FORCEMANAGER®

EBOOK

How to plan and execute an outside sales strategy from scratch

Building and developing a sales strategy is arguably the most crucial activity your business will engage in.

Whether focused on B2B sales strategy, inbound, outbound, small-to-medium business (SMB) or enterprise, the company needs a **dependable** source of income to survive.

The key to achieving dependable revenue is in tying specific sales activity to solid, thoughtful, and data-backed objectives formed with the company's long-term goals in mind.

Without a sales strategy plan in place, sales reps and directors make decisions based on what is in front of them at that given time. Not because they're careless or foolish, but rather unaware of the company's long-term goals.

As a result, it becomes challenging to tie sales activity to specific data-backed objectives.

So, to create dependable, long-lasting growth throughout the business, sales directors need a strategy. And that, ladies and gents, starts with a solid sales strategy plan.

This eBook aims to give you exactly that.

A 6-step guide to help you plan and execute any outside sales strategy tailored to the specific needs of your business.

Happy reading!

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eBook
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Step #1
Customer centricity

Every company starts and ends with its customers.

This is why how you hold your customers, or the customer experience you want to create, is the driving force behind all sales strategy plans.

While customer experience isn't exclusively a sales issue, we inevitably find ourselves communicating with them daily as they build a relationship with our brand.

Therefore, the experience they have when dealing with our field sales team shapes their opinion of the company, and in extension, how they share that experience with their peers, either good or bad.

As a result, customer experience is critical to the success of any sales strategy, forcing sales teams to think about:

- Who their ideal customer is?

- What are their specific needs?

- How do they want customers to view the brand?

- Around which fundamental values do they want to build their customer experience?

The better your organization understands its customers, the more successful the sales strategy will be.

A great exercise to gauge how well your team knows their customers is to get them to create a **buyer persona(s)**.

Buyer personas reference an ideal or archetypal client. They consist of elaborating a profile that can be applied to a group of potential clients that share common characteristics. Although the buyer persona can have qualities shared by different individuals, it must not be abstract. The more concrete the description of the buyer persona, the better.

So why is this exercise helpful?

Well, the answer is simple. Not only does it get your team to think about their ideal customer profile, but also to identify your company's "**sweet spot.**" That is to say, what is your company the absolute best at doing in the world, and why does your customer benefit from it?

As soon as we begin to move away from that sweet spot, the quicker the win rate plummets and the costlier the sales cycle becomes.

How to create a
Buyer Persona

The most common method for creating a buyer persona is to profile real customers.

You can do this by following a questionnaire template, similar to the one we've added below:
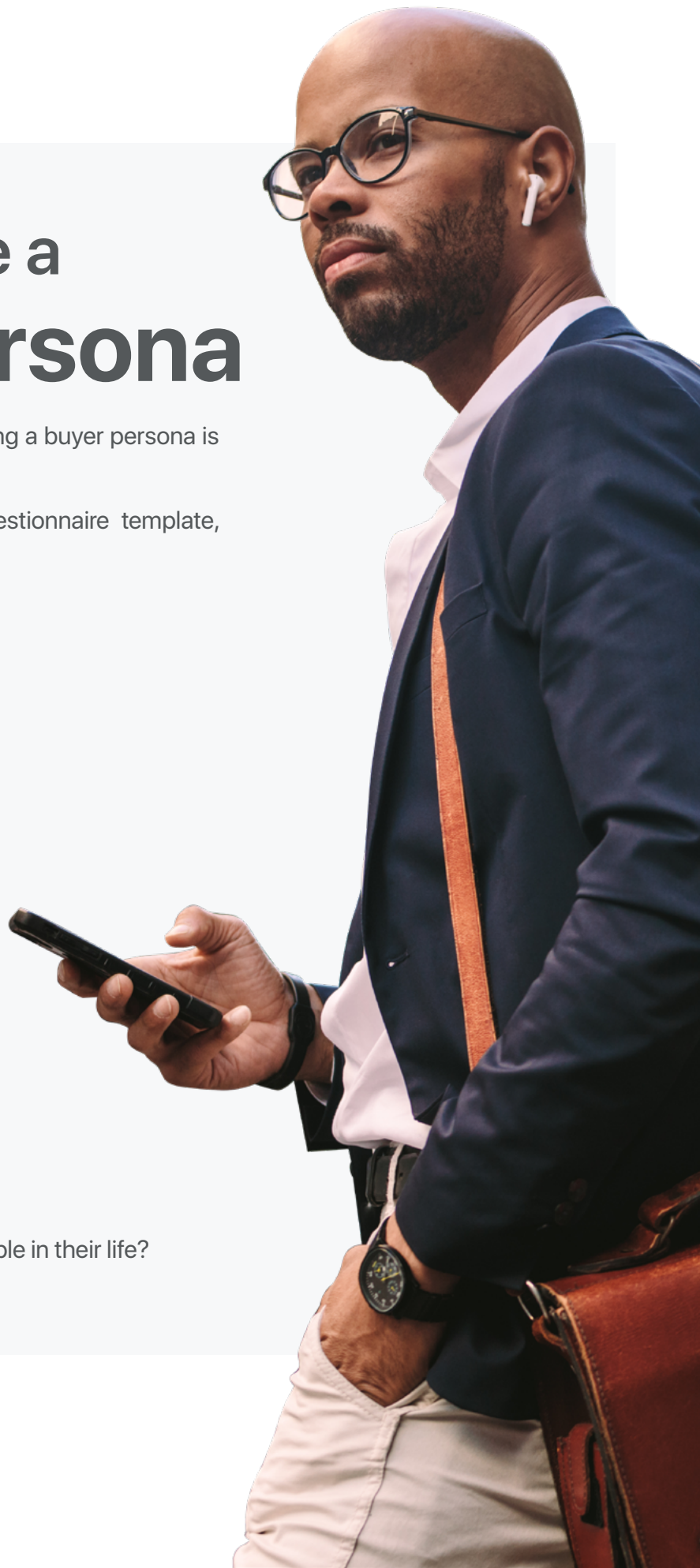
#1
Demographic Data

