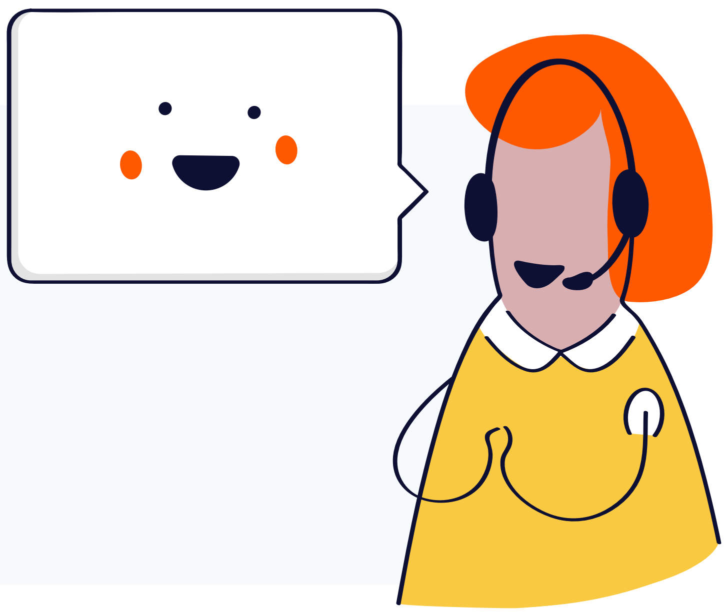
Steps to outlining your company's pipeline stages

Now that you know what makes a good sales activity, think about the activities your reps take right now to nurture leads into customers. These actions are a good starting point for improving your recipe for success.

The best sales activities will also directly address your ideal customers' needs. Are your leads considering multiple solutions or products and need time to compare their options? Do they need to see your product in action before making a buying decision? Be sure to include sales activities that answer your leads' questions and ease their concerns.

Activities could include:

- Making a phone call to discuss pricing options
- Sending an email to request a follow-up meeting
- Identifying stakeholders to loop them in on an email thread
- Scheduling a sales demo for key decision-makers



Set activities for each stage

Now that you have an outline of your pipeline stages, you can use your team's current process to assign activities to each sales pipeline stage.

Pipeline stages could include multiple sales activities across channels, like phone calls, emails, virtual meetings, and more. Just make sure that every activity your reps take in each pipeline stage is tailored to moving the lead to the next stage.

> For example, if you want to move leads from the pitch stage to closing, you might want to schedule activities like completing a sales demo and sending periodic email reminders about the sale—but not handing the lead over to your onboarding team.

Every activity you assign to a pipeline stage should have one goal: convincing the lead to take the next step on their journey.

At this point in your sales pipeline training, you have a detailed sales pipeline that improves your current sales process. It is filled with specific activities designed to move leads through your funnel. You've done a lot of the prep for optimizing your sales pipeline. Keep up the good work!

Chapter 4:

Taking Ownership

Assigning leads and activities to work more efficiently

You've determined what stages prospects need to go through and which actions your sales team should complete to make it happen. With your sales pipeline stages outlined and filled with the sales activities that fit your company's needs, you're on your way to working more high-value leads through your pipeline.

Now is an excellent time to get more granular. Before you start filling your pipeline with more leads, your team needs a clear idea of who's taking ownership of what so everyone can work more efficiently, create a better customer experience, and stay on top of every potential sale.

Tips for assigning ownership

What factors should influence how you assign prospects to your sales reps? Follow these tips to get started:

1. **Score your leads first**
   If you've never heard of lead scoring, now is an excellent time to get started. Lead scoring is the process of assigning value to a lead based on its priority. You might score leads based on factors like:

   - The lead's value
   - Expressed interest in your products/behavior
   - Industry/company type
   - Geographic location
   - Whether the company is an ideal customer

   Lead scoring can help your team prioritize leads when there are too many coming into your pipeline. For example, you might decide to assign leads with the highest scores first and work your way down.

2. **Build on your team's strengths**

   You could assign leads to your salespeople randomly. Or you could use each person's strengths to give all your opportunities the best chance of closing.

