Satrix Solutions EBook

Tips for Executing a Successful Sales Win Loss Program

SATRIX SOLUTIONS

How to gather a wealth of insight from the sales process.

Introduction

Most companies fail to capture powerful insights that should be acquired from the sales process. The opportunity is often squandered, largely because what's learned after you win or lose a sale isn't shared beyond a salesperson or the sales leader.

Understandably, most sales teams are laser-focused on generating revenue by closing deals, and they can't afford to be distracted. Their very livelihood depends on them keeping their eyes on the prize.

But if closing more deals is the goal, then executives should not only welcome a deeper understanding of why deals are won or lost, they should demand it.

This EBook will detail the information we believe every company should strive to gather from the sales process, how it should be acquired, who in the organization should be leveraging it, and – importantly – the benefits your business will experience by systematically incorporating this feedback into your decision-making process.

A Common Sales Scenario

Let's begin with the wealth of knowledge that can be obtained. First, I think we can all agree that the evaluation process a potential customer goes through varies greatly. But, consider a common scenario, whereby the prospect conducts a request for proposal (RFP), culls down a broad list of potential vendors to the 3 or 5 they feel have the best offering, then works through an in-person pitch, demo, proof of concept, pilot, etc. before selecting a winner.

In this situation, the buyer likely has a scorecard of some kind, with weightings or grades they've assigned your company and your competitors across a range of considerations. Assuming you made the final round, they've reviewed your RFP response, spent time with your team, evaluated your product or service, assessed your advantages, listened to you highlight your differentiators, compared your pricing to others, likely spoken with other customers, and probably asked their colleagues for their recommendations.

Now, how valuable would it be for you to get your hands on this information?

If you were able to insert a thumb drive into the brain of the decision-maker(s) and export everything they learned from the exhaustive evaluation process, you would have a compelling competitive advantage, right?

Research has shown that sales reps are wrong about why they win and lose deals more than 60% of the time.

Whether you ultimately won or lost the deal, acquiring insight into all of the decision drivers – what worked in your company's favor, what worked against you, and what really didn't factor into the final decision – that knowledge would be powerful.

Now, imagine exporting those same insights from a dozen potential buyers, or a hundred. You would now have access to prominent themes related to all the key ingredients in the evaluation and selection process.

What Insights Might You Uncover?

- How your company is found or identified and included for consideration
- How your message and brand positioning is resonating with your target market
- How your product or service is perceived by your prospective buyers
- What your target audience considers to be your company's competitive advantages or disadvantages
- How companies perceive the cost/value of your offering versus others
- How your sales team is viewed, and whether the sales people and process helped or hurt your chances of closing the deal
- How your company is being talked about among potential buyers and other prominent voices (such as within venture capital, private equity or industry research firms)
- How those with the authority to buy from (or retain) your company see the competitive landscape changing

Who Should Interview the Decision Maker?

The primary objective of a Sales Win Loss Program is to learn everything possible about why your company won or lost, so you can refine your approach and win more deals in the future. With that in mind, the first consideration is – who should be conducting the interviews?

The most common approach is having the sales rep ask the contact they've been trying to close why they made the selection they did.

While you may get some good insights that way, human nature is such that most people don't like confrontation, particularly when part of the reason a competitor was selected may have been due to a deficiency in the sales process or salesperson.

Having the sales rep ask directly might get you some superficial insights, but the feedback could also be misleading if – for example – something innocuous is shared to avoid offending someone.

Objectivity is vital for a Sales Win Loss Program to be successful. That means an impartial 3rd party conducting the interviews, highlighting the key takeaways, and identifying the themes that emerge over time. The 3rd party can be internal, such as someone from the Customer Experience / Success Team, Marketing, or Sales Operations, but an external consultant with significant experience will be your best bet.

