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EBOOK

3 Obstacles Throttling Your Pipeline Engine



Introduction

The best sales leaders know that pipeline creation, coverage, and conversion are at the heart of a high-performing business. But what does it take to optimize pipeline performance in the midst of looming economic uncertainty?

The key is for go-to-market (GTM) teams to work as a well-orchestrated engine that capitalizes on every opportunity across key accounts. Enabling that seamless integration of efforts is a matter of allocating resources to the accounts and personas displaying the highest level of purchase intent. Yet many organizations struggle to do so because they lack the necessary visibility into coordinated GTM investments and ongoing execution.

In this eBook, we explore the three biggest roadblocks to achieving that visibility:

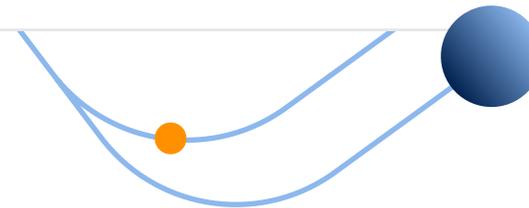
1. Today's buying groups are larger and more complex to navigate
2. GTM leaders can't measure the adoption, compliance, and impact of their selected sales qualification methodologies
3. Pipeline coverage is difficult to validate and convert due to a lack of stakeholder insights

We also outline proven ways for overcoming these obstacles to unleash a high-performance pipeline engine.



51% of those surveyed by Forrester listed “optimize buyer-aligned sales processes” and “increase alignment across the revenue engine” as top sales operations initiatives in 2022¹

¹ Slough, Anne, “Forrester’s Q1 2022 Sales Operations Pulse Survey Results,” Forrester, March 17, 2022



Roadblock 1: Today's buying groups are larger and more complex to navigate.

With decision-making units the norm, B2B sales cycles are extended until each member of the buying group gets on board with a purchase decision. The danger is not having a complete and accurate picture of the buying committee. Without that essential view, it's impossible to engage and sway each member in a concerted, effective manner that keeps deals moving and frees marketing and sales to pursue more opportunities and revenue.

Let's explore the three barriers that make it challenging to succeed in this area – and options for overcoming them.



Barrier #1: More convincing needed but less time to do it.

These days, sales teams have to convince more people within each account and opportunity, but prospects are giving them less time to do it.

More than 63% of purchases involve more than four people in various roles and often from multiple departments, according to Forrester². Yet Gartner finds that sales reps get roughly 5% of a buyer's time during the buying journey³.



Barrier #2: Buyer and rep turnover derails deals.

Turnover within accounts and opportunities makes it even more challenging to navigate sales cycles and increases risk of slippages or revenue loss. According to LinkedIn, 86% of organizations have experienced a lost or stalled deal in the last 12 months because decision-makers changed roles⁴. That's bad news considering that stuck opportunities account for 10% to 15%⁵ of a typical organization's sales funnel and contribute to longer sales cycles.

Complicating matters is the growing turnover within sales teams. Within a three-month period in 2021, sales rep turnover was up 39%⁶.



Barrier #3: Misplaced engagement.

Even in accounts with less turnover, sellers and marketers can waste time and effort engaging personas lacking the right levels of influence or purchasing power. Moreover, without the proper deal insights, sales leaders and frontline managers can't coach their reps in ways that shape and progress opportunities.

2 Caplow, Beth, "Three Seismic Shifts in Buying Behavior From Forrester's 2021 B2B Buying Study," Forrester, April 14, 2021

3 Ramaswami, Rama, "Future of Sales 2025: Deliver the Digital Options B2B Buyers Demand," Gartner, March 21, 2021

4 LinkedIn, "Global State of Sales 2022"

5 Mukherji, Debashis, "Salesforce for Sales: Get the Most out of your Sales Cloud Implementation with this Best Practices Guide," Salesforce, May 12, 2021

6 LinkedIn's Economic Graph, 2021



Removing the roadblock: Enable cross-functional orchestration.

The best reps know that in order to drive performance against expansive buying groups that are shifting and changing, they must orchestrate cross-functional multi-threading. In other words, selling as an extended, unified team – high and wide into an account.