   Everyone on your sales team has different talents, weaknesses, and past experiences, making them better suited for working with different leads and customers. Depending on the size of your team and the types of customers you sell to, routing leads to specific salespeople can be a smart move.

   For example, your more experienced reps may be the best people to handle high-value customers. Or if a salesperson is located in a particular city, you might want to send all leads within a 30-mile radius to that rep instead of someone who lives farther away.

   You may even be able to use automation to distribute leads to your teams based on specific characteristics, like industry or company size.

3. **Route to the right sales process**

   Many businesses send all their opportunities through a single sales team and process. This often works for smaller companies, but if you sell multiple kinds of products or services, your leads might need to go through various sales processes. You may even need to create numerous pipelines to help your team keep track of every opportunity.

   Make sure to send prospects to the sales team or pipeline that suits their needs best. This might depend on your lead's geographic location, interests, value, and other factors.

4. **Plan for reassignment**

   You may need to reassign a lead at some point for any number of reasons. Creating a protocol for that scenario before it happens can help your team avoid surprises.

   For smaller sales teams, it might make sense to reassign leads randomly to your other sales reps so everyone's workload increases equally. You might also consider a lead's value or industry before reassigning it to the team member who typically handles similar opportunities.

Focus on the big picture

When it comes to your sales team taking ownership of their leads, don't miss the forest for the trees. However you decide to assign opportunities to your sales reps, the point is to ensure everyone knows which prospects and activities they're responsible for working on.

When you assign ownership to your salespeople, you ensure that no leads get the runaround from your sales team and that every sales rep works in sync to keep opportunities flowing. Win-win!

Chapter 5:

Fill Your Pipeline

Increasing the flow of leads into your sales pipeline

Now, your sales team has a clear roadmap for engaging prospects from first contact to closing, understands every action to take to move prospects through the funnel, and knows who's in charge of which leads. It's time to open the floodgates and watch new leads pour into your pipeline!

This chapter begins a series of lessons on everything you need to know to fill your sales pipeline with the high-quality leads that are most likely to close.

> Keep in mind that filling your pipeline with leads requires trial and error, and some strategies will work better for your business than others. This series of lessons will give you a solid foundation that you can adapt to your company's needs and tweak over time for the best results.

Turning on the tap

To keep up the flow of leads in your sales pipeline, you need a few tools under your belt. Lead generation isn't one-size-fits-all, but knowing some proven approaches will help you find what results in the most leads for your business.

Here are a few of the best-loved lead generation strategies and some pointers as you get started:

1. **Know your prospects**
   Moving a prospect from the first stage of your pipeline to the next requires targeted communication and good communication demands that you know your audience.

   Spend some time researching your prospects and ideal customers to determine their needs and concerns. Understand where they are in the buying process by the time you get in touch with them so you can develop a plan for nurturing them effectively.

   If your business sells to multiple customer segments, create buyer personas to help you nail the messaging for each one.

2. **Utilize email**

Email is an incredibly powerful tool for generating leads. With an email marketing platform, marketing teams can create and manage email marketing campaigns targeted to precise customer segments.

Invest in an email marketing tool with features such as automated drip sequences, an AI writing assistant, and click tracking and notifications to get the most out of your platform.

3. **Be creative**

Sure, you'll always have cold calls and outbound emails. And those have their place. But don't discount the power of creativity when generating leads.

There are many ways to reach your company's audience, from asking for referrals to launching a partnership program. Think of creative ways to connect with your ideal customers.

4. **Circle back**

A lot can change in six months to a year. Leads that slipped out of your pipeline months ago or those that ultimately went with a competitor can also be good sources of new leads.

Keep in touch with those prospects and circle back to them to check in and see if their current solution meets their needs. You might be able to convince them to give your business another look.

5. **Deliver value**

Leads don't want to feel like leads—they want to feel valued and respected. Any salesperson who makes a lead feel like just another number for their sales quota won't get a second call.

