

White Paper

A Manager's Guide to Account Planning

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Manager's Guide to Key Account Planning

It's a tool. Make it a Solution!

In response to the ever-increasing pressure to increase revenues and grow business, sales managers are in search of solutions to help them meet sales growth expectations.

CRM systems have proliferated as the platform of choice by sales leaders and those responsible for revenue growth for improving sales performance. Although Salesforce.com (SFDC) has become the de facto standard in CRM systems used for sales performance improvement, different organizations use different CRMs.

We must remind ourselves that the CRM is a great tool for managing many things. However, for example, SFDC does not provide tools for creating and implementing key account plans.

This guide is written for Sales Managers. It is designed to enable you and your team to create plans within your CRM to manage your key accounts and help you achieve your objectives in those accounts.

When a professional sales manager uses the platform of choice with a specialized tool for account planning then their ability to improve sales results and gain insight into their sales data, is greatly enhanced.

As with any tool, this combination will only be effective in assisting you in meeting revenue objectives if the sales manager knows how best to utilize it. We are not referring to which buttons to click or pull down menus to use, but rather the sales practices for using the app that improve sales performance

A sound sales process for account planning and management is essential for optimizing the effectiveness of the tool in growing account revenues.

Account managers must see that mastering the tool's functionality will improve their sales performance. The account plan is a vital tool for organizing ideas and activities into comprehensive sales strategies for growing and managing their accounts.

Account planning must be integrated into the regular management practices used by the sales manager. It is integral to managing best practices that achieve account success across their teams.

What follows is a guide for implementing account planning best practices to improve sales performance.

The model works. Shape it for your specific business. Use the tool to assist in building strategic account plans and executing them and, in doing so, develop a foundation of trusted relations for continued success with these important accounts. That is the solution!

Manager's Guide to Key Account Planning

A Manager's Guide to Account Planning

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1. Why do Account Planning?

Your most important customers are critical to your success. Research shows that, on average, they are likely to account for 64% of your company's revenues.¹ Further, your best prospects are three times more likely to buy than the bottom 70% of prospects.²

You must maintain, build, and expand revenues from these customers to meet your sales goals. You want to be sure that you have close relationships with these customers so they continue to be your most important customers over the long term.

You need a plan for each of these accounts! You must regularly monitor and adjust your account plans. These customers are too important to not have a clearly defined plan that your sales people commit to execute. You need a plan for each account and a way to prioritize and align sales and operational resources to achieve account objectives.

In a survey, 73% of sales leaders indicate that sales strategy and planning was the greatest sales management lever they had for achieving their sales goals. And 80% of sales leaders rate key account planning as mission critical or very important.³ The message is clear- strategic account planning is essential to success. Focusing on account planning is well worth the effort.

Yet, many sales managers satisfy themselves that having their sales people write a plan for each of their accounts once a year and reviewing it once a quarter as sufficient. It is not. Account planning and the execution of those plans must be an on-going process that you manage actively.

It starts with having a structured thought process about what you want to achieve with each account and how you will do it. You and your sales rep can determine through your interaction, how to leverage your position at each account, overcome obstacles, identify resources to apply and when. Clear communication within your company about each account plan will improve alignment and support.

Business is dynamic. Markets shift. The account plan that you started with is almost certainly going to change. Ensure that you are adjusting each account plan regularly to anticipate and respond to changes.

Why do you need account planning? Without a plan, you are relying on luck... and that is not a good strategy! Account planning is a necessity if you are to meet your long and short-term account goals.

Why then, do managers often resist making it a key element of their sales management process? It takes discipline and commitment. There are a myriad of other sales issues to attend to and address. If focusing on success with your most important customers isn't a priority then what is? As the research demonstrates, effective account planning greatly improves your probability of success!

Footnotes:

1 and 3. [CSO Insights 2013 Sales Performance Optimization Study – Key Trends Analysis](#)

2. [Source: HBR article: "The New Science of Sales Force Productivity"](#)
by Dianne Ledingham, Mark Kovac, Heidi Locke Simon

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2. When is an Account Plan needed?

Not all customers require account plans, but your most important accounts do!

These accounts go by many names – major accounts, strategic accounts, key accounts, focus accounts, target accounts, and others. They represent the accounts where you currently get most of your revenue and accounts (new or current) from whom you want to attain significant new revenue.

Yes, other accounts will generate revenue for you and some attractive deals may present themselves. In the short run, meeting your objectives may come from a larger set of accounts. However, over the longer term, success with your “most important” customers will be the key determining factor of your success as a manager as they produce a large percentage of your revenue.

You'll want to maintain and grow the most important customer relationships you have. Yet, research shows that 41% of companies are struggling to renew business with existing customers.⁴ So, you must have a plan to retain customers and acquire new customers to fuel future growth.

Creating and maintaining a plan takes work. Your objective is to build a “trusted relationship” with these customers that bind you to them – and them to you, at a strategic/deep level. This is not easy to accomplish. It requires thoughtful planning and execution. You must create strategic relationships that are broad enough and deep enough to ensure your importance to the account over time. Your plan must provide the blueprint for achieving your goals and change with the dynamics in the account and selling environment.

Let's consider which accounts are “important.” I'm sure you would start with your largest account, right? Do you believe that the top accounts you currently have will remain among your largest accounts? Do they have significant opportunities for growth? If not, these are accounts you will want to maintain, but they will not help you achieve your growth objectives. You must look for accounts with real growth potential and create plans to win and grow them.

