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# Three ways to win without your sales funnel

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A new approach to sales generates growth, improves customer loyalty, and cuts the time between sales lead and deal closure.

**Much has been written about the “death of the sales funnel,”** but if the sales funnel is dead, what is taking its place?

The answer is simple: mapping customer journeys. A “customer journey” is the path customers take to learn about, compare, and decide on items they want to buy. But neither the sales funnel nor pipeline management actually go away; they just morph into processes that are much more nuanced and customer driven.

Instead of being sales-process forward like the sales funnel—generate a lead, qualify it, propose a deal, negotiate the deal, close—the selling approach needs to be much more tailored to the customer’s needs and behaviors. Taking this approach has substantial benefits. Our Sales Growth study, based in part on interviews with more than 100 leading sales organizations and subsequent research on marketing-enabled sales, has shown that a buyer-focused selling approach yields 5–10 percent revenue growth and up to 30 percent improvement in customer loyalty, and it cuts the time from initial lead to deal close by 10–20 percent. How can you uncover needs, however, that aren’t obvious? Start asking questions.

- How does the customer learn about you?
- Who are the influencers they pay attention to, and where are those influencers found (blogs, word of mouth, recommendations or likes on social media, trade shows, etc.)?
- How do customers compare your offers and the buying experience to competitive brands’ products and services?

- How do they decide to buy (or not) from you?
- What motivates customers to buy aftermarket services?
- What makes customers want to renew their contracts (or not)?

Based on the answers to these questions, it is vital that the sales team figure out how to better work with marketing to convert and satisfy the customer and win the deal.

### **1. Put yourself in your customer's shoes.**

It sounds so easy, doesn't it? Actually, looking at the world through their customers' eyes is often tough for salespeople. Have the courage to get your customers' unvarnished feedback about what it's like to buy from you —and from your competitors. Ask them where they get their information, whose information they trust, and how well you deliver insight. You might also ask them which of your competitors is really good at selling and find out what they do to create that impression.

Do this for your top two or three customers to understand how they make buying decisions.

### **2. Map your own decision journey.**

For those same two or three customers, map where in the purchase process YOU as a salesperson spend most of your time and effort, and then ask yourself why you get stuck in certain spots. Chances are the answer is a combination of "I've just always done it this way," "It's just the way we sell here," or "I don't know." Now come up with actions you could take to unstuck the journey.

For example, if you are always churning proposals but not closing, perhaps you are not proposing the right deals to the right customers with the right information at the right time in their decision process. Perhaps you need to deliver more targeted pitches, with customer data and insight from marketing.

### **3. Make friends with marketing.**

Ask for the marketing team's perspective and what could/should be done differently to better meet your customers' needs in their decision journey. Let marketing know where you often get stuck in the process. See what can be done to enable your selling:

- Can marketing help build a calculator app for comparing the total cost and benefit of your offering with your competitors’?
- Can you get help building the perfect pitch pack, with digital content, for a particular customer you are going after?
- Can marketing help build some interactive demos you can use with existing customers to drive awareness of your new product?

Marketing should be making your selling life easier—so tell them how. 

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