At the same time, organizations can account for sales rep turnover by streamlining account transitions. When an account moves from rep to rep or one team to another, provide a digital trail of stakeholders, sales interactions, and customer initiatives to date so the successors can hit the ground running on day one with the exact same insights.

Finally, sales managers often rely on lagging indicators like closed deals and revenue to coach reps, measure success, and work deals. But using past outcomes to manage future success is like driving a car using only the rearview mirror. By monitoring and managing cross-functional account and buying persona engagement data, sales leaders and managers can better see, coach, and manage their extended selling team's true engagement with an account.

Managing with Leading Indicators

Lagging indicators are outcomes, not inputs that help project future success. Yes, they are still informative and helpful for coaching, but teams need to start prioritizing leading indicators to help shape success in the moment, not once it's passed.



Lagging Indicator Examples

- Quota attainment
- Number of deals won/lost
- Average deal size
- Average deal length



Leading Indicator Examples

- Unique contacts engaged per account
- Number of meetings booked per month
- Total pipeline build and coverage
- % of opportunities engaged

Roadblock 2: GTM leaders can't measure the adoption, compliance, and impact of standardized sales qualification methodologies.

Every successful sales leader understands the benefits of a standardized sales qualification methodology. With an objective standard for qualifying deals, reps and managers can confidently prioritize opportunities, evaluate progression, and jointly determine how best to proceed. Yet many organizations struggle to understand how well – or even if – their chosen methodology is being adhered to and effectively used.

Here are the specific barriers that make it challenging to succeed in this area – and ways to break them down.

Why sales methodologies need to be better utilized



10-15%

Of a typical sales funnel consists of stuck deals, contributing to longer sales cycles.

Source: Salesforce



46%

Of reps feel their pipeline is accurate.

Source: HubSpot



Barrier #1: Struggles to validate methodology compliance and effectiveness.

Sales leaders can't validate whether reps are following their selected sales methodology. Often, they have to wait for a QBR, deal review, or other form of retroactive analysis to know if reps are qualifying opportunities correctly.



Barrier #2: Lack of insight into pipeline status and health.

Because it's cumbersome to qualify and process opportunity qualification steps within CRM, sales reps can't easily and effectively communicate pipeline status. Instead, their qualification data stays scattered in emails, calendars, and spreadsheets. Put simply, reps lack a streamlined, consistent way to show they are following the sales qualification methodology. In turn, they and their managers struggle to assess opportunity health.



Barrier #3: Inability to correlate methodology effectiveness with pipeline conversion.

Even if they can validate adoption and compliance, sales leaders and managers can't measure if their selected methodology has improved pipeline conversion rates. As a result, they can't be confident in the actions needed to efficiently and effectively move deals forward, or about redirecting resources when required.



Removing the roadblock: Capture and harness accurate data.

So, how can organizations measure the adoption of their sales qualification methodology and correlate the impact of that adoption with pipeline health? As you take the initial steps to improve overall GTM execution, you ideally operationalize your sales qualification methodology natively in your CRM. Now it's time to take advantage of real-time, accurate data to assess the strength of each opportunity.

Facilitating activity- and data-driven deal inspections helps sales managers coach reps on actionable next steps – which key stakeholders require more engagement, whether executives should be enlisted to speak to the prospect's C-suite, and

if entrance and exit criteria are being met. With more consistent qualification standards in place – backed with real data in the CRM – sales teams can now pinpoint improvements to win rates, deal sizes, and buying cycles. Having this intelligence at their fingertips also helps reps and managers measure pipeline health and generate the subsequent forecast with higher accuracy.



You can't forecast your way to growth

The forecast call is a weekly ritual for sales leaders, yet many organizations are hampered by poor accuracy. Despite a wave of investments in forecasting automation and visualization tools, the most reliable way to strengthen forecast accuracy is with pipeline coverage and quality.

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Roadblock 3: Pipeline coverage is difficult to validate and convert due to a lack of stakeholder insights.

