8 steps to accelerate your sales process

A practical guide to improving your sales efficiency and agility

Introduction

Enhancing the daily behavior and habits of your sales team is fundamental characteristic of sales efficiency. To empower your team to communicate, quote and, most importantly, sell more efficiently, you need to focus on improving sales operations through sales enablement.

Sales efficiency means rejecting the status quo. Naturally you need to know what has been done already, and why, so that you can create a comparative benchmark. This process is critical to keep your company relevant, profitable, and successful.

We are now going to look together at the essential areas of influence that will help you improve your sales dexterity and velocity. Enabling you to connect, measure, and optimize your sales process, so your sales team can win faster and more efficiently than they have ever have.

1 Remove manual processes and complexities from the sales process

In general, companies need to do everything in their power to remove the manual work and complexities from the sales process at every turn. Any time a salesperson spends hunting around for product specifications, using a complicated spreadsheet to ballpark a configuration, reentering proposal data into a CRM solution or simply wasting time on overly complex, unnecessary tasks, sales velocity and agility fall by the wayside. Here is what DestinationCRM has to say:

> "Sales professionals who spend large amounts of time drafting proposals or conducting extensive research may feel like they are working hard but getting nowhere. In reality, those are "alibi" tasks. These salespeople are making sure their whereabouts are accounted for, but they are not actually selling. Salespeople need to focus on the core aspect of their profession. No salesperson is paid for crafting fancy, animated presentations; filling files with background information on potential customers; writing proposals; or entering data in their company's CRM system for hours. Salespeople need to sell!"

Take the time to analyze what tasks you are asking your salespeople to perform – from prospecting to quoting; from training to reporting – and what solutions you have in place for supporting this work. Any investment in a technology or process that streamlines these activities will immediately increase the time they can spend on the value-added tasks that close business.

2 Streamline the Configure-Price-Quote process

Quite frankly, most companies are overburdening sales people at the most critical juncture in the sales process: the proposal phase. Rather than empowering this step, many organizations require salespeople to navigate complex configuration formulas, continuously updated spreadsheets, clunky SKU bundles and lengthy price lists to figure out what the customer needs. Sales teams in these organizations suffer – productivity is lower, error rates are higher and offerings are rarely optimized. Because the process is so difficult, individuals may not even bother providing quotes to prospects while they are still in the investigative phase – a practice that will definitely impact pipelines over the long run. According to an article at Fourth Source:

"When it comes to carrying out a fast Configure, Price and Quote (CPQ) exercise, which will determine the effectiveness of the sales process, their hands are too often tied by a lack of co-ordination with the back office. Improvements to this process will ultimately allow [them] to become more innovative and responsive …and bring new offers and products to market quickly. …a platform which allows for innovation, fast delivery and encourages interaction and loyalty will soon see the returns."

Providing salespeople with a robust CPQ solution is probably the single most important move companies can make to speed the sales process. Being able to quickly generate a professional response when the subject of cost comes up will help build credibility and allow sales teams to create a larger, more convertible funnel over time.

At the same time, CPQ solutions actually improve conversion rates and profitability. Not only can the system automatically configure the entire solution at an optimized price, it can also suggest possible upsell items to include as well.

An added benefit is that CPQ solutions can integrate directly with order entry, finance and other corporate systems to cut administrative expenses across the board.

3 Eliminate errors in customer communications

Nobody wants to go back to a prospect or newly-signed customer and tell them that the quote you recently provided is not accurate. It not only breeds mistrust and erodes confidence, it can be a deal breaker.

Studies show that the main source of these problems and quote inaccuracies is manual tasks. According to Experian QAS, 65% of organizations cite human error as the main cause of data problems.

More often than not, it is the companies that cannot easily update pricing or product information – or use highly complex configuration formulas – that end up releasing proposals with erroneous information. Typically, these companies must absorb the cost differential to win the business. On the other hand, sales organizations equipped with automated CPQ solutions can rest assured that each quote produced is fully validated – technically and/or managerially - before it is sent rather than relying on the human element to follow through on the task.

4 Fast-track your partner programs

Leveraging partners is one of the fastest ways to penetrate new markets and increase sales – by geography, industry and/or solution type. Done properly, a comprehensive partner program enables rapid expansion and business growth. On the other hand inadequately designed programs that require too much handholding can actually become a drain on sales resources and corporate profitability.

A CPQ solution that supports partner sales is critical for empowering an effective channel program. In short, it allows partners to create their own quotes – with fully validated configurations and pricing – without requiring constant intervention from corporate sales resources. And it provides a centralized system partners can use to securely access key sales enablement tools such as datasheets, presentations, testimonials, use case data, research reports and more. Without this level of "automated support" partners become little more than glorified yet highly paid lead generation tools while your territory managers do all the work with little reward.

With an efficient sales infrastructure in place, companies can focus on deepening relationships, targeting strategic opportunities and capitalizing on new market opportunities.

5 Standardize sales responsiveness

Companies with rigid, complex configuration and pricing systems have a hard time working with customers throughout the pre-sales phase to arrive at a mutually beneficial final proposal. This problem is exacerbated when salespeople cannot effectively team up with sales engineers, product managers and other subject matter experts. Companies must be able to respond quickly as both sides revise requirements and deliverables until an agreement is reached. Here is some insight from Enterprise Irregulars:

"The pace of business is so torrid these days that the turnaround time needed to develop a quote, get it approved by your boss, and into the hands of the customer is shrinking. If you can't deliver quickly, your competition can, which would place you at a serious disadvantage."

