

White Paper

Managing Key Accounts to Maximize Sales Results

*Adding Business Acumen, Strategy and
Plan Implementation to the Selling Process.*

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The problem with sales is...

"You don't close a sale; you open a relationship if you want to build a long-term, successful enterprise."

- Patricia Fripp

Far too often we get caught up in the "deal". How do we close it? How do we win? In this age of Web 2.0 and Sales 2.0, we as sales people really should be focusing even more than ever on the challenges presented in our prospects' lives and businesses. I know, we have been taught to find the need, cure the pain, and solve the problem. However, prospects know every technique that we have. They have been sold before. As I am fond of saying; "This ain't my first rodeo". And it isn't theirs either.

So what do we do? We become better **business** people. We become part of the solution. We become a person that the prospect wants to see since we should be able to help. So... How do we do that?

Let's start with the prospect. She knows as much about your service and product when you meet than ever before. The abundance of information on the Internet is staggering. The prospect can not only have details of your offering, but may have already read what others have said about you, if not spoken to someone personally. With tools like Linked In, Zoom Info, and Google, no one is more than a couple of degrees away from someone else. We have to not only understand that, but embrace it. How?

1. Know what they can find out about us. Good or bad, be prepared to discuss it in a matter of fact way.
2. Know as much as possible about their business. Take the 10 – 15 minutes to find out about the company, their history, their goals, and their mission.
3. Know as much as possible about the person you are calling on. There is no excuse for not doing a simple Google search on the person you are trying to sell. Try Linked In, Zoom Info, and Facebook.
4. Have a plan. There is nothing more frustrating for a prospect than a sales person that doesn't quite know where to go next, or what the next steps should be, or bothers to find out what her next steps should be
5. Be real. Remember the TV commercial a few years back with a cardboard cut-out of the sales person... Don't be that. We're human, go with it.

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While we could spend pages on each of these bullets, let's focus on becoming better business people by creating a strategic account plan. This is a fairly straight forward process, and frankly I may say things you already know. In fact, the process is simple. However, Simple does NOT equal Easy. Let's get started. You probably want to use Excel or Word to capture your thoughts.

In order to make the best use of this paper, you should have the following expectations:

1. Set aside dedicated time to answer the questions. Setting aside dedicated time will assure that you can focus on the issues and information that will make your plan more complete. Some questions may not apply to your business or product, but the concepts apply almost universally. You should plan on 2 - 4 hours of time to create a good plan. (2 hours with software, 4-5 without)
2. A plan will not automatically make you more successful. If you don't act on the plan, you will have the same results that you have been having. Those results may be excellent, if not, let's try and change that.
3. Update this document regularly. Once a month or once a quarter you should be looking at editing the plan to take into account all of the things that occur that we don't plan for.
4. Complete the plan in the same order that it is laid out. Feel free to go back and re-edit as needed.
5. All of this is preparing you to a) penetrate more organizations and b) crush your number.

We wish you the very best of luck and hope that you will be as absolutely successful as possible. If you want to comment and talk about sales and the challenges that you face or successes that you have had, join the conversation the Plan 2 Win Sales Success Blog at www.plan2winsoftware.com/successblog/.

Start at 30,000 feet

Start with an overview of this account. What do they do? Are they being impacted by changes in their industry? Is there anything in your region that is impacting this account? What initiatives have been detailed?

According to CSO Insights, 47.9% of sales leaders were dissatisfied with their sales team's research and analysis efforts.

The goal of this section is to analyze the account in terms of their business. You need to know well what they do, how they do it and what is affecting their business. How would you describe their business? "They make cars." Really? What kind of cars? What markets and demographic do they serve? How do they deal with import export?

Next, what is happening that affects their business? How are they dealing with fuel prices? Government regulation? Labor unions? Some of these issues you can help with some you may not, but you need to understand the dynamic in the account. The more you know, the more likely you will be to win the deal.

Before you can start looking at the new business, look at your geography or vertical. Is there anything in the region that is impacting their business? Think of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Think of businesses that served the southeast. That event was a major impact. What is affecting their geography?

Next, what has management said that they are looking to accomplish in the next quarter or fiscal year? If this is a public company, the annual report and 10-Q from the SEC are excellent sources for information. Public marketing literature, their web site, and the message from the CEO are all great sources of good information about initiatives.

What have they bought already? Not just from you but from your competitors and other suppliers. Past history is a good indicator of future behavior. Do they always buy at the end of the quarter? Do they always commit and then send it to purchasing to get a better deal? These habits will impact your ability to close the account when you think it should and to forecast the account accurately.

Develop a Strategy

Now look at the account in relation to the entire territory. How much should this account be worth? Who are your relationships and what are their roles? Do you have a technical buyer? Decision Maker? User? Economic Buyer?

