

• HOW TO GET STARTED WITH •

INBOUND SALES





What if you arrived at work one morning and found an inbox filled with leads? Not just any leads—the exact leads you want. The kinds of leads that already know who your company is and what types of products or services you offer. Leads with a problem *you* can solve, a need *you* can fill. What if there was a way for you to know everything about these leads before you had to make a phone call, like where they came from, what they already know, and what information they still need to make a purchasing decision?

What if, instead of chasing that big fish you've been after, *it came to you?*

But this is no white whale chase, it's an accurate depiction of what your sales process should look like. It's called inbound sales, and in a few years, it will be the only way most successful B2B organizations sell. Here's what you'll need to know to get started.





What is Inbound Sales?

Inbound sales is a consultative selling style that's respectful, non-intrusive and focused on helping buyers make an informed purchasing decision.

Hinged on data-driven dialogue, inbound sales uses every bit of information available about buyers to determine which are qualified and precisely when they are ready for a sales conversation.

With each communication, an inbound sales representative is armed with a rich history of the buyer's behavior and product or service knowledge. The buyer gets exactly the right information and guidance to reach the right decision to achieve their goals. As a result, a sales rep can close faster, generate more revenue for her organization and significantly increase earnings.





The Beginning of Inbound Sales

Before the Internet,

80%

of selling was done by the sales team.



Marketing collected leads, dropped them on sales' desk, and walked away.

Sales would call, qualify, persuade and hopefully close. Buyers relied entirely on sales for information about products and services because there was no alternative, and the process worked well enough.

When the Internet became mainstream, buyers began doing their own research online, changing everything. Their journey became non-linear, their interaction with sales diminished and the tactics marketing and sales used to attract and close buyers no longer worked.





In the mid-2000s, trailblazers like HubSpot confronted this new “self-serve” buyer’s journey by reinventing the way brands do marketing. They figured out that by providing the educational resources buyers used to conduct independent research about products or services, they could actively guide buyers toward a desired purchasing decision and reclaim ownership of the buyer’s journey. This strategy was the first move toward a less intrusive relationship with buyers, and required creating content that was relevant, helpful and therefore valuable to them.





Trouble at Sea

Of course, changing winds in the marketing landscape did not occur without simultaneously rocking the boat. By 2010, the marketplace was surfeited with information and buyers were accessing it from a bevy of devices. This created a convoluted environment for reaching the right audiences with the right information at the right time—not exactly smooth sailing.

Today, **85 percent of marketers** say they are practicing the inbound strategy, but many are still missing the mark. They may be accruing mass amounts of leads, but without more complete information to flesh out buyer personas, they can't properly target campaigns to generate high-quality, sales *qualified* leads. This is the metaphorical crowbar still widening the gap between sales and marketing departments.

Sales is up against increasingly dense call sheets, two or three times the length with little change in lead quality, and closing rates suffer. On the flip side of that coin, any leads that sales cannot get to are pumped back into the system, and become marketing's responsibility to nurture. The two departments fire spitballs over the cubicle wall—each blaming the other for the overall dysfunction of the process, and nobody wins. Who's at fault?





Starting Off on the Right Foot: Aligning Sales and Marketing

Several steps must be taken to get sales and marketing on the same team. First, both department heads must parlay, develop and commit to working together toward common goals, processes, metrics and benchmarks.

Ideally, they should come up with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that defines shared goals, expectations, responsibilities and other important metrics. This will ensure both departments understand exactly what their role is, and will assist in keeping departments accountable for their part in the overall process.

It's important for each department to understand and appreciate the other's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These are the metrics that matter most to each team and as such, they must be a shared interest. Defining KPIs will also be instrumental in measuring progress in both departments.



Next (and this will be a recurrent event), sales needs to talk to marketing about what a quality lead looks like. This conversation should be used to develop buyer personas marketing can use to target their efforts and sales can use to qualify prospects. Each time sales closes a deal, this conversation should be revisited so marketing can refocus campaigns and improve the quality of leads they attract.

Finally, sales and marketing must consistently work from a closed-loop reporting system that creates a circular flow of information about leads. Working from the same database of evolving contact information, they can provide the right content to support a sale and be ready to respond instantly when a buyer is ready to make a decision.





Building the Inbound Sales Team

If you have members on your sales team who have been at sea a while, they may resist change in an effort to preserve a selling style they believe still works. At one time, it did. But that's not the case **anymore**.

