

Getting Organized with Sales

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Sales reps report that only 31% of leads meet their ideal customer profile; but they follow up on over 70%.

We have several teams in our company. Each team leader is responsible for bringing in business for their team. Each team does its own lead follow up. Most of us don't put much information about sales activity down on paper. Every once in awhile we cross paths with the same leads. Last week we had a discussion about where everybody was, and what to expect for the rest of the year. Some people didn't have as much in their forecasts as we all expected. I think things have to improve, but I'm not sure how to do it. If we don't get more organized, the second half of this year could be brutal.

Insuring tools are in place so that everyone can share and support everyone else would be a good next step. Building a process to strategically pick and pursue accounts would also be helpful. Documenting what's going on, who's doing what, will cut down on surprises.

The good news is that this company has already built teams and assigned responsibilities for sales. Those are important first steps in building a sales driven company. But it's going to take organization and intention to hit goals going forward. Step in with a sales management plan to get things whipped into shape.

Work backwards from the outcomes - sales, to the inputs - sales inquiries, initial introductions to decision makers, information gathering, pricing discussions, proposals confirming offers. Do the math: how much activity is required overall in order to hit the desired number of closes.

For example, let's say on average 10 inquiries lead to 7 introductions to decision makers, and 5 leads that complete an information gathering process. After 4 pricing discussions, 3 companies accept proposals, and 1 closes. So it takes 10 leads, 7 decision maker introductions, 5 at the information gathering stage, 4 discussing prices, and 3 proposals to get 1 sale. Multiply by the total number of sales needed. If the goal is 10 sales, it will take 100 leads, 70 decision maker contacts, 50 prospects providing information, 40 pricing discussions and 30 proposals.

Create specific individual and team goals. Put them in writing. Make sure individual goals add up to, or exceed, the total of what's needed at each stage to hit the company's overall sales goal.

Track individual activity in excel, or in a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. Make reporting on activity mandatory. Spend some time on analysis. Figure out who's on track, who needs help, at which stage.

Develop best practices. Look at who's getting the highest and fastest conversion rates at each stage. Discuss what everyone can do to replicate those results.

Most sales people report that 30%+ of the leads that close come from their own efforts, and another 30% - 40% of closes probably come indirectly from their prospecting efforts. In other words, sales people are most invested in the leads they generate.

How can you help sales people generate more leads? Make a list of demographics that separate out the company's targets from the universe in general. Look for a database that identifies individuals or companies by those demographics. Decide how to carve up the database so that people aren't stepping on each other's toes.

Agree on a standard approach process. Do the people on the teams send out a letter, followed up by a phone call? Do they go to trade shows to pick up leads? How about connecting with targets via LinkedIn? Whatever is agreed, make each person responsible for his or her own approach. Remember, commitment to follow up is generally greater if people work to get the lead.

Keep a database of all active prospects, indicating who in the company is in charge of the lead. If a lead surfaces that isn't assigned, add it to the list, give it to someone, track the follow through. If leads in the database are sitting dormant, re-assign them to see if mixing things up can get them moving.

Looking for a good book? Topgrading For Sales: World-Class Methods to Interview, Hire, and Coach Top Sales Representatives, by Bradford Smart and Greg Alexander.

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