- Sex
- Age
- Education
- Marital status
- Purchasing power

#2
Personal Profile

- What are their hobbies?
- What makes them happy?
- How do they measure success?
- Who are the most influential people in their life?

#3
Professional Profile

- What is their role within the company?
- Do other people depend on them?
- Who do they report to?
- What are their responsibilities within the company?
- What are their professional aims?

#4
Purchase Behavior

- Are they a decisive person?
- What evaluations do they make when buying?
- Do they focus on quality over price?

#5
Relation to the company

- How do they respond to sales reps?
- Do they open our newsletters?
- Why do they need to work with us?
- How much time or how many visits does it take before they make a purchase decision?

Following the questionnaire template, we made a mock-up version for a medical device company based in Chicago, IL.

Bryan **Caldwell**

Doctor, 42 years old

Demographic Data

Location: _Chicago_

Industry: _Healthcare_

Profession: _Surgeon_

Level of education: _Doctorate_

Motivation

That the surgical equipment he buys be of the highest qualitiy.
Patient welfare is his priority.

Pain Point

The equipment hinders his level of performance.

Necessity

He patients expect operations to be performed to the highest quality.

Goals

Earn a reputation for being the to "go-to" surgeon in the Chicago area.

Hobbies

Spending time with his family, yatching club friends and watching the Bears on a Sunday.

It's important to note that you can have more than one buyer persona. Your product or service may be a good fit for more than a single "group" of consumers, so you'll need to create matching personas depending on the particular sales strategy.

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Step #2
Corporate Alignment

The sales team is responsible for **corporate strategy execution**. Sure, marketing, customer success, and other internal and external communication teams play a part in creating awareness around the brand, but it's sales that get the job done.

It's important to note that this means **more** than just hitting target revenue. Senior executives are concerned about market positioning, market maturity, customer perception, and what they stand for as a brand. As a result, they will have various goals other than pure revenue, such as:

- Increase market share

- Increase share of wallet

- New product line revenue

- Territorial expansion

The "big picture" enterprise goals must be taken into consideration when building a sales strategy plan. If not, the entire future of the organization is put in jeopardy.

Let me give you an example.

Imagine you are given an annual target revenue of $99m at a company with three primary service plans.

Plan A:

The first represents your traditional business model, the one your sales team has sold for years. It's a maturing market, and your company has a solid reputation and an established client base.

Plan B:

The second service plan is an ambitious entry into a new vertical and market segment. It's a potentially lucrative gamble being a relatively unexplored segment, but the sales team lacks experience and reputation.

Plan C:

The third and final service plan requires expansion into a new sales territory. Again, this is an unexplored ground that senior executives have earmarked for potential in the future.

Do you focus solely on hitting revenue from the tried and tested service plan A, or do you try for a combination of all three?

As the sales director, you have two options to hit your target revenue of $99m. You could:

Option 1:

Focus on your traditional service plan. Your sales team knows the market well, has an established reputation amongst industry leaders, and with a bit of luck, could reach target revenue without worrying too much about the success of the new service plans.

Option 2:

Develop a sales strategy plan balanced across all three. You might decide to split your annual revenue target into three, smaller $33m pieces – one for each service plan. You choose to reallocate resources and training budget to help with the two untested plans.

