

Planning

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The vast majority of sales organizations do not have a tactical, written sales and marketing plan. Generally the sales plan consists of revenue targets absent strategic initiatives and tactical, measurable activities. Establishing a tactical plan with timelines and accountabilities will enable you to sustain profitable growth within target markets, reduce customer attrition and maximize revenues. There are many reasons why strategic plans fail, among them:

Failure to understand the customer	Poor communications
Failure to obtain employee commitment	Over-estimation of resource competence
Under-estimation of time requirements	Failure to coordinate
Failure to follow the plan	Inability to focus

You must “reverse engineer” your goals to create an integrated sales and marketing plan. Successful managers begin by aligning their business objectives with their sales and marketing goals and in the end create short term tactical performance metrics and accountabilities to meet those business objectives.

The strategic plan is fundamentally a process of answering five questions: Who is our customer? What does our customer value? What is our mission? What is our plan? What are our desired results? To be effective, the plan must be built on knowing who the customer is and what results we must deliver to that customer. While the concept is simple, answering the five basic strategic questions can be complex. Experience has proven that much of the time spent planning fails simply because it is intrinsically focused. The best strategic plans are customer and market centric.

Despite completion of a sound strategic plan, there are still enormous barriers in executing on that plan. Management feels compelled to constantly examine and measure the results and accomplishments and they end up focusing on the wrong end of the problem, often times months too late. Great leaders will invest the appropriate time to help their people to define the specific activities required to consistently exceed their sales plan. The real focus should not be on results, but rather the daily activities which enable your sales people to win DAILY. The challenge in the successful execution of a strategic sales and marketing plan is to insure that your sales people take ownership in the plan, because they had a part in engineering the tactics needed to support the strategy that drives results.

All too often sales people do not recognize the need to drive corporate marketing strategies within their territory so they do not invest sufficient time, nor do they have sufficient ownership in developing their territory.

As with most planning endeavors, the devil is in the details.

- You must create an empowering process which allows the sales team to be part of creating the plan, not merely taking orders dictated to them.
- Make sure your people are using a solid and standard planning template which provides structure but allows for their individual strengths.
- Planning should be conducted at length a minimum of three months prior to year end (Timeframes will vary depending on your sales cycle).
- Inspect the plan, at minimum, quarterly through one on one coaching and mentoring.
- Tie the strategic plan to specific quantifiable activities which can be measured and improved,
- Remember the greatest benefit of having your reps create a strategic plan is that they will become better strategists over time. As Eisenhower once said, the plan is not as valuable in the end as the process of planning.

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