Either way, look for someone who:

- Is an exceptionally strong listener
- Is experienced at interacting with senior level executives, and has an engaging personality
- Understands (or can quickly learn) the sales process – in general and at your organization
- Knows (or can quickly learn) your company's value proposition, competitive advantages, roadmap, service delivery model, etc.
- Has a good sense of the competitive landscape
- Is skilled at recognizing when something is being glossed over and can probe for deeper insights

- Can be persistent, but knows where to draw the line so as to not pester
- Has the ability to glean, and pinpoint, the drivers of success or failure
- Can convert large quantities of mostly unstructured feedback into actionable findings and recommendations

Once you have the right person or consulting firm in mind, it's time to develop the process for your Sales Win Loss Program.

Kicking Off Your Sales Win Loss Program

First, it's important that the sales team is sold on the program. If your sales reps don't appreciate the value of the program, or – worse – feel it will be used as a way to single people out when a deal is lost, they can hinder the process.

Leadership should work to get the sales team on board with positive messaging about the purpose of the program. (i.e. learning = improvement = win more deals = more $$)

Second, decide on which wins or losses will be targeted for follow-up. It's unlikely that you will have the resources to put every sales opportunity through the Sales Win Loss Program. Furthermore, many deals likely don't qualify.

When Satrix Solutions onboards a new client, we generally work with the sales and marketing leaders to establish the criteria to determine which opportunities are targeted. The criteria might include several of the following:

- Deals above a certain revenue or profit threshold
- Deals that you expected to win, but lost – and vice versa
- Deals that were very competitive
- Deals that made it to the latter stages of the sales process
- Deals managed by certain sales reps
- Deals that fall into the 'ideal customer profile' group, or certain persona's that are being targeted
- Deals that originated or were referred by an important partner
- Deals in regions that you are hoping to further penetrate
- Deals that included a new or enhanced product or service
- Deals that are of particular importance to your CEO or Board

Once your criteria are established, and you've set up the mechanism to advise the Sales Win Loss partner on the deals that qualify, it's time to formulate your "questionnaire" based on what you hope to learn.

Crafting Your Questionnaire

Actually, it is not really a questionnaire as much as a list of topics the interviewer will use to guide the discussion. It's important the conversation stays fluid and somewhat unstructured. If it's obvious that someone is simply reading from a list of questions, it will surely diminish the value of the exercise.

Additionally, the list of topics / questions should be considered a live document. Meaning that it should change over time, and likely even for each interview. Every sales opportunity is unique, so the focus of each conversation should take that into account.

It is also a good idea to collaborate with all interested parties internally. The insights that can be elicited from a Sales Win Loss Program can be enlightening to many departments across your organization. In particular, Sales, Marketing, Product, Customer Success, Operations, Support, etc. should all have the opportunity to provide input on what they'd like explored.

While you may not be able to get every topic or question in each interview, it's good to include their input as the more people who are invested in the program, the better.

One last point, the list of topics should also change based on what's happening inside your company,

and across the competitive landscape. Changes in strategy, messaging, your offering, your competitor set, and other developments should lead you to refine and evolve your Sales Win Loss Program.

Pre-Interview Tactical Recommendations

Once the criteria are established, there is some consensus on the list of topics, and the process has been largely defined, we ask our clients to share some background details on each opportunity we will be perusing.

That might include the RFP response, notes input by the salesperson into Salesforce, a list of known competitors, etc. The more knowledgeable you are going into the interview, the better equipped you will be to navigate the discussion.

Then, it is time to reach out to the contacts and schedule the call. Our recommended approach is to email and ask to schedule a 20 to 30-minute call. Calling them out of the blue can catch them off guard and you may not get as much detail as you would otherwise.

Emailing ahead of time gives the person the opportunity to think about the experience with your sales team, and what led them to make their decision. It also enables them to collect feedback from others in their organization, and to review documents to remind themselves of what they liked or didn't like.

We also suggest that you record the phone conversations, rather than furiously scribbling notes while trying to listen carefully and probe.

Different states have different requirements and laws for recording phone conversations, so be sure to investigate that before doing so. It's always safer to ask for permission at the start of each call anyway. And, with more and more privacy laws (like GDPR) in place, you may be required to get consent at the very start of your interview.