In relation to your overall territory goal, what percentage is this account going to represent? If this account is 2% of your number then you should spend 2% of your time on the deal. Of course, during the time which you are trying to win the deal that number may be much higher. However, this is something that you must keep in mind as you plan your strategy and time. What is my ROTI? (my Return On Time Invested)

Next, choose a close date. Pick a date that is reasonable, but aggressive. This is the date you will need to work backward from in order to accomplish all of the steps necessary to close the deal. Think of it this way. I leave on vacation on a flight Thursday morning at 7:00 AM. I need my passport from the safe deposit box, traveler checks, and my laundry from the dry cleaner. I can't do all of that on Thursday morning. I have to plan backwards making sure I get the passport, make it to the travel office for checks, and the dry cleaner for my clothes. My week then gets planned accordingly. The same thing should occur with this account. Plan the day you want it to close and work backwards to complete all of the steps. Even if you get a no, and lose the deal, losing sooner is better since you are able to move on to another prospect.

Next, what should they be buying from you? Based on what you know about the account and the dynamics in the account, make an educated presumption and use that to plan how to approach them.

Lastly, think about the people in the account. What is your relationship with each of them? What is their title and what role do they play? Inside organizations individuals play buying roles. They may be the user buyer, the technical buyer, the economic buyer, or the decision maker. Rate the relationship. A rating of 5 is someone that invites you to his daughter's wedding. A rating of -5 gets you a restraining order. While that is an exaggeration, you get the idea. There are very few 5's and very few -5's. Of course your goal is to get the relationship as close to a 5 as possible. Now write a brief bio of the person.

Expand Your Strategy

In sales we talk about Pain. What is the pain that you see in each of the people you deal with? That is to say, what is their critical business issue? What are the budget and the budget process and how do they make decisions here? How do you plan to win?

You have to identify the critical issues that you think this account is dealing with. You also have to identify the person that is dealing with the issue. Different people may be dealing with different business issues, and in different ways. One issue may impact different people in different ways causing a different reaction. What are the impact and the issues?

This is where you will win or lose this account!

Next, think about the budget and the way that this organization deals with allocating budget. How much do you know about the budget process, amounts, timing, and ownership? Does the budgeting process align with your decided close date? If not, change it.

Next, discuss the decision process. Rarely does one individual make a decision without input. While one person may be the decision maker, who will he or she bring into the process? Who will insert themselves into the process? Why will they make a decision? Why wouldn't they make a decision?

I have always said that there are 4 questions that have to be answered:

1. **Why?** Why would they do business with me?
2. **Why not?** Why wouldn't they decide to use me? (and what am I going to do about it?)
3. **How much?** How much are they willing to spend to do whatever it is that we are talking about?
4. **When?** When will they do this? How important the issue is, will determine how quickly they decide to solve it.

Lastly, based all you have entered so far, what is your high level strategy for this account? Who and how will you go through the process of closing this account? What relationships are needed?

Good Guys and Bad Guys

Now take a look at why and why not. Why will they buy this Quarter? Why would they NOT buy? That is a Red Flag. What else is a red flag? Who are the players? On a scale, how do you rank your relationships?

Start this section with their viewpoint. From their perspective, why would they make a decision this quarter? What compelling reasons are there for them to act? What compelling reasons can you help them find to act sooner rather than later?

Now think about Red Flags. What is a red flag? Anything that you notice in the account or in the interaction with the individuals that you deal with that makes you uneasy can be considered a red flag. Trust your gut. What else do you not have? Is there a relationship or introduction you can't get? Are you "single threaded"? Which means do you have only one contact? These are all red flags and issues you need to develop a plan to solve.

There are 4 types of buyers in any account. As we mentioned, these roles perform different parts of any organizations due diligence. This may be 4 different people or 10 different people. One person may have 2 roles to play in the deal. Our job is to determine who they are and what role they are playing at any given time. These roles are:

1. **Decision maker** – He who can sign on the line which is dotted!
2. **Technical buyer** – Most people think of an IT department or CTO. However, a Lawyer is a technical buyer. As the corporate counsel looks at your Terms and conditions, she is looking at it as a technical buyer.
3. **User buyer** – This person has the most to gain or lose by implementing your "solution". They however may have the least amount of say. They can, very often, have VETO power. Just don't confuse a "not no" with a "yes". Users can not say "yes".
4. **Economic buyer or Financial buyer** – This person is looking at the spend, the ROI, the TCO, and the overall budget. They always have VETO power, and can often say "yes" too.

Now rank your relationship with these players on a scale of -5 to +5.

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

***What are they currently doing / using and who else is in the account?
What have you accomplished already and who do you compete
against? How well do you know the competition and how to win?***

Take a look at their current situation. What are they currently using? What infrastructure is in place that will impact what and how you sell to them? Are there current applications or technologies in place that will impact your deal? Are there consultants or system integrators in the account already? Do you have channel partners in the account that can help or hurt your deal?