If it were down to you, which option would you choose? Option 1 or Option 2?

Hopefully, you avoided the potential trap of Option 1.

While it may bring you short-term success (your target is to hit $99m after all), the long-term future of the company is at risk. Investments made within these new divisions that widen the organization's revenue plan may be forced to scale back or shut down completely, severely impacting the company's long-term growth strategy.

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Step #3
SWOT Analysis

Another critical step in building a sales strategy plan is **SWOT** analysis. This tactic is handy when assessing the challenges your organization faces when venturing into a new market or under pressure from increasing competition, by looking at a company's:

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

By analyzing each of these areas, businesses can build on their strengths, mitigate their weaknesses, uncover new opportunities while blunting the various threats that may crop up down the line.

So how do you undertake a **SWOT** analysis?

First of all, you will need to allocate an hour, maybe two, to gather a diverse group of colleagues (both internal and external if possible) as well as company leadership. This diversity is critical in providing differing perspectives on each of the four points of your SWOT analysis.

Once you've gathered everybody, I recommend handing out a pad of sticky notes and asking each person to come up with five separate points for each quadrant. Doing this exercise first gives every member of the team a voice while reducing the pressure of "group think."

To help in your analysis mull over some of the following questions:

Strengths

- What are your most substantial assets?
- Which of those assets would you consider the strongest and why?
- What is unique about your company?
- What advantages do you hold over your competitors?
- How skilled are your sales team?
- Which of the business processes are most successful?

Weaknesses

- What are the potential areas for improvement?
- What is it customers are saying they would like to see more of?
- Are there any physical or tangible assets the company lacks?
- Are there skill gaps within the sales team?
- Where do your competitors have an edge?

Opportunities

- What are some of the current market trends?
- Is the market expanding or constricting?
- Are there any upcoming industry events?
- Do you need to consider any upcoming regulatory changes?
- Is your chief competitor losing traction with their customer base?
- Is there something clear and obvious missing from your market?

Threats

- Are there any competitors that could be a potential threat in the future?
- Is the current customer base satisfied with your services?
- Is the sales team happy?
- Is customer behavior changing?
- Are there any legal threats facing the company in the near future?

Once you've completed this exercise, you should end up with a prioritized list of points up for debate amongst the leadership group. You can then convert these points to real-time strategy and add actionable objectives to the sales strategy plan.

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Step #4

Setting Goals

Now the objective with setting goals here is twofold:

1. It provides sales reps with compensation, reward, and incentive to achieve their objectives.
2. It keeps sales activity closely aligned to specific corporate goals.

The **SMART** principle comes highly recommended as it ensures all sales goals are:

S PECIFIC

M EASURABLE

A CHIEVABLE

R ELEVANT

T IME - SENSITIVE

Specific

Goals shouldn't be abstract. They need to be tangible, measurable figures. For example, instead of saying increase sales visits (an abstract goal) change it to increase sales visits by 20% (a tangible goal).

Measurable

"What can't be measured, can't be improved." To evaluate the success of your team's progress, you need to set them quantitative goals. If not, how are you to determine if they are on the right path? And if that's the case, which areas need improving the most?

Achievable

The idea of sales goals is to motivate your reps into hitting a particular target. Push the goalposts too far out, however, and it can have the opposite effect, demoralizing your team. Try to find a sweet spot between ambition and what's realistic to get the most from your team.

Relevant

As we've discussed already, sales goals must be closely tied to corporate objectives if we want to execute the company's long-term vision. If not, then its future success and longevity are put at risk.

Let's take a look at an example...

Imagine your corporate team asked you to increase quarterly revenue by 10%.

As the sales manager, you decide the most effective method to increase revenue is through acquisition. So you set yourself the quarterly target of onboarding 5 new business-level customers.

However, simply asking your team to onboard 5 new customers doesn't fill any of the SMART goal requirements.

So, you need to ascertain how you can get more customers on board. In this case, you decide to set your reps a tangible goal, such as increasing the number of visits or appointments made to prospecting leads by 20%.