Every sales leader needs to ensure enough pipeline is teed up. It's impossible to feel confident without accurate, timely information about GTM engagement with accounts and prospects. Yet many sales organizations lack these insights since reps don't consistently capture their activities in CRM. Combine this with no mapping of engagement with stakeholders representing varying levels of buying influence, and many sales leaders are truly flying blind.

Let's see how two common barriers trip up many sales organizations in this area – and a proven approach to pave the way for success.



Barrier #1: Inconsistent CRM data entry.

Since many reps find it distracting to keep CRM up to date, they simply don't. As a result, managers struggle to confirm teams are engaging the right stakeholders through the right channels – at the right place in the buyer's journey – to improve conversion rates. Being able to separate fact from fiction is hard enough without sales leaders having to chase down reps to get the real story on activity, engagement, and likelihood of deals closing. Without being able to confidently validate current pipeline coverage, managers find it difficult to deliver accurate forecasts.

Accelerate growth with integrated marketing and sales efforts



Barrier #2: No view into cross-functional GTM efforts.

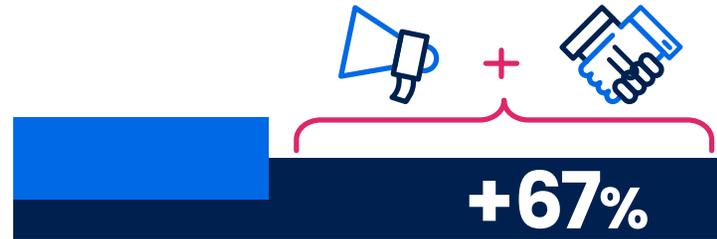
Even when marketing and sales strive for tighter alignment, poor visibility into cross-functional activities makes it difficult to ensure investments center on the same accounts and personas. But this is clearly an issue worth addressing. B2B organizations with tightly aligned sales and marketing operations achieve 24% faster three-year revenue growth and 27% faster three-year profit growth, according to SiriusDecisions.



Removing the roadblock: Provide access to up-to-date, accurate information about opportunities and engagement.

Ideally, everyone on the GTM team – from leadership to individual functions – has access to up-to-date, accurate information about key stakeholder and account engagement within the context of the organization’s qualification methodology. With a view into the presence of champions, economic buyers, and others who wield purchasing influence at key points within sales stages, the GTM team is better able to convert pipeline from an opportunity.

At the same time, better CRM data empowers sales leaders to correlate methodology scorecards and stakeholder engagement scores with pipeline and revenue performance. Moreover, it positions managers to inspect and coach while there is still time to improve multi-threading, drive or shape future meetings, and penetrate key buying centers on any open opportunity.



Tightly aligned sales and marketing organizations generate 67% higher conversion rates and 209% more revenue from leads.

Source: Marketo, 2019

Conclusion: Unleash Your Pipeline's Full Potential

The only way to effectively engage, nurture, and convert today's expansive decision-making units is for marketing and sales to work in concert. That's why more GTM teams are seeking ways to enable orchestration aligned with buyer expectations for a best-in-class buying experience. When the goal is to optimize every interaction between potential buyers and the company, it's a must to break down silos so cross-functional teams can truly act as one.

The best GTM teams collaborate on converting pipeline by leveraging engagement data to validate plans are being executed on schedule and in compliance with a fully operationalized sales methodology. In this eBook, we've outlined proven, practical ways that any sales organization can position themselves for the same success.

[Download the companion workbook](#) for even more prescriptive guidance on how to overcome the roadblocks to achieving a high-performance pipeline engine.

To experience how People.ai converts data into actionable insights, pipeline growth, predictable revenue, and an unprecedented look at the big picture, [request a demo](#).

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About People.ai

People.ai is the leader in guiding enterprise sales teams on the proven path to pipeline and revenue generation. The People.ai enterprise revenue intelligence platform ensures organizations speed up complex sales cycles by engaging the right people in the right accounts. Through our patented AI technology, People.ai enables sales teams to clearly see whom to engage within each of their accounts and exactly what to do to deliver the highest yielding deals. Enterprises such as AppDynamics, DataRobot, Okta, and Zoom know that people buy from people, that's why people buy from People.ai.

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