Do you need an account plan for the largest deal you have in your pipeline? Possibly. You may need a plan for winning that deal. However, that customer may not have the growth potential or strategic fit to justify an account plan. How about a plan for an account generating \$0 today? Although they are not generating revenue right now, they may have a great potential for future revenue and thus, require an account plan.

These examples illustrate that selecting the right criteria for determining the strategic importance of an account is a critical best practice. Agreeing on these criteria is an important exercise that should be undertaken. This should include input from account managers and then agreed upon at the leadership level—often including marketing and other functional groups involved in the sales process. These criteria lead to important qualifiers used by sales and marketing.

4. CSO Insights 2013 Sales Performance Optimization Study – Key Trends Analysis

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Once selected, account managers create an account plan for each of the accounts. The account team will focus on those accounts until the goals have been met. Then, new accounts are added to the list.

Wishing for success at these important accounts is not sufficient for winning at these accounts. The account team must invest the time and effort to develop a well thought out account plan. You must keep fine-tuning it to maintain its relevancy to your objectives.

Having a credible account plan, makes it easier to garner the company resources that support your plan to win with these important accounts. The account plan serves as a communication platform between you and your account manager, and from your account manager and you to your company.

Each account plan will evolve as objectives are achieved and new account issues emerge. As it does, you will want to keep the attention of the account manager on establishing a “trusted relationship” with their account and building the value delivered. That’s the goal.

By developing, evolving, and using your account plan, you will be able to build significant long-term revenue from your most important accounts. The process of generating, implementing and fine-tuning strategic account plans is a journey with a rewarding destination.

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3. Who needs to develop Account Plans?

You do!

You need account plans to achieve successes with your sales team, like these:

- Add important new accounts
- Increase wallet share from your current accounts
- Maintain revenue from a breadth of existing accounts
- Win more opportunities- with better margins
- Expand your participation in more departments at your existing accounts
- Improve your executive relationships with your customers
- Attain “trusted” vendor position with more customers
- Oust an incumbent competitor at an important account
- Keep your competitors from gaining a foothold in your key accounts
- Gain strategic advantage in a given vertical segment
- Expand the number of accounts you do business with
- Secure wins for new products or initiatives brought out by your company
- Broaden the base of customers generating significant revenue
- Open new geographical territories
- Increase the number of sales people meeting quota
- Improve support from internal stakeholders to win important business opportunities
- Meet your account and revenue objectives

Salespeople on your team who need to do account planning have the following titles:

- Account Manager or Account Executive
- Senior Account Manager
- Major Account Executive
- Key Account Manager
- Strategic Account Manager
- National Account Manager
- Manager of Named Accounts
- Global Account Manager
- Corporate Account Executive
- Client Relationship Manager
- Strategic or Senior Customer Success Manager

It is important to have a tool to help all of these salespeople on your team to develop account plans. This will shape their thinking about how to win at their accounts. It provides you, the sales manager, a powerful overview of your important accounts, opportunities, and each account manager's performance so you achieve more with your most important accounts.

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4. Organizing Critical Resources

The most critical resource in account planning is the perspective you bring to the process. The focus of account planning is long-term success. Even though most sales managers are driven by the need to meet short-term revenue goals in this activity, you are focusing on the steps you must take over a period of time to achieve bigger, longer-term goals. You want to set in motion a process, starting with the initial account plan, that you will manage to ensure that your sales people achieve their account goals.

Expansive thinking about each account should be applied to the development of the account plan. What MIGHT be possible to achieve with this account over a one, two, or three (or more) year period? Make sure your account managers apply expansive thinking to the establishment of goals in the account plan. The objectives you identify will be established for multi-year goals. Make sure you are reinforcing expansive goal setting coupled with realistic objectives.

It is also important to line up your internal support. Account selling is a team sport.

Now, the rationalization of those objectives....will they be achieved? Why? How?

Here is a partial list of resources available to assist your team in creating plans to achieve account goals:

1. Account information:
 - a. Annual reports
 - b. 10K filings
 - c. Quarterly earnings reports
 - d. Organizational announcements
2. Industry information:
 - a. Industry trends and forecasts reports
 - b. Analysts assessment of key issues in industry
 - c. Competitors in your industry
 - d. Technology direction
 - e. News about the company, key individuals
 - f. Social media comments
3. Company transactions, opportunities, contact information (from Salesforce.com):
 - a. Revenue history
 - b. Backlog of orders
 - c. New identified opportunities
 - d. Key contacts
 - e. Meeting and account call notes
 - f. Documents and presentations
 - g. Chatter threads
 - h. Plan2Win dashboard
 - i. Account status reports/communications

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4. Additional Resources:
 - a. Customer Organization charts
 - b. Sales collateral
 - c. Marketing leads within the account

The Manager's role in this process is to:

1. Make sure sufficient resources are available to your team.
2. Ensure that your account managers are using the resources in developing their account plan.
3. Review the account plan and rationalize it yourself using these data sources and resources.
4. Manage the execution of the account plan.
5. Review account plan progress.
6. Implement a regular schedule of account plan updates and resource refreshes.

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5. What is included in an Account Plan?

Here are the critical elements of an effective account plan.

Goals

What goals are to be achieved in the strategic account over the account plan timeframe?

Pipeline Sufficiency

Do you have enough opportunities in your pipeline at your current win rate to achieve your goals?

SWOT

What are your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats relative to the important account's industry, vertical market, and the technology trends that will impact your success?

