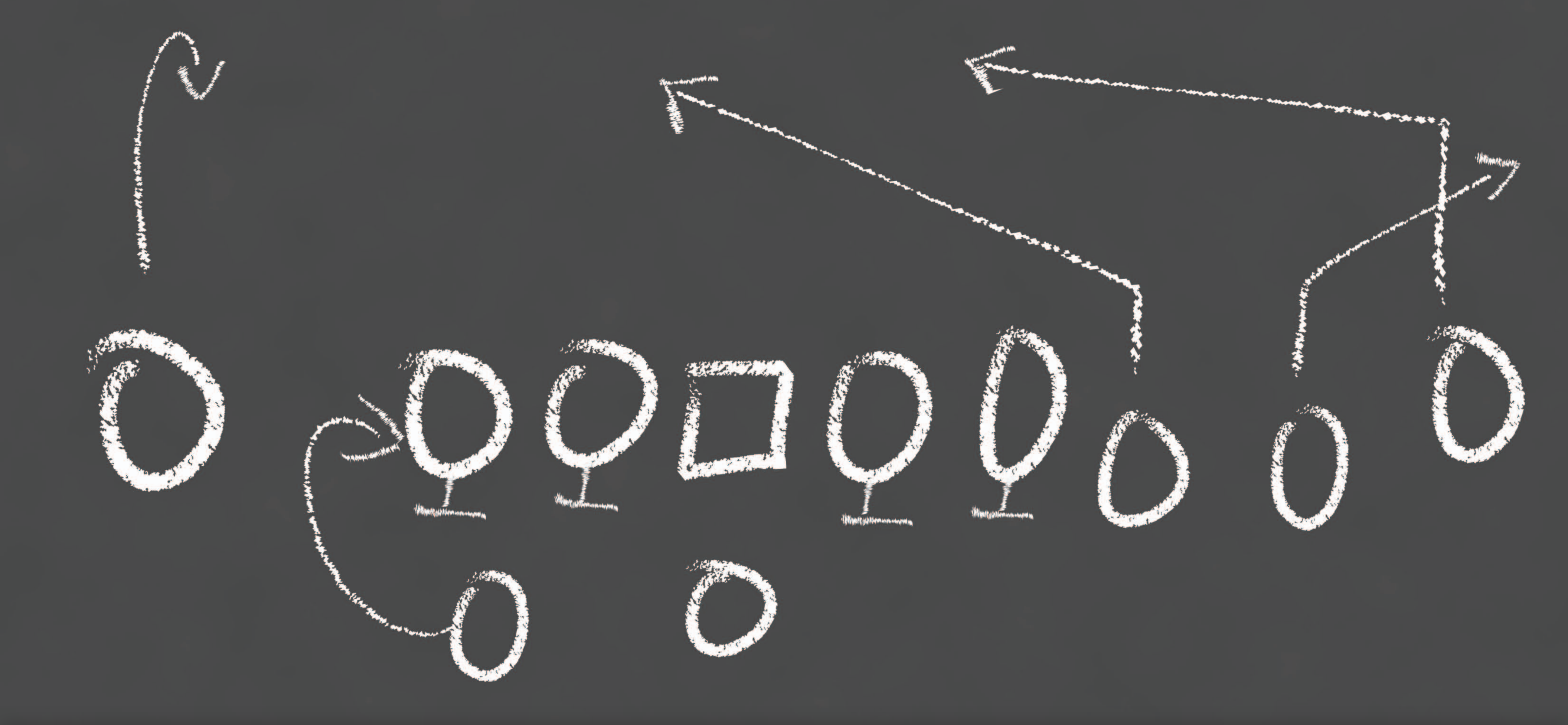

Sales Playbook Essentials in Brief

precision | thinking

Marketo®

Table of Contents

What is a Sales Playbook?

Sales playbooks are a means of capturing best practices from and communicating them to salespeople. They concisely describe what the salesperson should do in different situations he or she might encounter.

They're a resource trained salespeople can leverage to recall best practices in real-time. Sales playbooks should help new salespeople get on board but they can't substitute for sales training.

Why Create a Sales Playbook?

Companies typically create a sales playbook to get salespeople to share and consistently leverage best practices.