- **58 PERCENT** of buyers report that sales representatives cannot answer their questions effectively.
- **41.8 PERCENT** of sales representatives missed quota last year.
- When sales and marketing aren't properly aligned, it costs B2B companies **10 PERCENT OR MORE** of their annual revenue.
- When sales and marketing are working together, sales win rates increase by **38 PERCENT**.





What Qualities Does an Inbound Sales Representative Have?

One might describe an old-school salesperson as having a lone wolf mentality—trained in the art of persuasion and capable of spinning any angle to work in their favor. In other words, borderline manipulative.

Inbound sales is about sincerely guiding prospects to the right solution for their need or problem and furthermore, helping them feel comfortable with their decision. This type of selling requires a much different breed of salesperson. It's no longer just about skill and experience—it's about intellect, cultural fit and character.

Successful inbound sales professionals are tech-savvy, data-hungry and highly personable. They have high self-esteem, but they also have exceptional listening skills and can connect with prospects in a meaningful way. Despite the tough love this generation often faces, millennials make excellent candidates. What they lack in business, sales and marketing experience, they make up for in digital savvy, passion and transparency.



You can get inbound buy-in from your current sales team by providing ample training.

Organizations that provide salespeople with opportunities for ongoing development are much more likely to cultivate peak-performing salespeople than those that don't.

These books can help you build and groom this sales force:



[The Sales Acceleration Formula](#) (by Mark Roberge)



[Inbound Marketing](#) (by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah)



[Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose](#) (by Tony Hsieh)





Creating a Closed-Loop Reporting System

Data is the wind propelling inbound sales.

You must know your buyer so well, you can answer their questions at exactly the moment they ask them. This is where a closed-loop reporting system comes into play.

Sales needs a sophisticated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, and Marketing needs a Marketing Platform (MP) that supports marketing automation. But here's the kicker—if these two systems aren't fully integrated and religiously used by both departments, you might as well abandon ship.

The data these two systems enable you to collect and share serves as the linchpin holding all the pieces of your sales and marketing process together. **With proper integration, the impact of all sales and marketing efforts are realized, providing insights that lead to more qualified sales leads and more customers.** Without it, the entire structure sinks.





Using Technology to Build and Manage Pipeline

When CRM systems were first introduced to sales teams 20 years ago, they were strictly used (if at all) to take notes and shuffle prospects through the sales funnel.

At the time, sales wasn't really concerned with buyer behavior and engagement—they only looked at whether a buyer fit their predefined criteria, like budget, authority, need and timing (BANT).

Today's CRM systems are much more sophisticated at collecting, analyzing and presenting the full spectrum of high-level information. They're connected to your website, communication channels, social media and more. They work in the background to log your activity, and they are highly adaptable.





But CRM systems don't manage all communications, and that's where marketing platforms take the baton. Marketing platforms illustrate the more intimate details about buyers, like where they came from, how they are behaving on your website and which campaigns they're engaging with and when. That means sales representatives have far more context from which to base their action; they can be better prepared before the first phone call.

For example, sales can determine the quality of a lead by monitoring which pages that lead visits on the website. If a buyer is looking at pricing—you've got yourself a real nibble. If they're only reading blogs, they may still need time to gestate. Sales reps can also go into their CRM to review contact profiles from nurturing campaigns *before* making a phone call. This allows salespeople to see a detailed overview of every touch point a buyer has made with their brand and spark conversation that specifically addresses where a buyer is in their journey.

Most importantly, sales can receive real-time lead status alerts at the office or on a mobile device. This is important because it allows sales to reach out to buyers the moment they indicate they are ready for a conversation, such as when they request a consultation or revisit the website and interact with end-of-journey information.

Keep in mind, **80 percent of sales** require at least five follow-up calls after a meeting to close. Knowing what to talk about and when is a major advantage.