Increase
REVENUE
10%

New
CUSTOMERS
5

Increase
SALES VISITS
20%
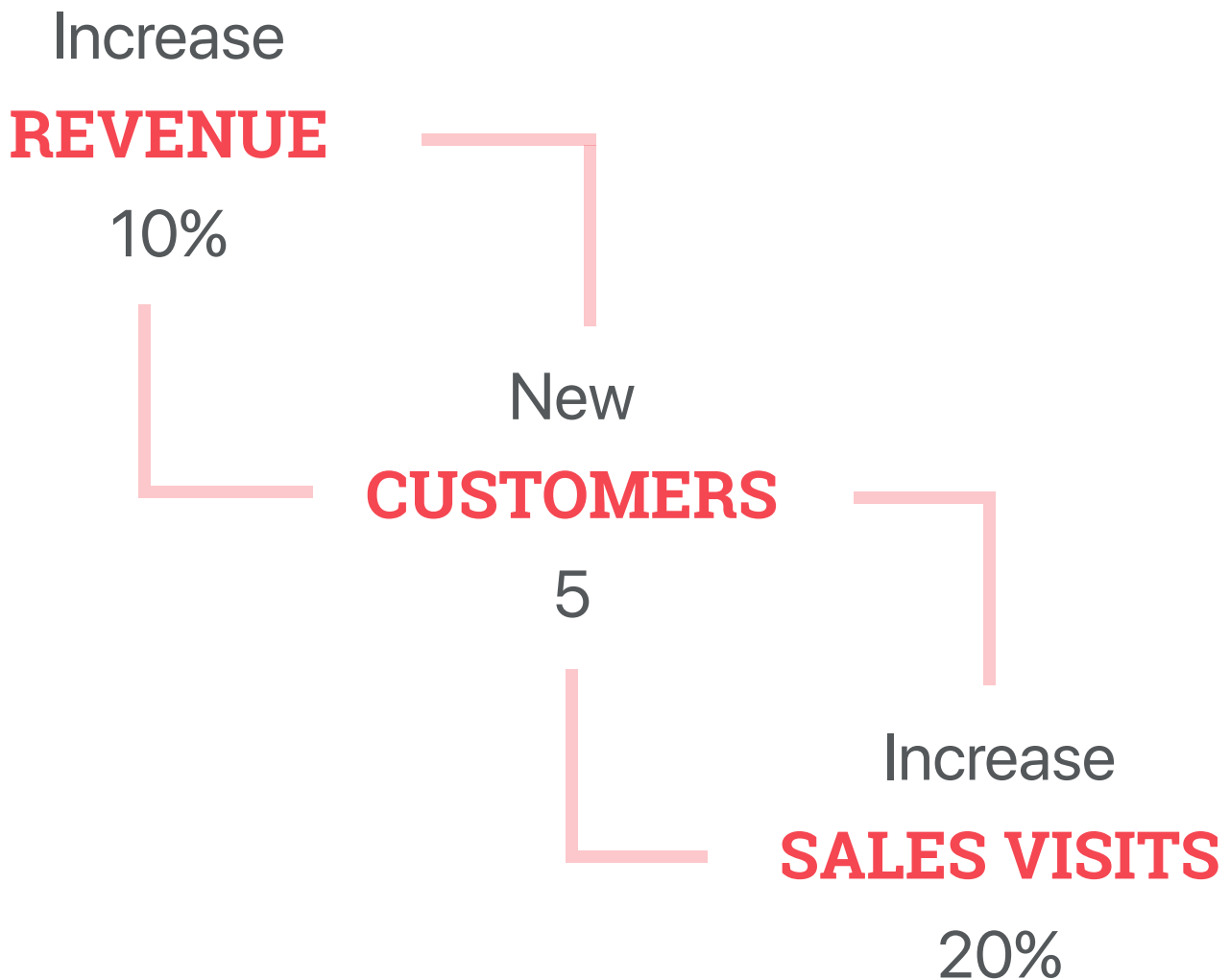
Time-Sensitive

Finally, our sales goals need an expiry date. If sales reps believe they have all year to hit their objectives, then where's the incentive? Again, it will need to be achievable as we alluded to earlier, but with just enough stick to get things moving at the business end of the quarter.

As you can see this method not only ensures the goals are **SMART**, so can be tied back to performance and sales coaching, but are directly related to corporate goals.

More importantly, they are broken down into manageable, tangible, bitesize pieces that your field sales reps can go tearing after to help achieve your business objectives.

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Step #5
Track and Measure Performance

Once the sales goals are in place, the second step in the sales strategy execution plan is to start tracking and measuring their progress.

We can do this by setting up custom sales manager reports within our CRM. This allows us to gather enough data that we can later apply to our sales coaching model.

However, before we do that, we must determine **what** we want to measure and, more importantly, **why**.

If not, we could suffer from a common affliction to affect almost all sales managers throughout their careers – analysis paralysis.

This is essentially an overload of irrelevant information in their sales reports that cripples their ability to extract any real, actionable insights.