Strategies

What are the critical strategies you will employ to achieve your goals?

Tactics

What are the tactics necessary to implement your key strategies?

Action Plan

What are the important action items, people and resources to implement your strategies and tactics?

Opportunities

Which opportunities should you pursue to accomplish your goals? What is your strategy to win them?

Strategic Account Relationships

Who are the key players in the account and how can you build relationships that support your efforts?

Partners

Who are the key partners (formal and informal) you need to leverage to accomplish your goals?

Team Members

Who are the key internal resources you need to work with to execute your plan effectively?

Reports and Dashboards

What information do you need to monitor to respond to changes in the account quickly and effectively?

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6. Seven Primary Account Strategies

Your job as the manager, is to shift the way your team thinks from just focusing on sales activities to win a deal, to thinking strategically about how to penetrate and grow an important account. The account plan provides the means for identifying your account objectives and determining the best strategy for achieving those objectives. As sales manager, you will assist your account managers in deploying the right strategy for the account situation. In addition, it is your responsibility to review and periodically adjust account strategies to new developments within these accounts.

You must ensure that each account plan has the most effective strategy for each situation.

There are 7 basic account strategies. You must analyze your position in the account, the account's needs and competitive situation in implementing each of these, to determine the best approach. The optimal account strategy will be determined by your objectives and your position at a specific account. This gives you the highest probability of success and optimizes your use of time and resources.

One of the account strategies described below will be the primary one you use within an account plan. However, there are situations in which additional strategies are utilized. Sometimes you will apply more than one of the strategies. However, only one will be the primary account strategy.

Primary Account Strategies

1. Defend and Grow
2. Land and Expand
3. Direct Attack
4. Niche
5. Change the Game
6. Maintain and Support
7. Develop Over Time

We discuss each of these strategies in greater depth below.

1. Defend and Grow

When you are established in an account, it is critical to defend your base so that you do not lose account share, future revenue potential and influence in the account. In order to this, you must build on your successes and promote the impact they have had on your customer's business. Further it is important to understand and show how you enable their strategic initiatives, support their internal and external allies, and

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maintain and build strategic relationships - especially with key influencers within the account.

In defending your base, you are establishing a foundation from which you expand your presence and increase your share of wallet (your percentage of the dollars they spend in your area of expertise) at the account. It is important to mount a strategy to expand into other business units, functional areas, and departments as is possible. Keep looking for new projects.

Building and strengthening executive, key decision-maker, and champion contact relationships are important. Invitations to participate in other business opportunities will emerge from having a strong position in the account and solid relationships with these stakeholders within the account.

In some situations, there will be limited opportunity to grow the account. This must be considered when deciding how to prioritize your efforts in that account.

2. Land and Expand

This strategy is used in accounts where you do not have an established position. Here, the objective is to win the first piece of business, creating a foothold in the account, and use that foothold to expand. It is critical to make this installation/use of your product/service successful. You then use this success to expand to other users, business units, functions, departments, etc. in the account. This is a good strategy for subscription model sales.

A number of expansion opportunities may exist in this account. Consider three different "land and expand" scenarios. In one case, the strategy is to land in one area and expand to other instances of the same needs. Another is to sell additional products/services to the same users. A final opportunity is to sell to a different group in the same account.

A central tenant of the expand strategy is to leverage your initial successes. Ensure that early users achieve maximum benefit from your product/service and communicate those wins thereby establishing a strategic position that supports your expansion efforts.

3. Direct Attack

This approach is used for capitalizing on a strong market or technical position or for displacing a competitor. The objective is to take on a competitor and beat them head-on. These scenarios are often highly competitive and resource intensive.

Knowing your account's needs, business goals, and priorities is fundamental to being effective using this strategy. You must have a strong competitive advantage relative to the account's requirements. You must leverage your significant advantage, knowledge of the account and a wide range of resources into an effective account plan to mount a focused attack.

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This is a typical strategy of the market leader; requiring strong market presence or greatly superior product offering. Execution of the account plan is critical to leveraging these advantages. You need high level support within your own company and executive sponsors within the customer. It is important to be preemptive; using speed and precision execution to win the account. Ideally, you want to get in early in the process and take the deal off the table quickly so you can win before the competition has time to execute a counter attack.

4. Niche

The objective is to demonstrate that you are the expert or leading provider of solutions for a specific problem, industry, or vertical market. Here your company and solution address a clearly defined, often narrowly-focused need or problem. You target a specific area within the account, such as one business unit, function, department, or even individual. The account manager must understand the account's organizational structure and engage the key stakeholders in the account.

You must have a very good solution for the target niche. You and your account team must deeply understand the challenges of this niche and demonstrate that you have the right solution and the expertise to help them implement it successfully.

It is especially important here that you have a clear set of qualifying criteria by which you verify that an account meets the target profile. Focus on only those accounts that match your target account profile to manage your resources effectively.

5. Change the Game

Bringing a unique insight on a business issue or industry dynamic to your account will provide the opportunity to "change the game" to your advantage. You change the way your account views their needs and how to solve them. This dramatically builds your credibility as a trusted source of valuable perspective in your domain and weakens your competition's position. Thus, it makes it much easier to become the "preferred provider" of the new problem-solution regardless of your previous position at the account.

This is a good strategy when you have a new technology/approach to solve important problems. Often, the account is not aware of the new approach/solution. Thus, your strategy must focus on changing the way your account thinks about the situation; then you can demonstrate how you solve the problem.