The Best Reason

The best reason to create a sales playbook is to engage marketing and sales in a systemic review of assumptions and a distilling of best practices.

VCs will tell entrepreneurs that the reason to develop a business plan is not to present the finished product to VCs but for the company to undergo a rigorous process for thinking through challenges and opportunities and how to address them.

The corollary for sales playbooks is to compel sales and marketing to discuss and determine where the best opportunities are, what impediments to sales success exist, and how you will marshal resources and messages to tackle both.

One fast-growth company had a seasoned sales team, each member of which had decades of experience in that domain. But each had focused on a different sub-segment or a different problem within the same segment. Through the process of collecting, distilling, and reviewing with the team their aggregate knowledge and best practices, they each gained insights that helped them crack tough accounts. The resulting sales playbook not only helped new salespeople coming on board, but also guided marketing in the messages to emphasize and the segments to focus on.

Alternatives to Sales Playbooks

Many companies operate without sales playbooks. The various sales playbook components might be captured in other systems or documents.

- Some sales playbook content – e.g., information about prioritized segments, target prospects, competitive differentiators, buyer roles, and the sales process – may be in the marketing plan or sales training material.
- Companies using a content management system may have a means of directing salespeople to sales enablement content (call scripts, email templates, success stories or case studies, analyst reports, etc.) based on prospect role, need and phase of the sales process.
- Some companies subscribing to a sales methodology have paper cue worksheets or the equivalent built into their CRMs that walk salespeople through qualifying prospects, probing for key needs and desired capabilities, as well as quantifying the impact the new solution could have. These systems organize key messages by role, segment, and need.

Most likely, some but not all of the material that can go into your sales playbooks already exists somewhere in your company. If you have recently audited this material, you might streamline your sales playbook and simply refer to it. One company with very experienced salespeople opted for a short sales playbook that simply highlighted how their key segments differed in pains, capabilities needed, and the perceived benefits the solution could help them achieve. Another company was hiring new salespeople and produced a sales playbook covering each stage of the sales process in detail.

The Value of Regular Reviews
If you haven't conducted a thorough audit recently, pulling material into a sales playbook forces you through a methodical spring-cleaning – you can update assumptions, hone approaches, and discard messages and tools that your market or solution portfolio has outgrown.

Without regular reviews, materials and processes proliferate, exacerbating the challenge of salespeople finding the relevant material when they need it. Proliferation of sales tools can also mask gaps and make it easy for outdated materials hide among and contribute to the clutter.

Inventorying success stories for one company's sales playbook, we discovered the customer success stories only covered one market segment and one solution. While the success stories gave some context, they didn't convey how the customer benefited from implementing the solution. A concerted effort produced a complete set of powerful customer success stories to refer to in the finished sales playbook.

Types of Sales Playbooks

Sales playbooks should be customized to a company's specific situation. A sales playbook for a company selling $5k solutions over the phone will be very different from one for companies selling $5M solutions in complex RFP situations. Here are examples to illustrate the differences.

1. Short Sales Cycles, Low Solution Prices
The sales playbook for a company selling a low-priced solution via an outbound email campaign targeted at a specific customer segment with the goal of selling a specific solution might include:

- The email campaign
- Titles mailed to
- Phone and email scripts to use to follow up
- Specific calls to action to move the prospect to the next stage (including sales tools like case studies, analyst reports, etc.)
- FAQs
- Quick reference sheets for competitors
- Specific data updates to make to the CRM system based on call outcomes

The expectation is that these campaigns will be high-volume and highly scripted. The sales playbook may outline the sales process from initial prospect engagement through close.

2. Longer Sales Cycles, Higher Solution Prices

At the other end of the spectrum, salespeople selling higher-priced, more complex solutions generally follow a less scripted sequence. A salesperson in situations like this might have these phases of the sales process:

1. Prepare via external research to approach companies in your prospect list
2. Reach inside and network within companies in your prospect list to locate a group within that company likely to have problems that make them great candidates for one of the solutions you sell.
3. Confirm for a specific group which problem they have and which of your solutions can help address that
4. For a group with a specific problem, move them from interest to active consideration, then to purchase.

There may be some dead-ends and restarts in this process. And in the happy circumstance that a prospect reaches out to a vendor, the salesperson would simply start later in the process.

