The Six Ingredients of a Successful SKO

Learn how to plan a SKO that engages your sales team and enables them to be confident and self-sufficient in their role.

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Why We Created This Guide

A sales kickoff (SKO) can inject your employees with the motivation, fuel, and knowledge they need to be quota-crushing powerhouses. But, it can also leave them feeling overwhelmed, deflated, and mentally exhausted. How do you strike a balance between informative and fun? How do you keep people engaged and participating? What tactics can you use to get your team pumped up before SKO and ready to take on the world after? We had the opportunity to speak with some of the industry's brightest enablement energizers and talent trainers to learn how they answer these questions and more. In this guide, we've distilled our favorite tips into six ingredients that will set you up for SKO success. Think of this guide as your framework for hosting a SKO that drives engagement, inspires your team, and leaves them looking forward to the next.

> "People that say it cannot be done should not interrupt those that are doing it."
>
> **Sheevaun Thatcher**
> VP GLOBAL SALES & SUCCESS ENABLEMENT AT SLACK

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We've identified six core ingredients that work together to help you pull off a successful SKO that we can separate into three distinct stages. For simplicity, we've grouped them as "Before," "During," and "After." Keep these in mind as you design your own process, whether for the first time or the hundredth.

01

BEFORE: PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL SKO

Create a thematic experience

Chefs often talk about the importance of having a theme when they create a meal. They design a program where each course blends into the next, creating a cohesive experience for the guests. The same is true when preparing a successful sales kickoff (SKO).

You're throwing so much information at your reps in such a short time. Having a theme to guide the content and agenda will allow you to drive home the most crucial takeaways by surfacing key messaging throughout your SKO.

So, whether you're coming into the year focused on growth, process, or culture — kick off preparations by identifying the theme that will guide your SKO experience. Then, you'll be ready to plan your agenda.

> "Content without context equals confusion and content with context equals confidence."

Whitney Sieck

intuit

WHEN PLANNING YOUR SKO AGENDA, CONSIDER THESE THREE ESSENTIAL THINGS:

The right people

Who you invite to speak at your SKO is everything! And, you don't have to spend big money to find inspiring speakers! Identify a few rock stars from across the organization to share what they're building and how it will impact the organization. Reach out to sales influencers on LinkedIn and invite them to present. Contact a partner and give them the opportunity to share about an integration or your partnership. We bet you'll be surprised at how willing people are to lend a helping hand.

A clear objective

Your agenda should support a clear objective for each day's activities. For some organizations, an SKO is a kickoff to a new sales initiative, a celebration of the past year's performance, or sometimes both! In other cases, it might be an event that highlights new market opportunities or gives employees updates on company initiatives. Once you've established your objective, work backward from there to ensure all elements tie into your theme and achieve this goal.

Engaging, educational content

It's easy to fall into a "laundry list" mentality when preparing your agenda. However, instead of simply listing topics and speakers, consider putting more thought into how you organize your SKO day. Your goal should be to educate your team while entertaining and keeping them excited and engaged with the content.

02

BEFORE: PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL SKO

Choose the right format for engagement

Once upon a time, nearly all SKOs were held in person. Today, the world is vastly different than even just a couple of years ago. But still, one of the most critical pieces of any SKO is how your team will spend their day.

Choosing the proper format is key to an engaging SKO. With the recent acceleration of advancements in event technology, we now have robust options for in-person, completely virtual, and hybrid SKO formats.

THERE ARE A FEW KEY THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR EACH FORMAT:

In-person

If you opt to have your SKO in-person, try to choose a centrally located venue that can accommodate all participants. If you have a smaller team, holding the event in your office space or conference rooms could also make sense. In addition, remember to schedule networking sessions and meals to encourage teammates from other locations to attend.