You are trying to change the criteria for decision making by altering the way the account looks at their needs and potential solutions. You must establish a new set of decision criteria that solve the problem better than the old approach and that favor your new solution. You must demonstrate how you can impact their business results more favorably by solving this new problem for them or a known problem in a new way. This establishes you as the "only" choice to meet the new set of criteria; eliminating other alternatives.

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6. Maintain and Support

If you have no significant new growth opportunities or changes have made the account of less strategic importance, then applying substantial resources to win marginal new business opportunities is not justifiable. The account plan must identify how to maintain current business levels without overcommitting your resources pursuing marginal incremental revenue.

Maintaining a good relationship with the account to keep them as a solid customer is a very rational strategy. For example, having them as a reference or a source of a case study will yield benefits for you with other accounts. Your objective is to maintain a reasonable level of business with the most cost effective deployment of resources.

Over time, new opportunities may present themselves. Then, you can change the account strategy- starting from a very strong position.

7. Develop Over Time

In this scenario, the account has potential to be very important to your business in the future. However there is either no compelling event driving the customer to buy now or the current solution is adequately servicing the account. You anticipate having a better chance to win in the not-too-distant future. For example, you may be waiting for a new product/technology to be released.

You position your offering to be the future solution of choice by investing in building relationships and champions at the account now. Over time, you need to build strategic relationships, collect data to support your selling proposition and build the perception of the value you can bring. For example, you may share your product roadmap with them, allow them to give input into product plans and use them as an early test site.

It is important to neutralize current purchasing activity during this developmental period. Make sure your competition doesn't strengthen its position. Further, ensure that the account is satisfied to delay new purchases. You must create a compelling story and have a sponsor within the organization who can convince the rest of the team to "wait" for your better solution or capability to become available.

In Conclusion

Regardless of the account strategy you choose, it is very important that you build an account plan that is aligned to it. Selecting the appropriate strategy, building plans of action and executing them effectively is the key to producing the best results optimizing the use of your time and resources.

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7. Using an Account Planning Template

Plan2Win's Account Plan Pro is an example of an account planning template that enables teams to implement the process below.

(A) Selecting the right template

Naturally, it is important to select a template that will fit the way you sell into your marketplace.

Most sales managers/executives we talk to are looking for:

- Strategic planning at the territory, account and opportunity level. One that enables them to prioritize accounts and opportunities and thus allocate resources effectively.
- A common approach across their team that enables the on-going process of planning and implementation.
- A strategic planning tool built into their CRM.
- An app that is easy to use and learn so they can get up to speed and reap the benefits quickly.
- A tool that supports their sales approach- vs. having to use the vendor's sales methodology.
- Visibility so they can respond as needed and identify and use best practices.
- A template that meets their needs out of the box yet enables some customization.
- A solution that is cost-effective in dollars and training time.

(B) Getting Started

When starting with a new tool/app, there are a few, one-time set-up steps to be taken. We will describe them in this section.

First, ensure that the tool/app is installed in your CRM and the appropriate people have a license assigned to them.

Manager's Use

It is recommended that you create a "sample" account plan. This will give you a deeper understanding of the functionality of the tool and will help you decide how to integrate its use into your sales processes.

Account Manager's Use

A best practice is to have all account managers create at least one comprehensive account plan within the first few days of having access to the tool. Users can create as many account plans as they want.

The account manager's first account plan should be reviewed with the manager. It will ensure a consistent

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use of the app across your account managers. Questions on the “best” use of the template for your team can be addressed during this first review.

Best Practices for Managers

Having clear criteria for which accounts must have a plan created is an important best practice. You should set this up at the onset of using the tool and fine-tune as needed. Examples of criteria for making this determination may include:

- Potential in the short term
- Potential in the long term
- Strategic value, such as opinion leaders and good reference accounts
- Characteristics of accounts
- Vertical markets that you want to develop or penetrate

Based upon the manager's criteria for an account requiring an account plan, each account manager should submit a list of accounts that they propose to create an account plan for. It is important for the manager to understand how the accounts meet the agreed upon criteria or the rationale for making an exception. Through dialogue, the manager and the account manager reach agreement on which accounts should have an account plan. A schedule for creating the plans should also be established.

Initiate an account plan review process with each member of your sales team. These regular reviews will create the opportunity to assess status and modify strategies for account success, using the plan as the basis for these discussions. Use dashboards and reports to complement the manager's account plan reviews. Updates to the account plan should be made prior to and after, each review session.

(C) Creating an Account Plan – The Account Overview

Use

When the account manager creates a new plan, his or her first screen will contain important overview information, including:

- The account sales goal
- The close ratio (percent of opportunities expected to convert to sales in this account)
- Situation overview, including:
 - A description of the account's business
 - Industry trends in the account's business
 - The account's strategic initiatives
- Process information, including:
 - The account's purchase history
 - Their funding and decision processes
 - Commitments needed to move the process forward

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- Your sales approach
- Behaviors and account goals to reach the overall sales goal
- A narrative overview of our plan

As a manager, you may have additional insight into many of these elements. It is therefore essential that you review the plan to offer these insights. Further, you may need to give feedback on whether the amount of detail is appropriate.

The thought process for creating an account plan should flow from top to bottom in the template. Having created the top section of the account plan, which is an overview, it is time to flesh out the plan in the next sections.

