KEYPOINT INTELLIGENCE

ANALYSIS

THE ADVANTAGES OF SALES PLAYBOOKS

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Introduction

In today's world, selling is only becoming more complex with time. What use to be a linear process now involves interconnected events that are driven by the speed of business as well as the evolving buyer landscape. Developing and acquiring new business has become a chaotic labyrinth of finding prospects, nurturing clients, and closing the sale. Despite the thousands of dollars that organizations spend on sales training, valuable knowledge can be lost mere days after the learning event. Training sessions should sharpen the skills that are required to meet the needs of today's buyers. All too often, however, the notes, exercises, and insightful conversations that are prompted during even the best training sessions quickly become lost in the real world. As a result, ad-hoc sales behaviors take over and reps begin to rely on often disappointing trial and error tactics.

For a simple example, consider cold calling. As a sales organization, do you have a set of e-mails or voicemail messages that will spark interest and resonate with the intended buyer, or do your reps find themselves scripting their own messages as they go? Next, think about the questions that must be answered before advancing the sale—does your qualifying stage have a structure? If not, this could mean that your sales efforts are getting lost on the wrong prospects.

Sales leaders must arm their teams with valuable resources to guide their reps through today's intricate maze of sales opportunities. They need to offer tools that create sales efficiency and eliminate the practice of experimenting on valuable clients and prospects. A good way to do this is to develop a sales playbook. When done well, a sales playbook breaks down the sales process and provides the resources required to engage with the buyer every step of the way. In short, it is a powerful, uniformed asset that becomes a map for sales success. A sales playbook represents the culture and character of your team and company. It is unique to the value that you deliver and how you approach new opportunities. In that sense, this document explores how a well-designed sales playbook can enhance your team's sales results.
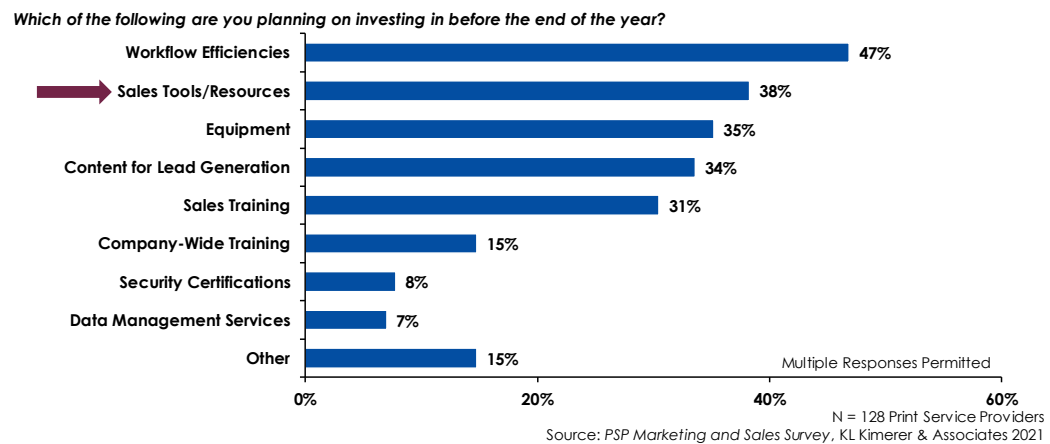
Playbook Objectives

Developing a sales playbook is similar to writing a book or a script—the first step is to identify the objective. Simply stated, you need to ask yourself about the motivation for your effort. The rationale behind a sales playbook is to foster a thorough understanding of your company's purpose and vision. It outlines what you do and who you do it for, and it includes roles and responsibilities that establish individual ownership. As the name suggests, it also outlines proven plays to gain new business. Overall, it inspires your sales team to seek success.

It's very likely that your firm already has an established mission statement, but it's reasonable to assume that this mission is not being talked about enough in your sales efforts. When a sales rep learns the history of his or her business, that knowledge can be transferred toward building better relationships. A sales playbook has the advantage of concisely displaying the information all your team members must have to unify them under a shared goal.

For this reason, it should come as no surprise that sales playbooks are becoming increasingly popular. According to a recent study by KL Kimerer and Associates, sales tools and resources—including sales playbooks—are high on print service providers' list of investments.

Figure 1: PSPs' Planned Investments

Which of the following are you planning on investing in before the end of the year?