Deliver value to make your leads feel important. Whether you post informative blog content, create downloadable resources, or record engaging videos about your services, provide prospects and website visitors with valuable information when they visit your site or engage with your team. Offering these resources or even a free trial or coupon code demonstrates that your team cares about helping customers thrive.

6. **Go digital**

Digital marketing and search engine optimization (SEO) are highly effective ways to generate leads. Digital marketing teams work with clients to develop and run personalized ad and marketing campaigns that drive conversions, improve website traffic, and boost revenue.

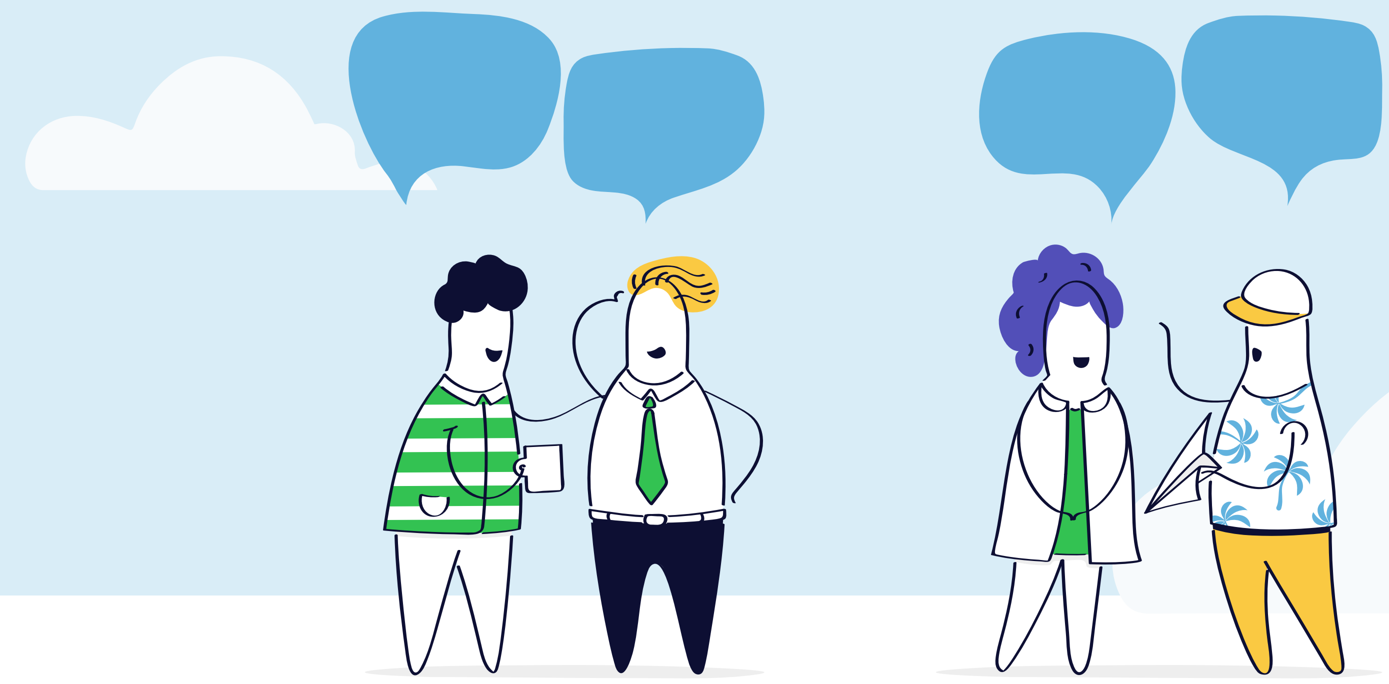
Your company needs an effective digital marketing strategy to stay relevant in today's digital world. Research digital marketing agencies to find a solution that fits your needs and budget.

7. **Use automation**

Finally, tools like a customer relationship management platform (CRM) can be used to automate certain aspects of lead generation. You can automatically assign leads to specific sales reps, move leads through your pipeline once they meet particular goals, and adjust lead scores based on behavior.