Until now there may have been activities that have already occurred. If so, what are they? Maybe an introductory meeting has occurred, or a demonstration or trial has taken place. When did it occur and what was the result?

In order to produce a complete plan, you **have** to know who you are competing against. How well do you know your competition? What is their strength? What are they good at and how well do they compete against you and your product or service? Does the competition have any weaknesses? What are they and can you exploit them? Don't forget that "no decision" can be a competitor, as well as internal business groups.

How do you plan to compete against whatever competition you have identified in the account? Maybe it is a side by side comparison. You may need to have better relationships. Determine the best way to neutralize your competition and then build an action plan to execute.

Put one foot in front of the other

What are the steps to close and how many have been taken? Have they committed to the sales process? What internal resources do you need to close this account? What steps are required to move forward?

As we go through a sales cycle, we as sales people and our prospects all make commitments. What have they committed to? What have we committed to? Maybe we committed to do a demo if they would commit to having all of the right people in the room for the demonstration. Maybe they committed to having a site visit, or an executive level meeting. List these.

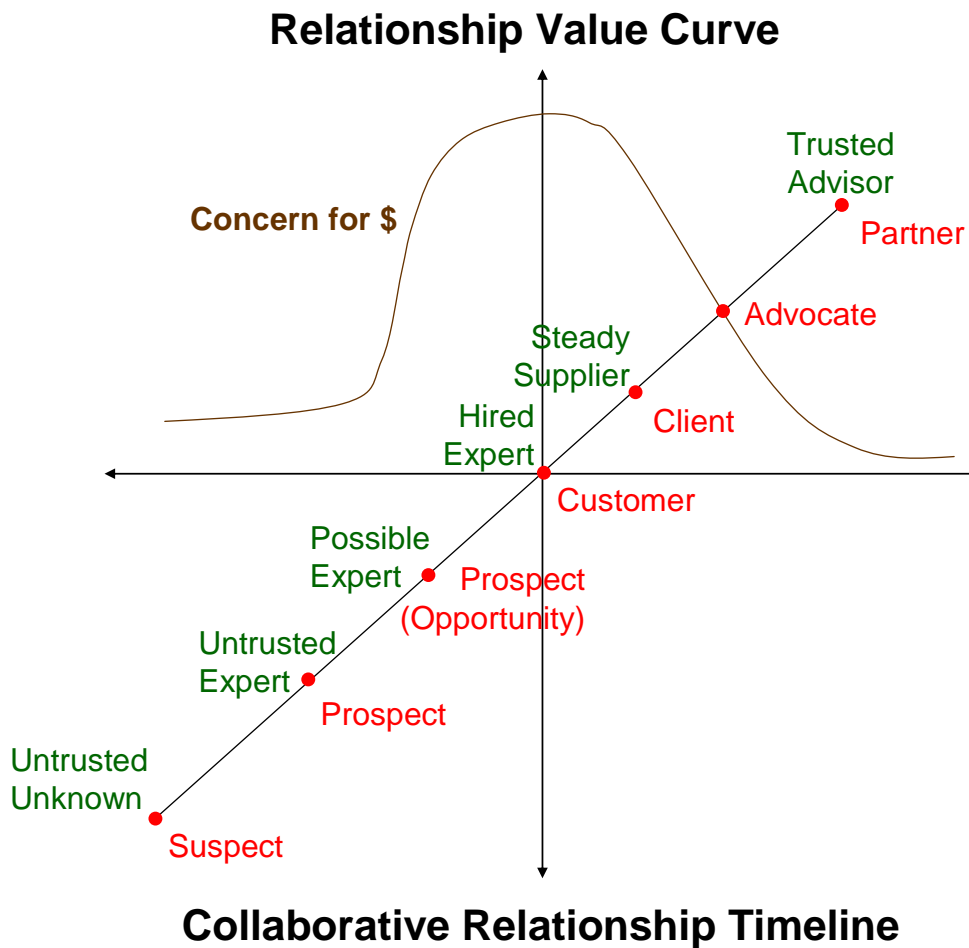
What commitments do we want in place but do not have? We should always be thinking about what the next commitment from them will be. This may be as small as a meeting or a conference call, but the true qualification comes from whether they are willing to commit to a course of action that may eventually end in a sale. Our job is to a) make it WORTH their time and investment and b) remind them that they *committed*.

In order to close a large deal, most of us need to engage resources within our own organization. What resources do you need on this account? Who is this and what role do you need them to play? When do you need this resource and what action is required?

Lastly, think about the sales steps that that you need to accomplish in order to move this account forward and to a successful close. Who do you need to interact with and what does that look like? In other words, what meetings, calls, and emails need to occur and by when? Capture that here and make sure you have a due date.

It's about People!

