

7 Standard Sales Pipeline Stages for Businesses to Succeed

The sales processes for an insurance firm, a realtor, and an automobile dealership may seem nothing alike. To land a new client, the insurance firm needs prospects to talk about risk and probability. The realtor wants them to list or buy a property. And the auto dealership wants to discuss a test drive or car loan.

But while every company—and every sales rep—uses methods unique to them, the stages of their sales processes are actually quite similar. Sales reps take a new lead, work to start a dialogue, and evaluate whether there's a good fit between the prospects needs and the products or services the rep's company has to offer before working to close the deal.

And the majority of business get it wrong. According to the research firm Marketing Sherpa, 68 percent of business-to-business marketers haven't identified what their sales and marketing funnels entail. And an inconsistent process results in lost leads, wasted time, wasted opportunity, missed goals – ultimately limiting the growth and success of the business. This problem is known as ***pipeline leakage*** and can be the difference between sales survival – often even ultimate failure - and busting out the sales goals and hitting a sales goldrush.

Even companies that have invested and successful in marketing automation like ***adVision*** can fail to see the full uptick in business if they don't have a good process to manage through and convert leads into sales. Chances are, many businesses that has a CRM system in place where first asked the key question: "What are your sales stages ?". If not, they should probably be running away from the CRM vendor!

But many startup and small companies have yet to invest in a CRM solution. What should they do to insure their pipeline leakage. Here are ***7 Sales Pipeline Stages for Businesses to Succeed***

1. New opportunity

Description

A new lead is identified and his contact information is recorded. The collection of that information must lead to an opportunity record being created in Excel, Access, Lead Management software (or CRM if you have one). Your sales rep will reference this record throughout the sales process, using it to access contact information, move the lead from one stage to the next, take notes and set reminders for follow-up actions.

Process

Aim for this: an opportunity record is automatically created when a prospect fills out an online form for a free consultation or when a staff member records prospect information from a phone call. Then assign a sales rep to the lead. This may be on a round-robin basis, or by territory or area of expertise/special knowledge. Then have a policy to ensure the rep receives a reminder to call the new prospect.

2. Contacting

Description

It's time for one of the most difficult parts of the sales process: simply getting a hold of the lead. The prospect remains in this sales stage until the rep makes contact, whether that happens after one phone call or 10.

Process

To connect with the new lead, the sales rep first picks up the phone. By recording the outcome of the call, s/he triggers a series of events that must follow. The items below are just examples, your business can change and adapt these to suit your particular business. In our examples these are handled via a series of standard email that can be set up in **adVision's** marketing automation solution

The first sends the prospect a Success Guide and asks him/her to choose a time to connect. The second, sent because the rep hasn't yet reached the prospect, educates him on the value of hiring a bookkeeper. And the last email, sent three weeks after the prospect originally expressed interest, asks if that interest still exists.

3. Engaging

Description

By this stage, the sales rep has reached an important milestone in the sales process: S/he has actually talked to the prospect. Depending on your business, the sales rep might have one conversation in this stage or several of them as the rep determines whether the prospect is qualified to make a purchase. In the engaging stage, the rep might send a series of standard **adVision** emails that educate the lead and collect information needed to qualify him/her.

Process

The sales rep talks with the prospect during a free consultation, the purpose of which is more deeply qualifying the lead. At the end of the consultation, the rep logs one of these three outcomes, each of which triggers a further sequence:

A) The lead is qualified

For a qualified lead, the rep sends an evaluation form and other documents to be completed.

B) The lead is qualified but isn't ready to buy

While some businesses would forget about this lead, **adVision** helps the sales rep to stay in touch. The conclusion is not that the lead doesn't want to buy; it's that he doesn't want to buy **right now**. Triggering this automated sequence adds the prospect to a monthly newsletter list and sends a reminder for the rep to call him again in a certain period of time.

C) The lead is not qualified or interested

If the lead is never going to become a customer, the sales rep applies a tag that stops all automated communication.

4. Qualified

Description

In this stage, the sales rep determines the lead is qualified, meaning that s/he has **the need, budget, intent and authority to make a purchase**.

Process

The sales rep sends the prospect paperwork that will allow him/her to create a proposal and close the sale. Inevitably, some prospects will forget or procrastinate on returning the paperwork, stalling the sales process. In that case, the rep needs to set reminders and tasks for the rep to call if the prospect hasn't yet responded.

5. Custom stages

Up until this point, the sales processes for most businesses involve the same general goals: contact, engagement, and qualification. Here's where things start to change. Some businesses may have unique sales stages, like scheduling an in-person meeting, arranging for a free trial, or sending a product sample. Regardless, this stage of the pipeline is designed to move prospects closer to closing the deal

6. Closing

Description

As the sales process comes to a close, the sales rep asks the prospect to finalize the deal.

Process

To close a new customer, the rep sends a proposal. At this point, it's win or lose—accept or reject.

7. Won/Lost

Description

Often done badly or not at all, this is a critical learning stage for the business. The sales process should ultimately end in either a win or loss. Each scenario might prompt **adVision** to deliver its own set of automated follow-up actions—like a series of welcome emails for a new customer, or a six-month check-in email for a lead who didn't end up buying. In tandem with this, the rep should write up a brief win/loss report so the whole sales and marketing group at the business can learn best practices (in the case of a win) or vital mistakes to avoid (in the case of a loss).

Process

As s/he does when a prospect isn't ready to buy earlier in the sales process, the sales rep keeps in touch with the prospect who rejected the proposal. In six months, the **adVision** software will give him/her a reminder to call and see if s/he's changed his/her mind.

If the prospect accepts the proposal, that means the business has a new customer—and it's time to welcome him with emails and an onboarding meeting to get started on the work ahead. Another **adVision** automated sequence will guide them along the way.