Chapter 6:

Connecting Pipelines



Juggling multiple sales pipelines

Not all customers take the same buyer's journey. Once they buy your various products or services, they might encounter different obstacles, achieve other goals, and even end up at different destinations.

We mentioned it earlier: you might discover that to give your customer segments the best possible experience in your sales funnel, you need to walk them through different sets of pipeline stages and activities.

Building multiple pipelines designed for different use cases can be an effective way to give prospects the best experience in your pipeline and optimize their chance of converting into customers.

For example, maybe you sell products to domestic and international markets or have vastly different sales cycles for various customer segments. These examples (and many others) are great use cases for multiple sales pipelines.

If multiple sales pipelines sound helpful for your business, keep reading to learn how to implement them in your sales process.

- **Segment leads into different pipelines**
  If you use multiple pipelines, it's important to segment customers into the right pipeline to keep all your leads organized. You can segment leads by characteristics like:

  - Stage in your sales process
  - Length of sales cycle
  - Type of product or service
  - Company size
  - Lead value
  - Order size
  - Market

- **Structure pipelines for the right segment**
  Next, make sure each pipeline is tailored specifically to the customer segment it serves. After all, the point of using multiple pipelines is to work leads through a sales process designed to meet their unique needs.

  Consider your different segments and what actions work best to convert them into customers. For example, a customer segment with a longer sales cycle may need more frequent communication from your sales team to keep them from slipping out of the funnel.

- **Consider how leads reach you**
  Another element of using multiple sales pipelines is how leads enter that pipeline in the first place. If you have a pipeline for customer referrals, you may start with a qualification stage instead of a prospecting stage, as these leads have already reached out to your team.

- **Measure each pipeline's success**
  You'll also want to track the metrics of each pipeline's success. It's important to track key performance indicators (KPIs) like conversion rate, number of sales activities, sales cycle length, and lead response time for all of your pipelines and compare them with each other. That way, you can see where your strategies might need improvement.

  We'll cover this in more depth in a later chapter.

- **Review your pipelines often**
  It's a good idea to review your pipelines and their metrics frequently to spot opportunities for updates. Remember that the stages and activities you include in your pipelines aren't set in stone—you can adjust them as prospects' needs change.

  For instance, you may find that routing leads based on the products they're interested in makes more sense than routing them based on their market. Only you and your team can make these decisions, so stay open to feedback from your sales reps about how your pipelines are performing.

  When you've mastered the balancing act of managing multiple pipelines, you can multiply your team's efforts, target customer segments more effectively, and boost your sales numbers.

Chapter 7:

Plugging Holes

Sealing pipeline leaks

Getting more leads into the front end of your sales pipeline is one thing—but keeping them moving smoothly through every stage is another. As you track your pipeline's conversion rate, you might notice a leak or two that's leaving your sales reps with fewer opportunities as they get further down the funnel.

And the thing is, these leaks can be sneaky. You might not get the chance to ask a lead why they suddenly stopped responding to your outreach, so how do you know what kept them from taking the next step?

Strategies for increasing pipeline conversion rates

Not everyone in the world will buy from your business. And that's ok—but by following the strategies below, you can find the people who are more likely to so you can focus your efforts in the right places.

1. **Attract your ideal customer**
   Those buyer personas you created earlier? Use them as a guiding light for how your sales reps should engage in cold outreach and how your marketing team should target prospects. If your product is one of the higher-priced solutions on the market, customers with small budgets aren't your ideal customers.

   Find ways to attract prospects that fit your ideal customer profile so your team doesn't waste time on those who aren't the right fit. If you consistently attract the wrong customers, analyze your marketing and lead generation efforts and tweak them.

2. **Work with the right people**
   Once you contact a lead, get your product or service in front of the right people at the company. You need to identify decision-makers with the knowledge and ability to take the next step down the funnel instead of spending all your time engaging with people who don't ultimately have a say in the purchase.

3. Track salesperson productivity

Your sales reps work hard to bring in new deals for your company. Tracking their daily productivity is a great way to help them improve their skills and maximize their time.

For example, if a rep spends half their day writing cold outreach emails, they won't be able to do other important tasks like calling leads and conducting demos. They may be able to use email automation to put more time back into their week and focus on the activities that really help move deals.