After the Call

Let's say you conducted the first call with a company that evaluated your offering but ultimately chose a competitor, and the interview went well.

You learned a tremendous amount about the prospect's decision-making process, how your company was perceived, how your offering compares to your primary competitors, how the sales team performed, and you identified several primary and secondary decision drivers.

Now what?

1. Review and Share Sales Win Loss Data

The first thing you'll want to do is summarize your findings.

At Satrix, we deliver a report to our clients after each interview, with the complete call transcript and a summary of key findings.

There are many effective ways you can present the important takeaways, but one we've found that resonates is to present the summary in the form of a SWOT Analysis. This enables our clients to quickly review the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats we identified from the interview.

The report should be shared with everyone in the company who could benefit from the insights, including sales, marketing, product, operations, customer success, the c-suite, etc.

2. Collectively Look for Patterns and Trends from Decision Makers

We also recommend that, after reviewing each report, the leadership team set time aside for a post-mortem.

It is during these huddles when the team can diagnose the problems and identify specific actions that should be taken to increase the likelihood of winning a similar deal in the future.

3. Continuous Learning = Continuous Improvement

The final step, of course, is to rally the organization to act – to reinforce and replicate behaviors that often lead to success and address the issues that tend to result in failure.

After conducting thousands of interviews on behalf of our clients, something that continues to surprise us is how many of the themes we identify are entirely in the company's control, and therefore relatively easy to fix.

All too often, drivers of lost sales involve issues such as: poor sales team responsiveness, a perceived lack of product knowledge, a product demo that isn't customized to the needs of the prospect, a poorly run pitch meeting, supplying references of existing customers who are not that enthused, just to name a few.

Identifying the 'low-hanging fruit' improvement opportunities can drive a meaningful return on investment (ROI) in just a few months.

Defining Success for Your Sales Win Loss Program

What does ROI look like?

Of course, the chief reason for launching a Sales Win Loss Program is to improve sales win rates. Most Sales Win Loss endeavors will rightfully point back to that metric as their key measure of success.

However, there are many other quantitative and qualitative measures you can look to for evidence your program is paying off, some of which include:

- Number of wins or losses vs your main competitor(s)
- Wins or losses by lead source
- Average deal size
- Percentage of opportunities that make it to a specific stage in the sales process (i.e. beyond the RFI, RFP, demo, finalists in contention, etc.)
- Sales success in a new region, market, product, etc.
- Average length of sales cycle
- Greater clarity on how you are found by prospects
- Greater clarity on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of your offering / company
- Greater clarity on sales team performance
- Greater clarity on which aspects of your messaging resonates vs falls flat

With all this newfound knowledge and data now at your fingertips, your organization will be in the enviable position of using data and facts to guide your decision making.

As has been said any number of times – sales is a numbers game. So, don't rely on suspicion, feel, anecdotal information, or incomplete feedback to drive higher sales win rates. Institute a strong, scientific, methodologically sound Sales Win Loss Program, and reap the benefits.

Quick Checklist

- Determine who will be conducting interviews - be sure they are skilled at soliciting feedback that is both candid and actionable. Contact us to learn more.
- Identify contacts from both won and lost opportunities who led the evaluation and were prominent in the final decision.
- Formulate a questionnaire that will guide your interview; seek to capture insight into your product/service offering, sales team performance, competitive landscape, pricing, and more.
- Review the conversations for key themes, complaints, or unexpected feedback.
- Maximize the impact of the insights gleaned by sharing key findings across the organization, including Sales, Marketing, Product, Operations, Service, etc.

ABOUT

SATRIX SOLUTIONS is a customer experience and employee engagement consultancy dedicated to revealing actionable insights that boost loyalty, retention, and growth. We can assist your organization with the following services:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) Survey
- Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Onboarding / Implementation Survey
- Customer Advisory Board
- Customer Defection Analysis
- Customer Perception Audit
- Customer Journey Map
- Sales Win Loss Analysis
- Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) Survey
- Employee Engagement Survey
- Employee Opinion Survey
- Interdepartmental Survey
- Custom Research Programs

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