Category	Percentage
Workflow Efficiencies	47%
Sales Tools/Resources	38%
Equipment	35%
Content for Lead Generation	34%
Sales Training	31%
Company-Wide Training	15%
Security Certifications	8%
Data Management Services	7%
Other	15%

Multiple Responses Permitted

N = 128 Print Service Providers
Source: *PSP Marketing and Sales Survey*, KL Kimerer & Associates 2021

Outflanking Tactics

Once the objective of your sales playbook is confirmed, you must address what it will contain. In general terms, plays that address every potential sales situation will be useful to your team. Your sales playbook should include examples that lead your reps through specific activities, like how to research a market and learn about its needs, how to prospect, which products sell well together, and tactics for overcoming common objections. A sales playbook reinforces tried and true sales behaviors and reduces the risk of sending your rep down a dead end. Clear, concise information along with direction gives your sales team a better opportunity to succeed.

Your playbook can't be static; it must evolve with market trends, technologies, and changing customer needs. To put this another way, a sales playbook should be fluid and "written in pencil rather than pen." In fact, your sales playbook may not be a written document or a "book" at all. With online operating systems and integrated CRM applications like SalesForce or Playbooks, you can construct your team's day-to-day activities. An online playbook can also set the number of outreaches you want each

salesperson to make, then pull lists of prospects from your CRM and deliver daily plays and expectations. If your primary focus is nurturing current customers, an online sales playbook can mark inactivity thresholds within your customer base and prioritize those contacts accordingly. Although these tools do require an investment in time and funds, online playbook platforms automate the collection of sales metrics that are meaningful to your team's success. In turn, you and your team will be able to test different sales plays if one isn't working well.

Although they can be quite intricate, sales playbooks (online or otherwise) do not need to offer all of the aforementioned functions to provide value. In their most basic form, however, all sales playbooks should include the following:

- An explanation of why your business exists and how you serve your customers

- An organizational chart or directory

- An onboarding process for new sales reps

- An identification of industry trends to help establish meaningful client/prospect relationships

- A customer persona (i.e., a picture of what your ideal customer looks like)

- Best practices for researching an industry or prospect

- Tips and tactics for prospecting, including sequencing

- An explanation of your sales process

- Templates for voicemail and e-mail messages that can be customized

- Outlines and agendas for a successful sales meeting or demonstration

- A list of smart (and I mean really smart!) questions to ask prospects

- Best practices to increase win rates

- A list of common sales objections and how to manage them

- Competitive intelligence

- Metrics that sales reps will be measured by

- Company marketing messages and efforts

- A how-to section on sales documentation

Often included are supplementary learning resources and links for content that can be used for social media, prospecting, and presentations. To create an incentive for your reps to use the playbooks, consider incorporating gamification (i.e., elements of gameplay). This can be handled online or manually by tracking completed tasks, contact rates, and win rates so top performers can be recognized and rewarded. When you associate recognition with your primary objectives, you'll keep your entire team moving in the right direction.

Winning Stakes

The final pillar in analyzing a book's text or script is determining what's at stake. Ask yourself—what do you stand to gain or lose by not using a sales playbook? How else can you confidently distribute uniformed sales plays and resources? If your sales reps are used to winging it, they're probably just relying on their own best guesses. A sales playbook provides the necessary structure so you can be prepared for almost anything. In turn, it is a resource that can be calibrated as our industry evolves and buyers' needs change.

There is no question that developing a sales playbook requires an investment in time and money. If your goals call for market expansion, it makes sense to invest in sales enablement tools. For an on-screen example, consider this—a Robert Downey Jr. is going to cost a lot more than a local theater thespian, but that investment will be returned with reliance and influence.

In addition to eliminating uncertainty, a sales playbook can prepare your team to take more calculated risks. It can serve as a safety net if something goes wrong. For example, if a sales situation calls for a little improvisation and the rep's efforts fail, he or she can immediately return to the proven sales plays. If, on the other hand, a rep's improv results in great success, it might be worth adding to the next revision of your sales playbook!

The Bottom Line

Think of a sales playbook as your company's GPS to progress. Before we had access to these wayfinding devices; attempting to navigate the roads and highways on your own often resulted in lost time, dead ends, and traffic delays. Traditional maps only offered a rigid set of directions to follow, with no "rerouting" if you missed a turn along the way. Much like today's directional apps, a modern sales playbook is more amenable to success than a static printout. It will keep you moving forward, prepare you for obstacles, and ensure that you remain mindful of speed requirements.

There are a variety of models and templates that print service providers can use to create effective sales playbooks. As you're developing your own, take the opportunity to alter your competitive landscape with proven plays for success.

opinion

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As Director of Business Development Strategies at Keypoint Intelligence, Karen Kimerer has experienced the many challenges of expanding current market opportunities and securing new business. She has developed a systematic approach to these opportunities, addressing the unique requirements of becoming a leader in our changing industry.

Comments or Questions?

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