Virtual

If you opt for a virtual SKO, it's crucial that the technology fits within your budget and isn't overly complicated so your participants don't get frustrated and can focus on the content. Each solution has its benefits, which you should consider when selecting the right one for your organization. But arguably, the most important thing to consider for virtual formats is how you will engage your audience remotely. When you're in person, there are fewer distractions. But virtually, there are always endless other things going on. So, it's important to find ways to adapt in-person formats such as moderated panels, roundtables, and keynotes to be even more engaging for virtual participants.

Hybrid

Today, more and more companies are adding hybrid formats to their SKO because they know that virtual events will play a significant role in their sales culture. The hybrid SKO format is often a great way to optimize the benefits of both in-person and virtual events, so make sure to plan out your day accordingly. Creating sessions for some parts of the event where all participants are physically present and using digital tools for others is a great way to use the hybrid format to its full potential.

03

DURING: MAINTAINING ENGAGEMENT

Host mini breakout sessions

The main presentation is often the focal point for this event, but your goal should be to keep people engaged.

That's where breakout sessions come in.

Identify areas where people are struggling and create a breakout session for that specific topic, to practice a new skill, or to take on a challenging problem.

A successful breakout session can be as simple as practicing giving a product demo or learning more effective ways to research prospects. You could even design it to be more of an interactive workshop and teach people about topics such as why a particular feature is a key differentiator, how to effectively use social media for prospecting, how to create a great email campaign, or even how to negotiate.

The point of the breakout sessions is to ensure that people are engaged, working on new skills, and having fun while doing it. You could also leverage these smaller breakout sessions as an opportunity to create a sense of friendly competition.

You could have everyone break into small teams, then task them to solve a particular business challenge related to your presentation topic. At the end of the session, present the best solution and give a prize to that team.

Sales is known as an environment that fosters friendly competition, so why not lean into that to make your SKO even more engaging?

04

DURING: MAINTAINING ENGAGEMENT

Bake in downtime

You should also allow for downtime in your SKO — we recommend you “bake it in” to your agenda. Planned downtime will enable people to catch up on any emails, Slack messages, or other things they may have neglected during the keynotes and breakout sessions. It also provides a chance to circulate and chat with your teammates or prospects without feeling oppressive time pressure. Even if you plan out and pace the event well, it’s important to make sure people also have time to debrief and share any learnings. Plan a happy hour or live chat for after the keynotes wrap up but before your smaller breakout sessions begin.

Some companies spend most of their time in breakout sessions, with little to no breaks, which can be fine if you follow a specific schedule. However, the goal is to give people enough material but not so much that they feel overwhelmed and to give them time to digest and socialize. By including some downtime in your SKO, you’re giving folks a chance to recharge while giving yourself a chance to answer questions that might have come up during the breakout sessions.

To include some planned downtime, you could plan a mix of in-person and virtual activities such as escape rooms, scavenger hunts, or trivia contests. You could also host a happy hour (either virtual or in-person) and invite a guest mixologist to host. Bonus points if you have a fun guest cameo to give a quick, uplifting message during this downtime.

05

AFTER: KEEP THE MOMENTUM AND REINFORCE LEARNING

Leave them with food for thought (and plenty of it)

You've got them thinking — they're excited and ready to tackle the next challenge! Now you need to leave them with some things to think about. This might be something your team is working on; it might be an area for improvement that they will contribute to or a topic that has been recently in the news.

You could also consider announcing something new and exciting such as unveiling a new product release, feature roadmap, strategic vision, or some other big company news.

Whatever it is, remember to keep the momentum going by talking about your next steps as a company and how each person on the team is personally contributing to that vision for the future. Always tie this back to the overall objective and theme that you established during the planning phase of your SKO. No matter what kind of training you provide for your employees, you want them to learn something useful for their job.

It's essential to leave them feeling they can accomplish what you set out for them.

By the time your SKO is finished, it should be easy for them to see how to use their new skills and knowledge to be even more successful at work.

"Any salesperson has had the experience where someone has asked them to build a dashboard and they come back to it in a month, and it hasn't been refreshed since you made it. If we bring the metrics to their Slack channels, then they can't avoid it, and they can bake it into their agenda items, making it actionable."