Track the number and type of activities your sales team completes each day, then zero in on individual salespeople's accomplishments. You'll be able to visualize which activities move the needle and where your reps can simplify.

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4. Analyze lost deals

You may not always get the chance to hear why a deal went through. But when you do, take advantage of the opportunity to learn why the prospect went in another direction. Reflect on questions like:

- What were the factors that led to the prospect’s decision?
- What was the ultimate dealbreaker for the prospect?
- How did they articulate the value their choice provides?
- Were there any key decision-makers you weren’t in touch with?

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5. Locate the leak

The pipeline stage, where you're losing the most leads, can tell you a lot about how to increase your conversion rate. For each pipeline stage, we've compiled a list of the possible causes of a pipeline leak—and how you can plug them.

- **Qualification:** If leads aren’t making it past the qualification stage, you might need to redefine “lead” or take a hard look at your lead generation process.
- **Meeting:** If leads are meeting with your reps but have yet to move any further, focus meetings more on identifying and filling your prospect's needs than singing your product's praises.
- **Proposal:** You might need to brush up on your sales pitch skills or spend more time getting to know your prospects if they’re balking at the proposal stage.

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6. Know the most about your prospects

Part of increasing your conversion rate is showing leads that you know their business needs inside and out and then demonstrating that your products and services are the best solution for those needs.

And if you can do that better than your competitors, you display the care for your prospects and attention to detail that can make all the difference.

Chapter 8:

Boosting Momentum

Shortening time to conversion

In this chapter, we'll cover conversion times and how to build momentum in your sales process to keep deals moving smoothly down the pipeline.

What’s the best length of time a prospect should consider their options before making a purchasing decision about your product or service?

The answer could depend on a lot of factors. But however long a prospect takes to decide, the time shouldn’t be totally up to them. Your sales team needs to play an active role in encouraging a faster decision.

Here, you’ll learn a few methods for increasing the momentum of deals in your pipeline.

Create urgency

If your prospect feels like they have all the time in the world, you can create urgency for them by offering a discount to help move them along.

Just be sure that you’re not being too urgent. Telling a prospect on Wednesday that they’ll get a discount if they sign the contract by the end of the week is likely unrealistic—and will almost certainly annoy them. Be respectfully persistent rather than pushy.

Keep in touch

Following up is critical in sales. If you leave your prospects to reach back out to you, you risk letting your solution slip from their minds in the bustle of everyday responsibilities. And when a competitor swoops in and shows the buyer the attention they deserve, they’ll walk away and never look back.

Remembering to stay in touch with every lead can be challenging but crucial for success. Use whatever kind of calendar or CRM software you need to keep follow-up reminders front and center for your team.

Be consistent

A disorganized and haphazard sales process is bound to leave some leads in the lurch. Consistency is key to building and maintaining momentum.

Here's where pipeline stage activities and goals can really shine. Every stage should have a goal: book the next meeting, provide the right resources, and set a date for a demo. Being consistent and goal-oriented will help your team remember follow-ups and encourage forward movement.

Chapter 9:

Eliminate Congestion

Emptying your pipeline of bad leads

Sometimes, the best thing you can do for your pipeline is to flush it out. It might seem backward to newbies, but the sales pros know it's true. Holding on to every possible opportunity can result in wasted time—both yours and your prospect's. Instead, it's a good idea to regularly empty your pipeline of deals that don't quite fit.

In this chapter, we'll focus on learning how and when to rid your sales pipeline of any clogs.

Quality over quantity

To optimize your pipeline, you need to focus on quality over quantity. Having 1,000 leads in your pipeline that aren't likely to convert is worse than having 500 that are. Why? Because your team will end up spreading themselves too thin and letting opportunities fall through the cracks.

How do you know if a lead isn't high-quality? Compare it with your ideal customer profile. If their needs don't fit your solution, their budget is too small, or they're in the wrong market, politely wish them the best.