Sales Directors and the excess of data which cripples their ability to make tactical decisions

EXCESS
of data
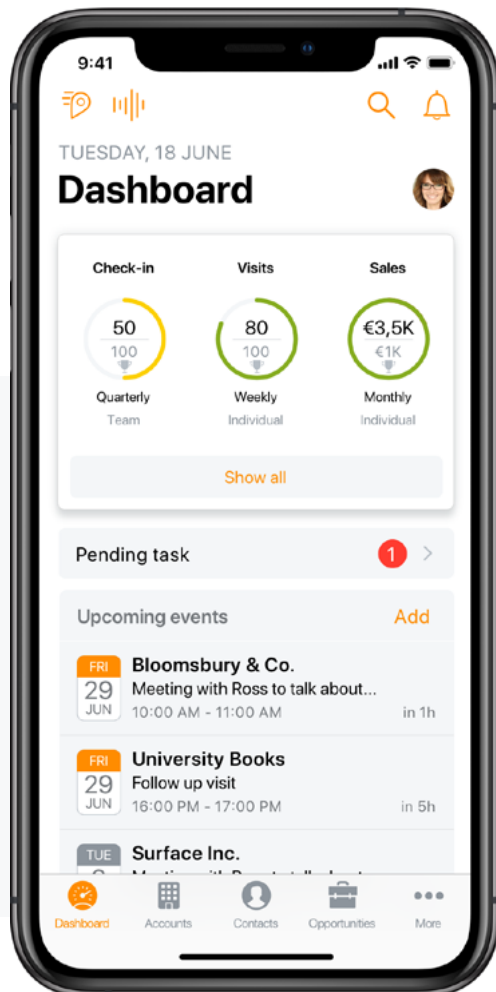
NO TIME
left to manage

Lack of
FOCUS

SUFFER
"ANALYSIS - PARALYSIS"

Want to know how to solve this problem?

FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS!

- Decide exactly **what** it is you want to measure and **why**

- Concentrate **only** the data directly affects your **desired result**

- Measure your team's results against that data to **increase their performance**

What benefits can you expect from this change?

+ Performance

More time dedicated to **coaching** your team

+ Efficiency

Pinpoint weak areas for improvement in your sales process

+ Productivity

Make tactical decisions based on real-time data

In our particular case, we know our field rep's **SMART** goal is to increase face-to-face customer visits by 20%.

Therefore, the only information you need from your sales reports is your reps' face-to-face visit count. While additional information may be nice to include, you have to ask yourself, is it really relevant to the overall goal of increasing revenue through customer acquisition?

If not, it's only going to clutter to the report and lead to analysis paralysis.

So, let's see what a mock weekly report might look like for us:

Individual Sales Rep
Performance Q3
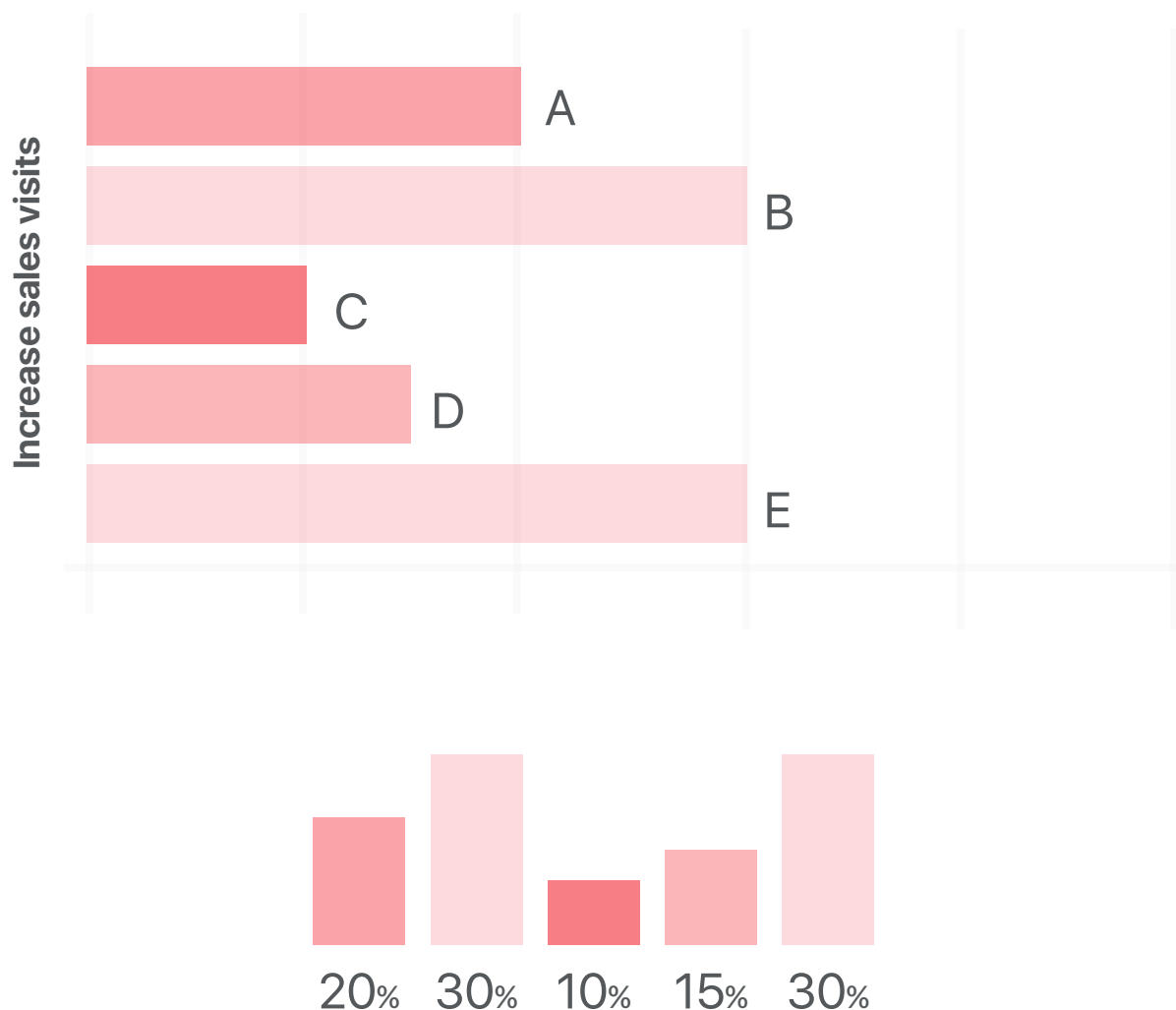
As you can see, we are looking at the number of sales visits made by 5 of our field reps from the past week:

While we have no particularly outstanding performers, sales reps C and D do raise a red flag. They have reached only 10% and 15% of their assigned targets.

It's unlikely the team hits their overall targets if these two continue to fall short of their face-to-face visit quota.

Clearly, something needs to be done about it.

However, before directly approaching the pair, please take a few minutes to think of all the skills a sales rep needs to hit this particular goal, and perhaps some of the obstacles they face.

Off the top of my head, some of the likely reasons are:

- Poor time-management

- Too much focus on existing customers

- Lack of understanding of primary goals

- Distance too great between visits

- Poor route planning skills

- Low motivation

Once you've completed this quick exercise and identified a few potential problem areas, it's now time to move onto the fourth and final step in the sales execution strategy plan, coaching.

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Step #6
Coaching Improvement

The final stage of the sales strategy execution plan is arguably where we, the sales director, earns their keep.

Combining our experience with a targeted, data-driven report, we can step in and provide our team with advice and support.

Now I do have a recommended method for approaching the subject. It can, as I'm sure you've experienced before, get quite tricky when critiquing a salesperson's performance.

It starts by organizing a weekly sales meeting, which typically lasts between 30 minutes to an hour, to resolve issues or obstacles preventing salespeople from hitting their goals.

Before you begin offering any advice during the meeting, ask for feedback from the individual sales rep in question. It is crucial in stopping sales reps from immediately going on the defensive.

For example, try opening the conversation like so:

> "Hey sales rep C/D, generally speaking, how would you rate your overall performance over the past couple of weeks?"

> "Let's take a look at your weekly sales reports and the number of face-to-face visits made compared to the rest of the team...what is your opinion?

This approach empowers salespeople to reflect on their performance. It allows them to question why they've underperformed and uncover their weak points.

Then, after a quick discussion, you can continue with the following question:

> "So, based on your observations and the metrics we've gone through together in your report, which skills do you think we should work?

Once this process is completed, you can then step in with your own opinion and form an appropriate sales coaching plan for the future.

Here's a potential problem scenario and corresponding coaching plan for sales reps C and D:

Time Management

It's probable that, after your weekly sales meeting, you uncovered the reason for their poor performance stems from a lack of time management. Depending on the field rep, it could be that:
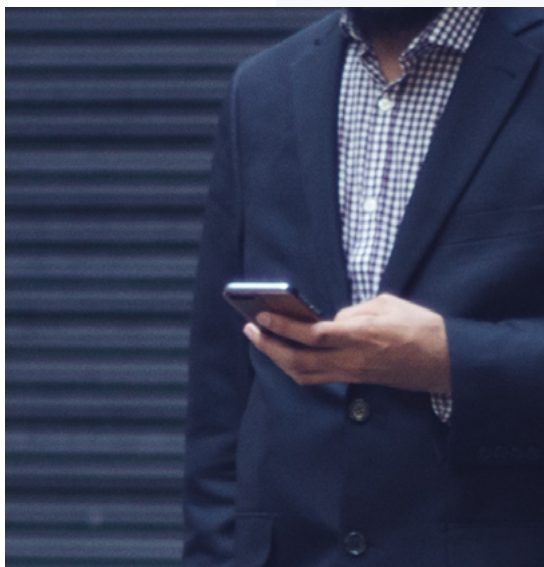
- They are spending too much time with existing customers

