

What's the Secret Sauce for Better Sales Processes?



A recipe is essentially a process: Add a dash of this, a dollop of that, mix thoroughly, season to taste, and voilà! Success! When it comes to sales, the magic ingredient in the sales *process* – the secret sauce, if you will – is data. Fresh, relevant, heaping portions of meaningful, actionable data.

Here's why using a data-driven sales approach is so important, and what types of data are essential to the mix:

Where Sales Process Ingredients Come Together

First things first: Your company's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is where essential data should be stored, mixed, and prepared. Metaphorically speaking, it's the pantry, the mixing bowl, and the oven where your sales process recipe comes together. Using sales performance metrics and other key data in your CRM, you can refine your sales processes to achieve new levels of sales success.

This can be true IF you first ensure the quality of your CRM and the data within it. It's essential, for example, for your CRM to be well-chosen and properly configured. While you might not need the most expensive (or *expansive*) CRM to achieve your current data usage goals, you should still select a CRM that can accommodate changing needs.

Likewise, your data needs may change over time. For example, essential data can be influenced by technology, economic and market forces, your product and service mix, and even what your competitors are doing. With that in mind, let's look at the sales metrics that can be vital to better sales processes.

The Influence of Meaningful Data on Sales Processes

Meaningful data, particularly *leading* (vs. *lagging*) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), can provide critical benchmarks and mileposts throughout the sales process. For example, by aligning forward-looking sales performance metrics with important sales process milestones, you should be able to more accurately forecast sales. Certainly, by analyzing how well your process moves prospects through the pipeline, you should be able to project where trouble spots might occur. You could, for example, be able to anticipate a bottleneck where a lack or misdirection of sales resources could cause an interested and engaged target to drop out of the sales funnel, thus turning a high-conversion probability prospect into a missed opportunity.

Although using the historical perspective of lagging indicators can be important, *leading* indicators can empower you to analyze relevant sales process data in near real-time, so you can head off weak performance before it happens. Data analysis should be a funnel of its own – one that first provides big-picture snapshots of overall performance, and then enables you to drill down to actionable detail. While the big-picture view can reveal the effectiveness of your overall sales strategy, it's at the detail level where the need for process refinements can be discovered and even small modifications can produce significant results.

There's no need to wait for year-end or quarter-end to run reports. If your data is relevant and aligned with your processes, you should be able to use sales data analysis to identify trouble spots and make changes quickly. However, don't overdo it by continuously micro-managing either. Make sure your numbers have context. For example, is your market's overall economic performance in a funk? If so, your sales performance downturns might be understandable. In fact, if your sales are outperforming your competitors in a tough economic landscape, even weak performance data could indicate that your processes are working despite market challenges.

The Bottom Line:

A data-driven sales approach, using relevant and meaningful sales performance metrics such as leading KPIs, can empower you to identify and correct problem areas in your sales processes. When trouble spots become obvious, so do the solutions. And when your sales processes are effective and efficient, sustainable sales growth become more likely. The secret sauce that makes it all possible, of course, is data!

To learn more about how to identify key sales metrics, improve your CRM, and turn sales data into better sales processes, contact Don McMahan, your Sales Xceleration Sales Leadership Consultant today. [Click here](#) to schedule a free consultation or call (925) 487-1970.