Best Practice

It is very helpful to have a sample plan that you distribute to your team as they create their first plan. Be sure to make the plan representative of the typical account situation that your people will encounter. Review it with the team, noting certain critical elements of the plan. Also provide guidance as to what should not or does not need to be included in the plan.

(D) The Account Plan

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Use

In this section, the account manager reflects on the SWOT relative to this account. This is very important, as it prepares the account manager to create powerful strategies to achieve the objectives in the account.

Best Practice

In practice, we have found that it is more important to capture the ideas than to spend too much time deciding if it is placed in the right category; for example, if it should be classified as a strength or opportunity; a weakness or threat. Capturing the critical ideas, however, is important as it guides the thinking in the strategy section.

Strategies

Use

Creating account level strategies is critical to long-term success in the account. This is a place where many account managers come up short and it significantly impacts their results. Remind your account managers that this is intended to be account level strategies, such as:

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- How do you penetrate this account for the first time?
- Which business units or functions to expand into?
- What can be done to build strategic, senior level relationships?
- How do we leverage our partners and network to accomplish our goals?

In the strategy section, the first strategy should highlight the primary, high level approach, such as one of the Seven Primary Account Strategies described in our previous chapter on strategies.

Best Practice

This is an area in which the manager's review will make a big difference. Often, especially for newer account managers, it is good for them to have an example of the type of strategies and tactics that are appropriate for a strategic account plan.

Activities

Use

Ensuring that strategy turns into action is central to accomplishing your goals. The template should remind the account manager to create at least one activity in the CRM for each strategy.

Best Practice

The manager's role is to ensure that the appropriate level of activity is generated and then executed. Your tool should help you to do this. For example, it is very helpful to have the app prompt the account manager to generate follow up action items for each of the major strategies and tactics captured in the plan. Further, it should report on progress on those activities. Further, the app should keep track of the activity history, including the due date, assigned to and last modified date. This enables both the account manager and their management to track progress and course-correct quickly where needed.

Opportunities

The key element of any sales campaign is the opportunity. As such, it is important that management provide criteria for which opportunity should be included in the plan. Potential criteria include:

- Dollar potential - especially short to medium term
- Strategic value
- Fit with your unique selling proposition and capabilities
- Wise use of resources- considering the potential to win
- Ability to leverage or create strategic relationships

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You want to track the sum of open and sum of closed opportunities in the plan. This enables the account manager and anyone reading the plan to observe how the plan is progressing toward the sales goal.

For each opportunity, the account manager generates an opportunity strategy. Needless to say, this is critical to winning complex sales. The opportunity strategy should include the following:

- The account's compelling needs/events
- The product/service being sold
- The account's decision criteria
- Your differentiators/unique capabilities
- The account's decision and funding processes
- Next steps in the sales process

In addition, you want to track the following information:

- Roles of key contacts involved in the opportunity
- Partners engaged in the opportunity
- Products/services being sold

It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that these strategies are well thought out and then implemented.

Relationships

Use

Strategic relationships are essential to penetrating any substantial account. Many account managers may not focus sufficient attention on this area and, as a result, their sales cycles either take longer than they would otherwise or require deeper discounts to win.

The app should provide a Relationships section, which would present the contacts name, title, buying role, your unique value to them and the relationship strategy; providing a good overview of the key, strategic relationships in the account.

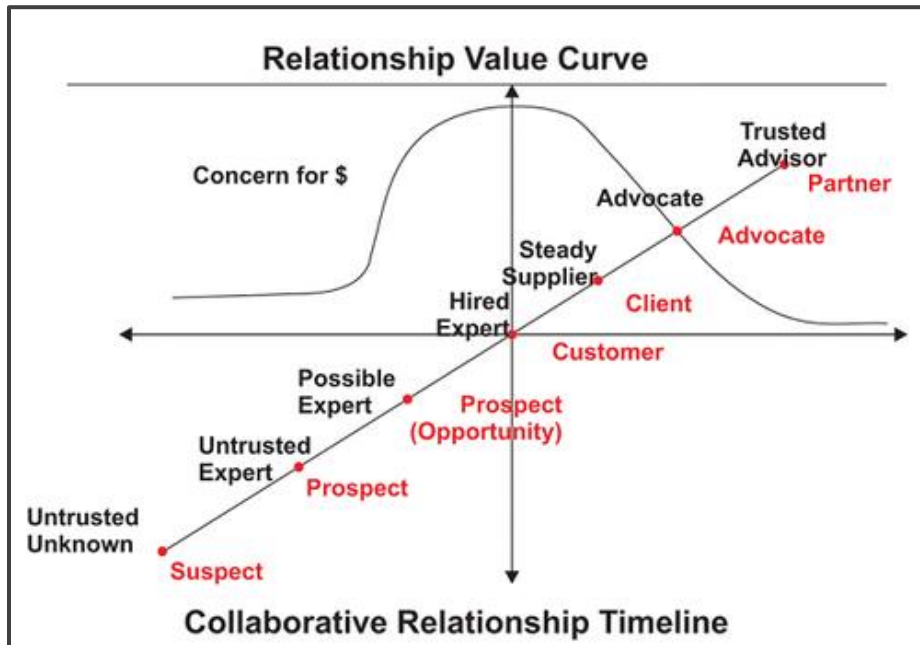
In addition, the account manager needs to analyze and create a relationship strategy. You want to track the progress of the relationship and how it affects the buyer's concern for dollars over the course of the relationship. It gives the account manager the opportunity to reflect on the status of the relationship to develop it further.