- Not visiting new prospects and leads

- Route planning is inefficient

- Excessive admin work

- Simply not working hard enough!

Whatever the reason might be, you can set out a "daily scrum" where they commit to completing a set of actions every day against the new objectives outlined in their sales coaching plan.

Both salespeople and managers then track these daily/weekly goals or KPIs to boost performance.

Then, with a bit of luck, the weekly sales report will start looking like this:

Number of Sales Visits
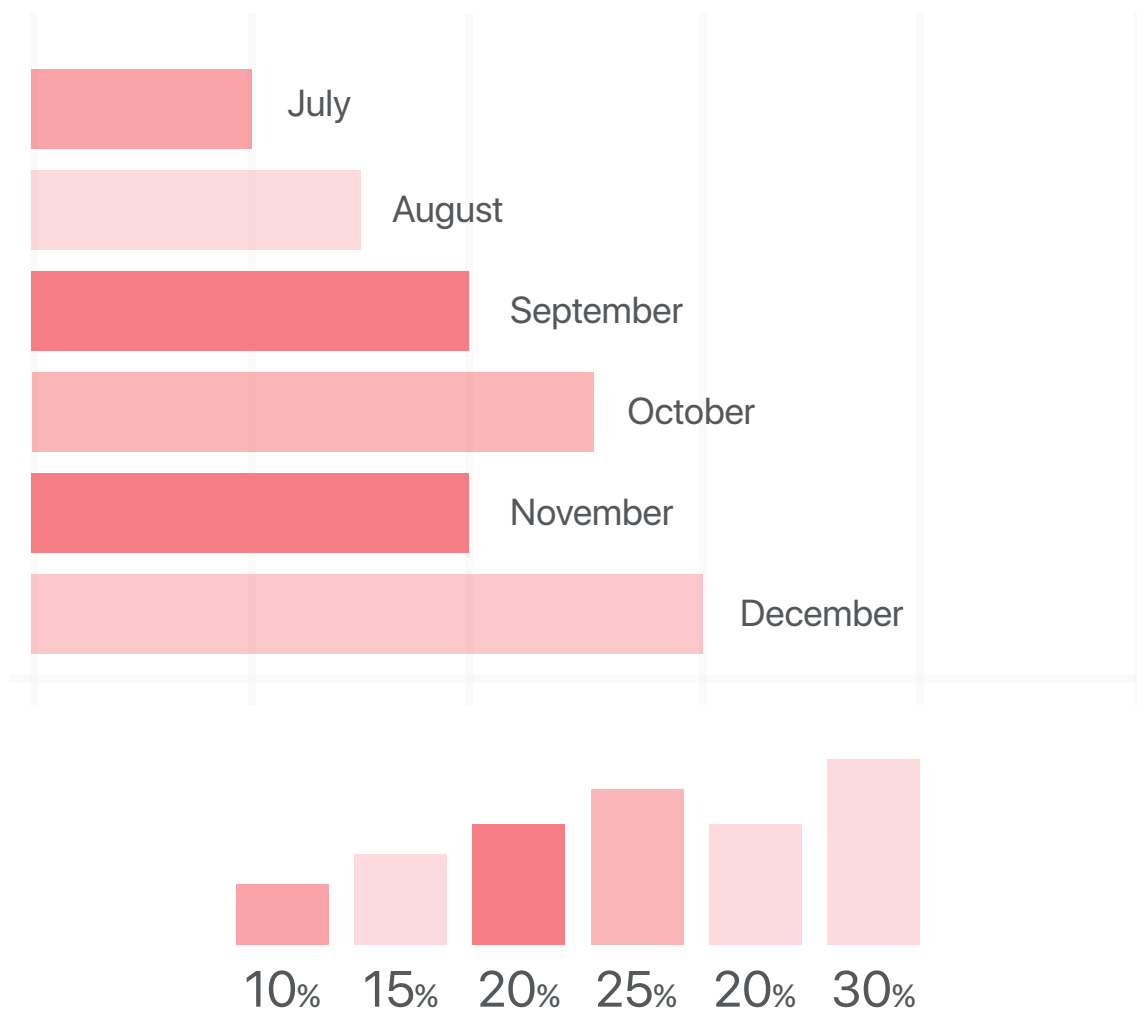
We hope that's given you a head start when developing your next sales strategy plan!