A sales playbook for this type of salesperson might include (or in some cases, link to):

- A guide for what external material to gather and where to find them during the research phase
- Thought leadership materials and PowerPoints for gaining access to executives (or links to these)
- A summary of key roles and typical titles
- Email and phone scripts
- Qualification questions and criteria (including trigger events)
- Messaging sheets by prospect type and buyer role (prospect's pain, solution capability, benefit to prospect)
- A quantification guide to help salespeople assess – with prospect participation and buy-in – the potential impact of the solution
- A company introduction PowerPoint and leave-behinds
- Customer case studies and success stories
- Competitors to expect by segment and how to undermine them
- How to overcome key objections
- A pricing guide

In addition to these typical elements of a complex-sale sales playbook, there may be a section on key sales process insights. For example, if multiple business units within a prospect could use a solution, this insights section might advise on which line of business is likely to benefit the most in order to locate the most willing champion or sponsor. Or if there are executives who will be threatened by the change, there might be advice on how to neuter their opposition.

3. New or Modified Solution, or New Market

Most companies don't develop a sales playbook for brand new market segments or solutions until pioneering salespeople report back what works and what doesn't. When you first enter a new market or are rolling out a new product, you have hypotheses for which customer needs your solution addresses, what messages will resonate, and what the sales process should be, but you need to validate and frequently modify initial premises. If you want to lay out your premises in a formal document, build a lightweight sales playbook summarizing these assumptions and be prepared to modify these early and often as new information comes in.

Preparation

How Preparation Pays Off
One company started developing their sales playbook without the preparatory work – without validating key assumptions with salespeople and between sales and marketing. The result looked comprehensive and well organized. But it only cataloged common knowledge that was already shared publicly – the knowledge that was deemed insufficient. The reason for investing in the sales playbook was to find better approaches, not to simply outline the current approach.

Just discussing the biggest impediments to sales and what different approaches salespeople have tried can produce insights into better qualification, better processes, or more effective message delivery.

When the ISO 9000 certification came out decades ago, hordes of companies went about documenting their processes. And that's as far as most companies went. But innovative companies examining their processes detected opportunities for improvement. These companies then documented the streamlined processes that resulted.

Your company can simply document existing processes or examine and improve on them during the sales playbook construction. Your choice.

Preparation Steps
Before embarking on a sales playbook you should have completed these steps:

- Segment your market by different needs and priorities
- Select the market segments that best match your differentiators with their needs
- Study your competition – which segments they concentrate on and what their strengths and weaknesses are for those segments
- Note key differentiators
- Create qualification criteria for ideal prospects
- Identify buyers' roles and typical titles encountered by role
- Outline the sales process (sequence of steps, order in which roles are approached if relevant)
- Identify impediments to selling and sales strategies and processes to overcome them
- Map out what supporting sales tools you need by sales stage, role, and segment

These may sound pretty basic. However, at one company we used the proposed target list of roles and titles to conduct message testing. It became clear during those interviews that some of the titles proposed were less appropriate than others. If your list of potential roles exceeds a dozen, you should call out the few that are highest priority to distinguish them from those who might just be useful for providing information to help you effectively reach and persuade those in the key roles.

Design Your Sales Playbook for Easy Navigation

The best sales playbooks make it easy for salespeople to quickly find the relevant information for the specific situation that they find themselves in. But what that means can differ by company.

Determine Your Optimal Structure
If you have a simple playbook, like the Short Sales Cycles, Low Solution Prices example above, skip to the next section.

Is it better to have separate sections for each sales stage and subsections by industry? Or industry sections with subsections for each stage?

If there are only minor variations, say titles and competitors by industry or market segment, and only in a few sections, then by all means organize your sales playbook by stage of the sales process.

If your salesperson has to locate subsection 3 in each section for the situation he or she is facing, it's time to reorganize the sales playbook to make it easier to navigate. It might be time to reorganize your sales force, too.

Leverage Headlines, Bullet Lists, and Tables
Each page should have prominent headings to make it easier for your salespeople to browse sections or pages for the information they need. This document should illustrate that principle.

If you have long bullet lists, look for ways to regroup items or consider converting them to tables.