The relationship strategy should focus on your unique value to this individual and their focus and influence in the account. With all of this in mind, the account manager articulates the relationship strategy.

The Relationship Value Curve below illustrates the intended progression from both the buyer's and seller's perspective as the relationship grows. It shows how the buyer's price-sensitivity and inclination to seek

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competitive alternatives decreases as they have positive experiences working with your company.



Best Practice

Reviewing this section, you can include additional relationships that you have and relationships that you know other people in your company have to ensure that the relationship strategy is powerful and executable.

Account Team Members

Use

It is critical to ensure that your team uses your limited resources most effectively. Having others available when needed, yet using them in an optimal manner requires planning.

The account plan template enables the account manager to identify the key internal resources and their roles to manage them most effectively. Further, the account manager should be able to assign tasks and events to these team members from within the account plan template.

Best Practice

The manager should advise the account manager on other resources to include in their plan and how to orchestrate the use of these resources. This includes reviewing the team member section and the implementation of associated activities.

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Account Partners

Use

It is not unusual for account managers to miss the opportunity to fully leverage partners and other people in their network could have helped them when specific opportunities and/or further penetrate the account.

The partner section and the account plan partner strategy provide an opportunity for the account manager to decide which key partners to work with, your value to them, their value to you and to articulate the strategy for the joint effort.

Best Practice

The manager should include additional relationships that they have and incorporate strategies that have worked in your marketplace and fine-tune strategies that have not worked in the past.

Plan Approval

Use

It is important that the manager review each account plan. Typically, in larger organizations, it is helpful to have a formal process and to track the approval of each plan. Often in smaller organizations, this level of structure is not required.

The account plan template should provide a section for tracking the approval process, including when the plan was submitted for approval and the approval status (approved, pending approval, rejected, etc.).

Best Practice

In addition to approving plans, it is important that the manager be clear in setting the expectations of what should be included in a complete plan. Also, the manager must establish the frequency with which plans will be reviewed; such as in weekly one-on-one sessions, monthly, or in quarterly reviews.

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Reviewing the Plan

Use

By definition, you are working at a strategic level with an important, high potential account. Reviewing the strategic account plan and the execution thereof is one of the areas in which the manager can make the biggest difference.

Best Practice

Be sure to review the plan upon its creation. This is a good subject for one-on-one reviews. It is important to review progress versus the plan and update the plan on at least a monthly basis. Quarterly strategic account reviews are, of course, also a high impact management activity.

Further, it is appropriate to review the plan prior to each important, visible activity in the account, such as significant meetings which will include senior management from the account, partners and/or your business. This may require sending a copy of the plan to partner or senior management who do not have a copy of tool. The app should enable the account manager to generate and send a copy of the plan to key people.

In addition to reports and dashboards, it is often helpful to have a view of the progression of the plan. This can be done by saving a copy of the plan on a regular (i.e. monthly) basis.

Reports and Dashboards

Use

The app should provide reports and dashboards provide valuable insight into progress versus goals, strategies and activities... at an account and opportunity level. You should also have reports that show progress across the sales process to identify stages in the process in which the team or individuals are having difficulty. Having this insight is, of course, valuable for direct supervisors and senior management. Reports and dashboards should aggregate at the level of the manager, so one can easily see what is going on at their level and below them in the hierarchy. With this insight, managers can decide which individual account plans to review for more detail.

Best Practice

The reports and dashboards must to be useful to the account manager. This provides them the insight they need to identify important next steps and where strategy or implementation needs to be fine-tuned.

In addition, managers should review the appropriate reports on a regular basis. This ensures that you stay on top of changes in the industry and the account, competitive activity and plan implementation.

Here are a few of the reports that we have found to be very helpful to monitor progress versus goals:

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- Comparison of the sales goal to sum of closed opportunities, sum of open opportunities and pipeline gap by account plan
- Comparison of the sales goal to the sum of new sales needed pipeline gap by account plan
- Total opportunity amount by account plan
- Opportunity amount by type of opportunity by account plan
- Summary of key metrics by account plan
- Historic summary of sum of new sales needed, sum of pipeline needed, pipeline gap

Here are a few of the reports that give insight into sales process effectiveness:

- Total opportunity amount by sales stage by account plan
- Average stage duration by account plan

Finally, it is critical to have a report that focuses on progress versus activities that are tied to strategies and tactics.

These reports and the dashboard should be customizable to meet your specific needs.

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8. Sales Manager's Checklist for Quarterly Account Planning

Account planning, reviews and implementation are the foundation of account growth. This checklist provides an overview of sales manager's account planning activities to be performed each quarter.

The focus is to help you achieve your objectives for each of your key accounts and across them as a group. These objectives often include specific account revenue targets, a percent increase in revenue or share of account spend in your product/service area, winning high profile opportunities, net new accounts won, percent increase in business with existing accounts and increase in pipeline.

There are certain activities that will only be performed in the first quarter of using the app/ approach. These are in the set up section. Thereafter, the sales manager implements a repeating set of account planning, review, and implementation each quarter.

Having a process for managing all of the account planning activities is an important best practice that sets world class sales organizations apart from the rest. This process should include what needs to be done each week to ensure the team successfully implements their plans and stays on top of changes in the accounts as they unfold.

There are a few management activities that will not make sense until there has been at least one quarter of use (indicated as "Q2 & beyond").