Know when to step back

You don't want to spend weeks communicating with a lead only to discover that your solution is way out of their budget. That's why the qualifying stage is so important and why it needs to happen early on in the sales process.

If you find out early on that a customer isn't a good fit for your product or service, don't pretend they are. The lead will appreciate you being honest. You may even be able to maintain the relationship in case future opportunities open up.

Remember your sales cycle

Consider whether a lead fits into your sales cycle when deciding whether to keep working on it. If a prospect says they aren't ready to make a purchase this month or this quarter but will after that, you might need to flush them. They could be taking valuable resources that would be better spent somewhere else.

Perform pipeline audits

It's a smart move to periodically review what's in your pipeline to check for congestion. Has a lead not gotten back with their sales rep in several weeks? Has your team logged several unanswered phone calls and unopened emails? That's a sign the lead is dead.

A pipeline audit can help you catch and either revive or remove these dead leads. Do this as often as it makes sense for your team and sales cycle, and you'll be on your way to an even healthier pipeline.

Plan for the future

Did a lead look particularly promising but fail to progress through your pipeline? They might be a good candidate for a follow-up pipeline.

A follow-up pipeline aims to reengage with lost opportunities. Activities in this type of pipeline could include sending a closed-lost survey or scheduling a follow-up call.

Chapter 10:
Pipeline Management

Best practices for managing your leads

With your pipeline all set up and bringing in plenty of leads for your sales team to work with, your team is poised for success. But there are a few more lessons to learn. And one of the most important is pipeline management.

As you probably know by now, sales pipelines won't manage themselves. They take lots of planning, consideration, and continuous refinement. Knowing some pipeline management strategies helps you improve your lead management process and keep leads flowing smoothly.

Here are some of the best practices we've learned from our pipeline management experience:

1. **Tailor communication for each pipeline stage**
   You wouldn't put all your current and potential customers in the same email blast list, would you? That tactic won't help you achieve your goal of nurturing each of your opportunities toward a sale.

   Email automation is an incredibly helpful tool for this. By automatically putting contacts into the correct email list for their needs, you can steadily nurture the relationship with perfectly timed messages designed to encourage leads to take the next step.

2. **Make time for prospecting**
   Your salespeople might feel pressure to spend all their time completing activities like responding to emails, making phone calls, hosting demos, and fine-tuning proposals. But remember to make time to actually reel in those leads in the first place.

3. **Ensure your data is correct**
   It's absolutely vital that your sales data is correct. Sales reps need a single source of truth for all their information about leads, deals, and customers.

   A CRM is the best option for organizing your customer and lead data. A good CRM can save your team time, ensure incoming data is standardized, and help you view where every lead is in your pipeline so you know what to do next to move them along.

Some CRMs also have features like email marketing tools, web form builders, landing page builders, and more, helping you generate new leads, too.

4. **Use reporting dashboards**
Pipeline management is much easier with an effective reporting tool. Sales and funnel reports give you insight into your pipeline's health, helping you track where leads are getting stalled, how your team is performing, how many new leads are flowing in, and so much more.

5. **Take advantage of automation**
Automation tools help keep your team focused on the most valuable tasks. By automating certain activities, you can ensure consistency across your business and help sales reps manage their time better.

The right automation tool will let you put tasks like these on autopilot:

- Sending personal email sequences
- Scoring leads
- Moving leads through your pipeline
- Assigning leads to sales reps

6. **Offer help**
Even when speaking to your sales team about purchasing your product or service, leads don't want to feel like they're just another customer. Make leads feel valued by offering the help they need to make a decision.

Is a decision-maker hung up on a particular aspect of your product? Provide them with a document, slide deck, or video your team has prepared that answers their question. Is price an issue? Give them a discount or free trial. Consider what you can provide to increase trust.

7. **Strengthen the relationship between departments**
A successful business breaks down siloes between sales, marketing, customer success, and support departments to ensure everyone is working toward common goals. Regularly meet with the heads of other departments to boost collaboration between teams.

The Numbers

Measuring your sales pipeline's success

Sales success is measured by numbers. Whether it's new leads generated or sales won this month, your business needs to keep a finger on the pulse of its sales success by tracking metrics.