Just remember, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to building a sales strategy. Customize the template provided to fit your needs, those of the organization, and their goals.

Don't take our word for it!

Find out how some of our customers used ForceManager's Mobile CRM to help plan and execute their sales strategies

"ForceManager ensures we execute our sales strategy"

> "Before ForceManager our data was scattered to the winds, stored on individual field rep's devices. This prevented different people within our organization from accessing and made it difficult to make any real, tactical decisions and execute our sales strategy."

Tom Ellis, Managing Director
at **JT Ellis & Co.**

MADE BETTER BY
ELLIS

"

"After implementing ForceManager we increased prospecting visits by 20% while also reducing the time our reps spent on admin. All this led to an increase of between 25%-30% in the conversion rate of new customers."

Adolfo Masagué, Sales Director at **Das Insurance**

Find out moure

"

"Thanks to ForceManager, we are working more efficiently, spend less time reporting and are able to divert more attention to sales-driving activities."
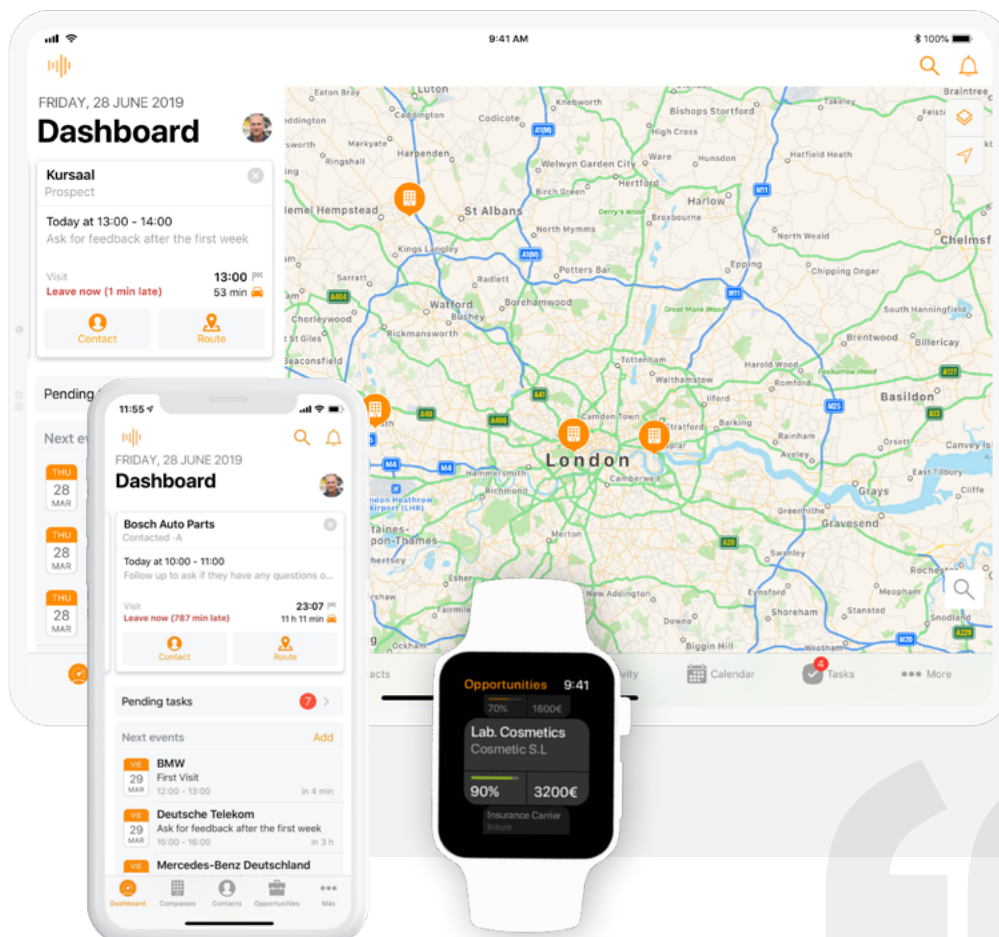
Albert Freixa, Marketing Coordinator at **Asics**

Find out moure

![ForceManager logo]

Want to see how **ForceManager** can help you execute your sales strategies

Request a Demo

A consultant will help answer any questions or queries you may have as well provide examples of how other companies are utilizing ForceManager's personal sales assistant to execute their sales strategies.

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