Best Practices

The sales manager's activity related to account and opportunity management are pursued throughout the entire quarter. The following stages define the primary focus of his account management sales activities during a typical 13 week quarter:

Stage 1: Create and/or update account plans

Stage 2: Review and revise plans of action for each account

Stage 3: Identify and communicate trends and support requirements

Stage 4: Meet with internal organizations and stakeholders

Stage 5: Coach Sales account teams

Stage 6: Target and close key opportunities and account objectives

Stage 7: Close current quarter; Prepare for start of new quarter

In the first quarter, generate account plans for a few key accounts per account manager. With each subsequent quarter, add the next most important accounts.

One of the manager's critical roles is to observe and identify trends, communicate them to the team and

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disseminate guidance to improve the account planning process and results.

We recommend implementing regular quarterly business reviews with customers in each top account. This is a great way to engage key players in the account, understand their strategic initiatives, capture/ resolve issues and accelerate results in the account. In your first quarter of using the app/process, conduct these reviews with a few top accounts and add next most important accounts each quarter.

This Checklist is meant to be a guide. Feel free to adjust it to your business, team size, account manager assignment and calendar. For example, you may want to move the sales meeting suggested in week 4 to week 3 or 5. Further, you may have regularly scheduled sales meetings. The meetings suggested in the checklist are designed to support the account planning and implementation process.

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Manager's Checklist for Account Plan Implementation

Set up

- Set up users in your CRM and assign licenses to each user.
- Sales manager creates a sample account plan to use during user training.
- Establish the focal sections of the account plan or topics that will be reviewed regularly.
- Conduct user training at a sales meeting. Explain account planning process, review sample plan, dashboard and select reports. Set expectation of creating and updating account plans regularly.
- Respond to usage questions quickly so users stay positive about using the app.

Sales Manager's Account Planning Weekly Checklist

Stage 1: Create and/or update account plans

Week 1

- Assess prior quarter's results
 - Review sale results from the previous quarter for each account for which an account plan has been created... Use dashboard and reports.
 - Review reports on usage and trends in key parameters, such as pipeline gap. (Q2 & beyond).
- Identify effective activities and required corrective actions
 - Progress and set-backs identified.
 - Determine the accounts that require creation of account plans or updates and will be reviewed throughout the quarter. Make account plan assignments.
- Create/update plans
 - Update account plans from previous quarter's activities
 - Each account manager to add (at least) one new account plan.

Week 2

- Conduct in-depth review of updates of pre-existing account plans.
- Schedule quarterly business reviews with customers in top accounts. Use reports and other information to prepare for the meeting.
- Align account plans with company strategies and product/market objectives.
- Sales meeting: communicate objectives
 - Communicate quarter's goals and expectations regarding account plan, app usage.
 - Share how account plans have driven activity, results in accounts. (Q2 & beyond).

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Stage 2: Review and revise plans of action for each account

Week 3

- Review account plans that are new this quarter.
- Continue to review updates of pre-existing account plans.
- Check usage report to ensure new account plans are generated and existing plans are updated. Send reminders to appropriate team members.
- From account reviews, synthesize input from the team to disseminate learning to improve the account planning process.
- Schedule and conduct sales calls in targeted accounts. Identify next steps in account, opportunities.
- Account manager updates account plan and opportunity advancement strategy. Review call and coach account manager. Identify next steps to close opportunities- especially this quarter.
- Conduct quarterly customer business reviews. Set quarterly goals. Generate a joint action plan to keep key account members engaged in the process. Continue to schedule and implement customer business reviews over the next few weeks.

Stage 3: Identify and communicate trends and support requirements

Week 4

- Sales meeting: review account planning app, process with the team.
 - What's working: show value of using account plans/the account planning process
 - Review dashboard, usage report and other reports with team.
 - Instruct team to have a complete plan for each per account manager's top 1-3 account (depending on assignment) by the end of week 6.
 - What needs improvement: discuss team's questions. Provide guidance regarding a common challenge across the team.
 - Provide instruction on how to use the app/process effectively.
- Select one important account and review it and reports in 1 on 1 meetings with each account manager. Have account manager update the plan. Inform team members of update.
- Schedule account visit for manager and/or other account "team members." Account manager presents account plan for that account and pre call plan for the meeting prior to the visit. Account manager updates account plan and opportunity strategy. Continue schedule and implement sales calls over the rest of the quarter.

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Stage 4: Meet with internal organizations and stakeholders

Week 5

- For the most critical accounts, review with internal and partner stakeholders, solicit input and solidify engagement. Continue over the next few weeks. Secure support and resources for all or specific account requirements.
- Examine newly revised/ submitted account plans. Provide feedback to account managers.
- Account manager revises plan based on internal stakeholder input. Manager reviews it.
- Manager meets with their management to review status. Use reports and dashboards.
- Update forecast for accounts with plans.

Stage 5: Coach Account teams

Week 6

- Manager supports implementation of account plans; providing guidance and resources as needed.
- Assess sales reports, forecasts. Match to account plans. Send guidance to appropriate account managers, team members, executives.
- Identify accounts on-track and off-track to revenue and other objectives.
- Schedule and conduct account plan reviews on off-track accounts. Involve team members. Discuss challenges. Set action plan. Update account plan.
- Schedule/ conduct account sales calls. Identify next steps. Update plan. Provide coaching.