	Segment	
Titles	**Telecom**	**Banking**
Buyer	Title 1 Title 2	Title 3 Title 4
Technical	Title 5	Title 6

Is vastly better than:

- Buyer
  - Title 1 (Telecom)
  - Title 2 (Telecom)
  - Title 3 (Banking)
  - Title 4 (Banking)
- Technical
  - Title 5 (Telecom)
  - Title 6 (Banking)

Traps to Avoid

Too Generic

Don’t make the mistake of simply copying a sales playbook outline from another company. Your sales playbook organization should reflect the type of situation you are in (complex vs. simple sale, low vs. high-cost) and the type of sales force you have. Secure input from sales and sales management to outline the content and deliver a few sample sections early to ensure agreement and avoid rework.

Too Much Information

The process of developing a sales playbook can surface a lot of valuable information. Not all of it has to be stored in the sales playbook.
In the process of developing a sales playbook, one company conducted detailed research and gained new insights into specific segments. Some of the information was incorporated into the sales playbook, but much of it was organized into separate segment-specific background pieces to help new salespeople.

Wishful Messaging

The most organized and complete sales playbook will fail to boost sales results if it recommends ineffective messaging / positioning. When we test messaging salespeople tell us works, we often find that up to 40% of what salespeople tell us resonates, doesn’t resonate widely (or not at all, in some cases).

In the course of message testing, one vendor in a mature market discovered competitors used the same “differentiators.” Another company learned that prospects’ integration pain referred to a very different type of integration than they proposed to solve. A different company promoted their solution as the answer to a painful customer issue, but it turned out that the vendor only provided one of several capabilities required to resolve the customers’ issue and couldn’t marshal the other capabilities required. Messages about that vendor’s capability were discounted by prospects with that problem.

If you build into your sales playbook preparation some validation of proposed messaging and positioning, you can streamline the sales playbook while boosting its effectiveness by weeding out messages that don’t resonate at all.

Not Focusing on the Key Segments

Sales managers and salespeople understand pipeline economics and take comfort in large numbers of prospects. But don’t let the temptation to broaden the pool of prospects drive you to include segments where your odds of success are too low.

Take software applications, for example. Being more customizable invariably also means taking longer to master and often requiring specialized talent to manage. A sales playbook that pretends salespeople can propose an easy to learn application to organizations that need extensive customization can send salespeople into battles they are not likely to win. Sure, salespeople might win some of these contests, but their win rate will be higher if they focus on companies needing extensive customization.

Summary

Developing or updating sales playbooks is an exercise that can align sales and marketing as well as refocus efforts and sharpen skill levels across both organizations. The result should be a reference tool that helps salespeople adjust their approach to the circumstances of a specific opportunity they find themselves in.

Effective sales playbooks spur virtuous cycles. If the sales playbook helps sales, sales will invest in keeping them updated, which will make them more effective… You get the idea.

About Kathryn Roy

Kathryn Roy (*kathryn@precisionthinking.com*) is Managing Partner at Precision Thinking, a marketing and strategy consulting firm that helps B2B technology companies boost the effectiveness of their marketing and sales organizations.

Kathryn has over 20 years of experience helping some of the most successful and fastest growing B2B companies including IBM, Constant Contact, Avid, CA, Lotus, AT&T, Kronos, Novell, Giga, Phase Forward and dozens of other technology companies.

Kathryn has published in HBS Working Knowledge, MarketingProfs, Guidestar, and Mass High Technology. Her "7 Infectious Diseases of B2B Marketing - and Their Cures" is the top rated eBook on MarketingProfs.

Kathryn speaks at conferences and events on Getting Messaging Right. She consults and conducts workshops to help marketing and sales organizations produce messages, strategies, and tools that drive sales.

precision | **thinking**

About Marketo

Marketo is the revenue performance management company, transforming how marketing and sales teams of all sizes work — and work together — to accelerate predictable revenue. Marketo's solutions are both powerful and easy to use, providing explosive revenue growth throughout the revenue cycle from the earliest stages of demand generation and lead management to deal close and continued customer loyalty.

Marketo, Inc.
901 Mariners Island Blvd, Suite 200
San Mateo, CA 94402
Tel: 650.376.2300
Fax: 650.376.2331
www.marketo.com

Marketo®