A CPQ designed specifically to enable collaboration between multiple contributors is the best way to inject agility into the sales process. From the start, it allows all users to work together to quickly update the products, services and configurations being proposed. And, CPQs can offer full version control to eliminate mistakes throughout the process.

By improving collaboration, sales people can rest assured that the end-result will be the best possible offer – one with the best chance of winning the business.

6 Improve training for current and onboarded sales teams

It can take 6 to 9 months to onboard a new salesperson and get them to meet their quota. Educating your new hires about the products so they know what to sell and how to sell it is a major step in this learning process. But the learning shouldn't end there. Once fully onboarded, sales teams need to be constantly trained and updated on the new products, pricing and solutions that they can present to clients and prospects.

For some companies, getting a sales team or channel partner to focus on a new product offering can be difficult. It's easy for salespeople to have success in one area and settle into a comfort zone. Salespeople tend to pitch what they know best – and ignore the rest. In a typical company, 30% of the sales team isn't even aware of the latest wins and success stories.

Often, organizations try to combat this tendency in two ways: training and SPIFFs. When done properly, training does help to make a new product top-of-mind. Unfortunately, many salespeople find the constant bombardment of highly-technical information to be a distraction to their real job.

On the other hand, incentives can provide some short-term excitement. However, the first time the salesperson runs into difficulty – especially at the proposal phase – they will quickly revert back to their comfort zone.

One of the best ways to push new technologies in the market is through a Guided Selling tool integrated directly into a CPQ solution. It basically walks a user through specifications, options and other customer related requirements and then generates a validated configuration/price quote in just minutes. This approach limits the need for extra training – which salespeople usually resist – in favor of a system that walks them through the process of matching their customer's needs to the products and services that address those needs.

When sales teams trust that they can effectively propose new technology to valued customers – and be sure it is both accurate and appropriate – companies will find themselves better able to capture market share as their offerings evolve.

7 Eliminate approval bottlenecks

Often the only way to win a deal is to completely customize an offer. Whether they need to send a proposal with special pricing, a non-standard configuration, extended support and/or a very competitive discount, most companies have rules governing “non-standard offerings” and who needs to approve them (Sales Management, Finance, Support, Product Marketing) before they are released. After all, companies cannot afford to send out quotes that will not be profitable in the long run.

Companies with inefficient notification/response methodologies are impeding sales velocity at the organizational level. When a salesperson sends an email requesting permission for a special offer – even if it is marked urgent – it rarely elicits an immediate response.

That communication channel is so noisy and overused and people always seem to be traveling, in a meeting or otherwise occupied just when their approval is needed. Typically, salespeople have to sit around waiting for an answer or calling various approvers or their assistants before they can do anything else – a tremendous waste of their valuable time.

This particular bottleneck is easy to eliminate as today’s CPQ solutions have a built in solution for streamlining the process. When a created quote needs authorization, the CPQ system automatically sends a notification to the required parties requesting the necessary technical and/or commercial approvals. Designing notifications to include all the relevant information an approver needs to make a decision will ensure a rapid response. And, salespeople can go about their typical workday knowing that the system is tracking down approvers for them.

Removing bottlenecks in the sales cycle will immediately boost velocity in any organization. More importantly, sales tools need to be integrated together. Asking salespeople to log into the CRM system to look up customer details and then enter them into the CPQ solution to build a proposal is extremely unproductive. Instead, integrate sales enablement tools directly into the CRM solution and allow salespeople to instantly respond to customer requests – wherever they are.

8 Sales engagement - measure everything

If you cannot measure something – then it does not exist. From the top down; Investors, Board, Management Team, all need to be able to measure the existing process and forecast growth accurately. Your role is to create an accurate Sales Engagement Lens to measure each micro-step within the Sales Process that contributes to the growth goal OR detracts from that effort.

You need to measure both the seller and buyer's activities and engagement touchpoints. Looking at frequency, duration, intervals, and communication style and content are all good areas for focus. Allowing you to build a profile of that buyer's disposition, the influencing factors, and clear and timely recommendations for best-practice. The advantage of this objective process is you can compare the steps of successful reps draw conclusions as to what the whole team can be doing better.

Taking the guesswork out of the execution process is a huge stress relief for all concerned – and they will thank you for this once they are consistently hitting their quota. Your litmus test is whether your Sales Engagement data is covering the entire Sales Process. If it is not then you face the issue of data without authentic context.

About DealHub

DealHub delivers a complete quote-to-revenue solution designed to drive sales processes forward faster. As the only low-code commerce engine that powers business agility and high-end customizability, DealHub's intelligent and integrated solution enables enterprise and mid-market leaders to connect their teams and processes, execute deals faster, and create predictable pipelines more effectively than ever before.

DealHub delivers Sales professionals and end customers with a consistent environment to build and maintain an engaging dialogue throughout the sales and deal management process.

With CPQ, CLM, Billing, and Subscription Management software powered by an intuitive Sales Playbook, your team can generate, on the fly, accurate price quotes, accelerate contract negotiations, deliver relevant content, and close off bigger deals. You can also centralize buyer/seller communications and deliver everything needed to close deals in a digital DealRoom.

Integrating with leading CRMs (Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics, HubSpot, Freshworks, and SugarCRM) and trusted by revenue experts such as WalkMe, Gong, Drift, Hopin, SpotOn, Sendoso, and Braze, DealHub ensures faster time to value with one fluid revenue motion.

Complex pricing made easy

Close deals faster with one automated workflow for price quotes, contracts, subscription management and billing.

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