I always remind myself of that phrase. Look at the Curve below. The green labels are how our customers see us. The red is how we see them. The higher we go up to the right, the more Trust they have in us. The more they trust us the less money is a factor.



This is based on research by the Harvard Business School. Executives and anyone who makes buying decisions, base these decisions on trust. They have to trust that their decision will a) solve the problem they are looking to solve, and b) they have to trust the person that they are buying from. This “trust curve” works through a very predictable path. As we look at and qualify our targets, we see them first as (in red) Suspects, then as Prospects, and then as Qualified Prospects. They become labeled as such based on our

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interaction with them. However, from the prospect's side of the table (in Green), they have to establish trust and rapport with us first. They are looking first for an expert. They have a specific issue that they want to solve. When we first approach someone, we are neither trusted nor known. Our first challenge is to become known. Then we can begin building enough trust to be viewed as a possible expert.

Notice the red line labeled as "Concern for \$". There is little concern about what you charge early on in the relationship. This is because they do not know you or trust you enough to be concerned with what you charge. When prospects bring up money early on, they are typically just trying to weed you out of the process.

Once a prospect has decided to buy from you, you have passed the threshold to become an expert for hire. In other words, they are looking for a specific solution. They have now become a customer. It is not until the second and third purchase that they become a client, and you become a steady supplier. Eventually, both you and they become advocates. That is to say, they speak positively about you and your product in the marketplace, and you speak positively about them. The highest form of flattery is to become a trusted advisor. At this point, you view them as a partner and your businesses are intertwined to some degree.

So now, choose the accounts with which you have a relationship established. How do we view the relationship? Where on the curve do we think we are?

Next, where so they think we are? This requires honesty on our part. It also requires understanding that organizations are made up of people. One person may think of us one way, yet another will think of us another way.

90 Day Action Plan

Build a plan based on the information you have entered. What do you need to do and by when? What step in the process are you at, and what priority is this action. Be specific and add time frames with specific dates.

This step is possibly the most important one in the process. Based on all of the thinking and information you have entered, you now need to create a 90 day plan of action. Here you need to enter all of the actions and activities that will make you successful at making the number of sales and quota numbers that were entered at the very beginning.

The most efficient way to create this plan is by person. That is, enter all of the activities that you believe you should do, with the soonest activity first starting with each person. Then follow with each additional person. You will need to enter a due date and priority. Then you can group the activities by timing.

Take your time and enter all that you need. Remember, the priority of any given action is determined by any other on which it relies. In other words, closing the deal is high priority, but you can't do that without a first meeting, or a demo, or whatever is involved in your particular sales process.

Pull it all together as a Narrative

Based on what you have entered and the actions you have created, talk about your plan. How will you reach your goal and close this account? What will get in the way? Who will help? Be specific.

This is where you tie everything together and write your full plan. This will probably be the part of your plan that someone else will see, so write it that way! This should really start with the overview. For Example:

"ABC Company is a \$5 billion manufacturer of sportswear. They are currently going through some significant changes due to the new competition in the TWEEN market from both domestic and off shore companies. Last year they spent \$250,000 on eco-friendly dye for their clothing line. This year there is a commitment to fully use non-polluting sources in their manufacturing. However, green dye is more costly than the traditional chemistry so it is unclear if the executive team is ready to fully move their process into 100% green dye. "

Now walk yourself through the plan. Which existing relationships will be positive to buy and why? What new relationships will be targeted... these people are on the list because... You plan on using the following partners because...

The action plan and this narrative can help you focus your time and perform activities that are going to be the most productive. Remember, the goal is to create a plan you can follow and will lead to more sales and more commissions.

This process should be revisited every 30 days to update the plan. New people join your prospect. Your allies move on to other jobs. Your detractors get promoted. You have to account for these factors when you redo your Account Plan.

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About Plan 2 Win Software

Plan 2 Win Software was founded by sales veterans and former VP Sales. We saw that Sales Force Automation Systems needed territory sales strategy and key account planning tools.

Plan 2 Win provides software and sales methods that enable sales people to develop insightful territory and account strategies and plans. This enables sales teams to fill their funnel with better prospects, make better use of their time and resources and produce better results!

Our sales planning applications enable the user to capture key trends in the industry, vertical market and geography. Sales reps, then, develop strategies, identify target accounts, business opportunities and partners to leverage and develop action plans to grow their business.

The plans are perfect for Quarterly Business Reviews (QBRs) and strategic account reviews. Sales management is able to review progress and help implement plans successfully.

Our method is simple. Our software and sales training methods push sales people to think strategically about how to penetrate their sales territories and key accounts.

Visit us at www.plan2winsoftware.com and on the app exchange at: <http://bit.ly/hPTdDT> (territory planning) and <http://bit.ly/eCZcFR> (account planning) and our blog www.plan2winsoftware.com/successblog/. The planning tool is integrated with Salesforce.com.