Pete Kazanjy

FOUNDER OF MODERN SALES PROS

06

AFTER: KEEP THE MOMENTUM AND REINFORCE LEARNING

Deliver the knowledge your team needs, when and where they need it

It’s now time to leave your attendees with resources to make them think about what they’ve learned and how they can keep the momentum going. The more practice your employees get with their new skills and knowledge, the easier it will be to remember.

And the sooner they can use their new skills, the more likely they are to rely on those skills again in the future.

Some of this follow-up content could include things like session summaries, cheat sheets, videos, and walkthroughs.

The best way to deliver this is with a just-in-time enablement platform that reinforces it during their day-to-day workflows when opportunities to practice their new skills and knowledge arise.

If your team isn’t using such technology already, it may be time for an update! But don’t worry, Spekit has you covered!

Building on what employees have learned is one of the best ways to keep them engaged with your company’s learning resources.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

Think about how you can bridge what they've just learned and their work-related objectives set at the beginning of the SKO session. This will make it easy for employees to see how what they've learned connects with their current challenges.

If you want to reinforce a new behavior, try pairing it with a reward. Try adding a leaderboard to track the adoption of new skills. This gives clear objectives that employees can strive for and will help them see how they're progressing towards their goals!

Don't be afraid to have some fun! If your team is engaged and having fun during these activities, they'll be all the more likely to retain what they've learned and continue putting their skills into practice.

07

AFTER: KEEP THE MOMENTUM AND REINFORCE LEARNING

Save room for dessert: something fun to end the event

Thanks to all of your hard work, you've successfully changed the way your team thinks about their jobs and their trajectory for success!

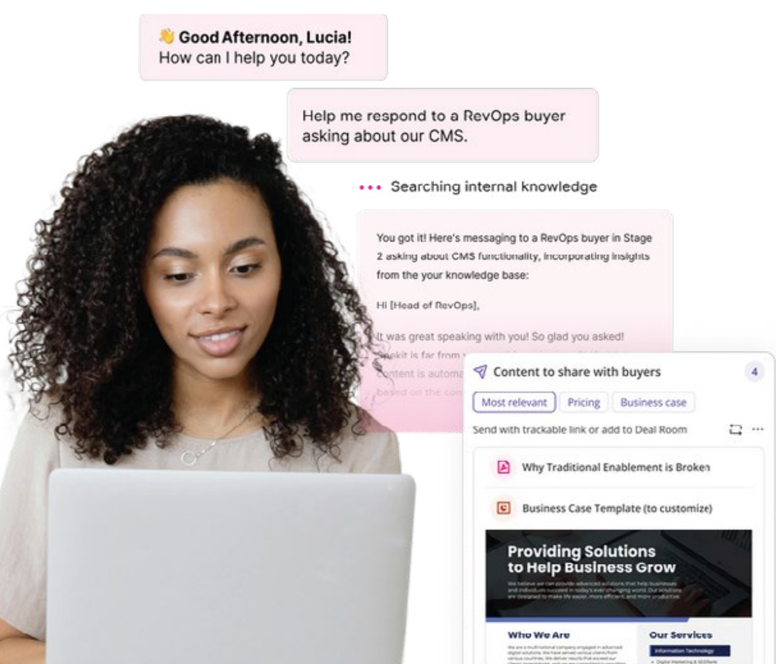
Now it's time to close things up with a fun activity that will leave them feeling inspired and proud of what they've accomplished and ready to take on the next challenge.

For an in-person SKO, maybe you could host an after-party?

Or if you're running a virtual or hybrid SKO, why not give away a couple of prizes?

They've just spent all day learning, so it's time to let loose and have fun.

Why not try a giveaway involving everyone in the room (virtual or in-person)? It could be as simple as asking the attendees to share the best part of their day and rewarding the winner with an unexpected prize!



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