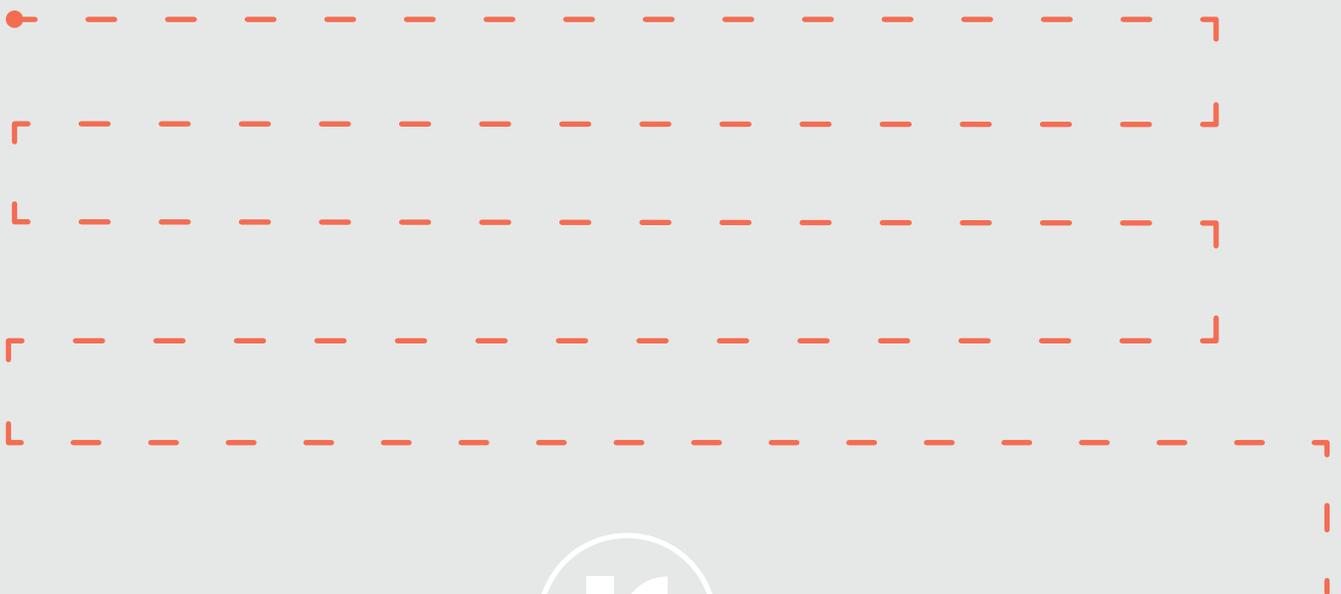




Feeding Information Back Into the System

One of the biggest mistakes sales teams make is failing to promptly feed what they learn about their prospects back into the system. This includes when a lead closes and for how much it closed.

On the surface, this information illustrates where a lead is in their buyer's journey and what the next action should be. But more importantly, it shows marketing what a high-quality lead looks like so they can retarget their efforts to reel in more of the same. And an up-to-date CRM gives sales managers real-time information about high-quality prospects and deals in progress and accurate reporting for strategy and planning purposes.





Developing Your Sales Process

Naturally, to support this new technology-driven way of selling you need to implement a new sales process.

If the marketing team is doing their jobs correctly, leads are coming to you, not vice versa. That means outbound sales is becoming obsolete (at least in the B2B vertical), and your new sales process focuses on inbound strategy.

Outbound Sales Process

The old sales process looked something like this:

- 1 **Prospect:** Go out and find leads
- 2 **Hunt:** Cold call to create opportunities
- 3 **Close:** Convert leads into customers
- 4 **Upsell:** Increase revenue



This process is stripped of data, disregards marketing efforts, and is essentially like blindfolding your salesperson and telling them to walk the plank.





Inbound Sales Process

The new sales process looks something like this:

- 1 **Monitor and Anticipate:** Know the buyer's wants and needs
- 2 **Educate and Guide:** Influence qualified leads to move down the sales funnel with relevant content and timely context
- 3 **Qualify:** Use data to determine who is sales-ready in real time
- 4 **Close:** Teach buyers how to be your customer

This process is more focused on insight, fact and non-intrusive relationship-building. There's a smaller chance your sales representative will become shark bait and a greater chance they'll convert more leads into long-term customers.

A well-established sales and marketing SLA can help build an effective inbound sales process. Your SLA will not only define *when* leads will be passed to sales, but also to whom a lead belongs. It's the foundation from which your process will stand.





Conclusion

A good captain hails aboard the right crew members who know the ship, the waters they're sailing and their role to keep the ship sailing in smooth waters. A good inbound sales team—with the right technology and the right process—will be able to work with the marketing team to identify qualified leads who might have otherwise slipped through the cracks.

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