With good sales tracking practices, you and your team can identify what activities are working, which need improvement, and even forecast what's ahead.

What should you track?

The metrics you need to track depend on your company's needs and goals. Some of the most critical are:

- **New leads:** The number of new leads in a given period
- **Close rate:** The percentage of leads that become customers
- **Sales cycle length:** The length of time between first contact and winning the deal
- **Average purchase value:** The average amount customers spend in one transaction
- **Total sales and sales per rep:** A measure of sales team and individual rep performance
- **Customer acquisition cost:** How much it costs to gain a new customer
- **Number of sales activities:** The number of activities each salesperson completes per sale
- **Lead response time:** The time it takes for a lead to respond to each communication

How to track sales pipeline metrics accurately

Keep a few things in mind when tracking sales metrics to make sure your numbers are right:

Define terms

What exactly counts as a sales activity for your business? Defining terms is essential when tracking numbers like number of sales activities or sales per rep.

Use the right tools

Calculating sales metrics can be dizzying unless you're using the right tools. Make sure your team has the right software, such as a reporting tool, CRM, and integrations with other tools in your tech stack, to make pipeline tracking easy.

Assign metric tracking

It’s also a good idea to put a handful of people in charge of tracking essential sales pipeline metrics. Having multiple people checking the numbers helps prevent mistakes and keeps everyone on track.

Chapter 12:

Pick the Right CRM

Supply your team with the best tools

You've reached the end of this sales pipeline training course! Congratulations! You've learned how to:

- Set the proper pipeline stages for your business
- Fill each pipeline stage with focused, goal-oriented activities
- Assign ownership and improve sales team buy-in
- Generate more high-quality leads for your pipeline
- Juggle multiple pipelines for different customer segments
- Keep your pipeline clean of bad leads
- Manage your pipelines effectively

Using the right software, like a CRM, can make all the difference when completing these tasks. But so many CRMs fail to walk sales teams through their pipelines in a way that's easy to understand and shows them which actions to take next to nurture leads into customers and champions for their business.

Nutshell is the all-in-one CRM that helps sales and marketing teams close more deals. And with next-action selling baked in, Nutshell gives you control over your sales pipelines so your team knows exactly what they need to do next to nourish each lead, wherever it is in the pipeline.

Nutshell includes powerful features that help boost sales success, including:

Sales automation
Reduce time-wasting tasks, provide your team with sales pipeline guidance, and put email outreach on autopilot.

Contact management
Keep all your contact data in the same location, record every conversation, and pin important notes to each customer's page.

Pipeline management
View leads how you work best, use laser-focused filters to zero in on specific customers, save filtered lists for future reference, and share them with your team.

Reporting and analytics
Customize reports from your sales data to identify areas of opportunity, then download presentation-ready charts.

Team collaboration
Get your whole team in your CRM for less, keep conversations front and center, get help from your team when you need it, receive notifications of new sales, and track everything in the Nutshell mobile app.

Email tools
Benefit from email sync, automate personal email sequences, use Nutshell's email templates, and integrate with email marketing tools.

Email marketing
Send newsletters and broadcasts using Nutshell's email designer, create email audiences from your CRM contacts, automatically trigger multi-email sequences, and perfect your messaging with A/B testing.

Intelligent form and landing page building
Design beautiful, high-converting web forms and landing pages using Nutshell's drag-and-drop builders.

Powerful insights
Pinpoint the right point of contact, discover who's visiting your website, and enrich your data with Nutshell's robust web analytics.

Meeting scheduler
Plan and manage bookings from Nutshell, share virtual meeting links with attendees or on your website, automate booking confirmation messages, and co-host meetings with team members.

Artificial intelligence
Generate email content, quickly summarize customer relationships, and summarize virtual meeting transcriptions.

And more!

Nutshell features reasonably priced paid plans and add-ons to help your team elevate their productivity and generate more revenue. Plus, you can try it for 14 days for free.

Want to see Nutshell in action for yourself?

SIGN UP FOR YOUR FREE TRIAL