Week 7

- Sales meeting: mid-course correction
 - Tell the team about your plans to support activities for the rest of the quarter.
 - Share one plan/success story- look for representative account challenges. Account manager discusses how account plan/process has helped drive activity and results.
 - Review a few other account plans- presented by account managers.
 - Review reports on usage, progress on strategic action items with team.
 - Set the number of complete plans per account manager expected by end of week 9.
 - Give feedback to team regarding what needs to be done to meet expectations.
 - Solicit feedback on resources and needs for quarterly implementation of account plan

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Stage 6: Target and close key opportunities and account objectives

Week 8

- Update forecast based on your account plan reviews and reports.
- Conduct account plan reviews on accounts not yet reviewed this quarter or recently updated. Discuss challenges and provide guidance. Identify additional resources required. Set action plan. Update account plan. Inform team members of update.
- Identify focus accounts, opportunities, and meetings needed for quarter close

Week 9

- Check progress on forecasted opportunities and update forecast.
- Review updated account plans. Check reports on progress on strategic action items and progress on goal achievement.
- Meet with account managers to gain consensus on plan of action for quarter close.
- Plan end-of-quarter activities to achieve quarter's account goals.
- Coach or guide account plan implementation with one-on-one meetings with account managers.
- Conduct account meetings and phone calls to close opportunities this quarter. Continue through to the end of the quarter.

Week 10

- Check reports to track progress on end-of-quarter activities in targeted accounts, opportunities. Leverage all available resources. Make course corrections.
- Sales meeting: prepare to close quarter
 - Report on what is needed for quarter close;
 - Check progress on forecasted opportunities.
 - Establish activities required to meet quarterly account objectives.
 - Establish the balance of activities: Identify those account plans and resources than can be deferred to next quarter
- Meet with customer and partner leaders to move account plans forward towards objectives.

Week 11, 12

- Check reports to track progress on end-of-quarter activities in targeted accounts, opportunities. Leverage all available resources. Make course corrections.
- Meet with customers to close important account deals.
- Assign account plan resources to key accounts with significant opportunities.
- Provide leadership team with projection of quarter results.
- Meet with and manage account teams to ensure they are executing on priority quarter closure activities.

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Stage 7: Close quarter

Week 13

- Focus on activities to close target account and target opportunity objectives for quarter and provide support.
- Check reports to track progress on deals to close this quarter.
- Check progress on forecasted opportunities, estimate quarter results and advise management team.

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9. Additional Resources

[Account Planning app](#)

Account Plan Pro is Plan2Win's application that works in Salesforce.com, enabling account managers to create and implement strategic account plans to achieve their goals in their important accounts.

[Territory Planning app](#)

Plan2Win's Territory Plan Pro is an application that works in Salesforce.com, enabling sales people to create and implement a plan to achieve their goals in their territory or vertical market.

[Pre Call Planning app](#)

Plan2Win's Pre Call Planning app template helps sales people be well prepared for a sales call and produce the best possible outcome. It is a free, unsupported application that works in Salesforce.com.

[White Papers](#) on Territory and Account Planning

The White Papers provide a step-by-step guide for generating an effective territory, account plan.

[Our Book](#): "Plan to Win; Strategic Territory and Account Planning"

This book provides an overview of 7 key topics, quotes and exercises for improving your territory and account planning skills and results.

[Sales Management Articles](#) about Territory and Account Planning

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10. [About Plan2Win Software](#)

Plan 2 Win Software provides software applications, consulting and training that enable sales people to generate and execute winning territory and strategic account plans. Instead of *planning* being a quarterly event that is *forgotten*, now that plan is available and top of mind daily- in Salesforce.com. Our Territory and Account Planning applications walk people through the process of generating insightful, actionable plans ideal for Quarterly Business Reviews and strategic account reviews.

This helps sales teams produce better results, including:

- Growing high leverage customers
- Penetrating new accounts
- Improving win ratio
- Shortening sales cycle time
- Increasing average selling price

Our sales planning tools are designed to:

- Work in your CRM (Salesforce.com)
- Enable the sales person to be more effective
- Be straight-forward, easy to use and learn
- Provide insight for the manager and facilitate coaching
- Deliver good value in dollars and training time
- Augment any sales methodology

Here's what people say about our apps...

"These apps transform Salesforce from a data repository into a strategic selling tool."

- Joan Washburn, CEO, sales consultant, former VP of Sales for medical equipment companies

"It's the kind of tool you need to run your business."

- Steve Daniel, Chief Sales Officer of a technology company

"It makes Salesforce a usable tool for salespeople... I can build and manage my plan in it."

- Ed Bronder, Director of Business Development of a medical technology business

"Over each of the last 3 years we have achieved double-digit sales growth. Account Plan Pro has assisted us in applying critical thinking to our account planning process and has contributed to more effective management of our accounts. Adding Account Plan Pro to our broader sales account management process has contributed to our success."

- Dave Thomas, Director of Sales of an Insurance Underwriter

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11. About The Authors

Ron Snyder is the President of Plan2Win Software, which provides sales planning apps and Breakthrough, Inc. that delivers sales consulting. He has consulted with and trained thousands of sales leaders, managers and sales people, helping them dramatically improve their sales effectiveness, especially in strategic account and territory management.

Ron is co-author of the book, "Plan to Win; Strategic Territory and Account Planning."

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Marty Levy has held VP of Sales positions in several Silicon Valley companies. His sales leadership experience includes the semiconductor, cloud applications, and services segments of the technology industry. Marty has led pre and post IPO sales organizations, direct and channel teams, and major account sales staff. He is a recognized thought leader in sales best practices. He publishes sales content through his company TechSavvy Sales LLC.

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