MASTERING THE LEAD MANAGEMENT PROCESS FOR INSIDE SALES
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Managing leads is one of the largest expenses and most perplexing pains experienced by inside sales teams, and only a few companies know how to do it successfully. Statistics show that a large portion of leads fall by the wayside because of inadequate lead management systems, poor organizational skills, and varied levels of diligence among salespeople.

If you’re looking for a way to increase inside sales productivity and successfully manage leads, then the buck stops here. Discover the best practices for lead management that will help you move your leads through the sales pipeline from cradle to grave.

Here are some amazing lead management statistics:

- The analyst firm Yankee Group estimates that **between 40% and 80% of sales leads are dropped between marketing and sales** – that is, they were lost, never qualified, and most likely fell out of the system.

- SiriusDecisions, a leading global B2B research and advisory firm, found that **80% of B2B prospects that enter a company’s sales funnel will buy a product or solution within two years** from one company or another. So why shouldn’t it be yours?

Proper lead management is key, and sales CRM systems designed for the unique challenges of the inside sales industry are imperative to optimize sales effectiveness. Develop your step-by-step process and incorporate the measures below to optimize your lead management.

**Develop a Lead Management Process**

The first action to take in lead management mastery is to develop a lead management process. Write a formal step-by-step plan for sales reps and ensure that your team follows it every step of the way. Tailor your lead management plan to your value proposition, classify the types of leads your team will be working, and include when and how often to follow up on those different types leads over a period of weeks to years. Sales reps should follow a consistent schedule of phone calls, sprinkled with value- and content-driven emails to achieve maximum sales. The most important function of your sales plan is to take the best practices from your past successes and replicate them in a successful sales process to produce consistent, repeatable, and predictable results. After evaluating your sales environment, see what works and what needs revising.
Qualify Leads

Part of mastering the art of lead management is making sure that sales reps have quality leads to call. Qualifying leads helps prioritize potential deals so that sales reps don’t waste time dealing with prospects that have no intention of buying. All leads must be evaluated to determine if they are qualified for sales reps or should be buried in the graveyard.

Define a Qualified Lead

Lead qualification can begin after your company determines two things: the criteria that constitute a qualified lead and the process to move qualified leads effectively through the system to yield the most cost-effective sales. Before you can properly manage a qualified lead, you have to define it. This is one of the biggest areas of confusion for inside sales: what is a qualified lead? A lead is defined as a person or entity with interest and authority to purchase. A qualified lead, on the other hand, takes it a step further: it must also be worthy of a salesperson’s time and effort. More research must be done to ensure qualified leads include additional information on the prospect and company to qualify them for your product or service.

Start the qualification process by first building your BANT profile. These are the basic questions that can turn an ordinary lead into a qualified lead:

- **Budget** – Is the company financially stable enough to afford your product or service?
- **Authority** – Does the prospect have the authority to make a buying decision
- **Need** – Does the company have a need for your product or service?
- **Timeline** – Is the company ready to buy now or later? Determine the specific time frame.

Institute a Lead Qualification Team

Not all prospects are ready to buy immediately. It takes time to find qualified leads that meet your lead qualification criteria. Sometimes salespeople are required to wade through the swamp of raw leads while still meeting high sales quotas. This is very impractical. Sales reps should concentrate on making more sales instead of trying to find hot leads.

Institute a separate lead qualification team to drain the swamp and search for the truly qualified leads for sales follow up. It is much easier to motivate qualifiers to process each and every lead effectively when they are not also salespeople with quotas over their head. The lead qualification team’s goal is simply to determine if a lead is hot and should be distributed to sales reps. When you use a lead qualification team to ask the right questions, they can help determine which leads should go to which salesperson, assign them to the right email campaign, keep them in the system for future follow up, or identify them as dead leads. The lead qualification team empowers salespeople to:

- Save time looking for qualified leads
- Spend more time selling
- Be prepared with information for their sales call
- Close more sales and meet sales quotas
- Stop wasting time with prospects who have no intention of buying your product or service

How does the qualification team discover qualified leads? Based on how you have classified different types of leads, your lead qualification team will make initial contact with those leads and check them against your BANT profile. The better your lead qualification team is at filtering out the unqualified leads, the more productive your sales reps can be with their time. In other words, you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you reach the prince. A lead qualification team will simply save your sales reps time from having to manage the kissing booth themselves.

While properly qualifying leads is imperative, instituting a lead qualification team isn’t necessary for sales success. However, it is a next-level component that organizations can implement to maximize their sales productivity.
Distribute Leads and Establish Workflow

It can be challenging to manage and distribute a high volume of leads efficiently, especially over a long period of time. A sales CRM system is a great tool to prioritize, track, and distribute leads quickly and effectively to sales reps. Whether you send a new lead to a qualification team or salesperson right away or down the road, ensuring that your team receives the right lead at the right time is essential. Effective prioritization and distribution of leads drives sales productivity. Leads that were once mediocre become hot and profitable over time with the right prioritization and distribution workflow. Implementing a sales CRM system can automate the process and give your sales team the competitive advantage by reducing production costs and increasing sales revenue.

List-based and Queue-based Lead Systems

There are two types of lead management systems: list based and queue based. Both systems can distribute qualified leads to sales reps. On a basic level, list-based lead management is merely transferring a paper list of leads to the computer for mass distribution. Most of today’s sales CRM platforms are built on a list-based architecture.

Another way to ensure that qualified leads get to sales reps is with a queue-based platform. In this type of platform, leads that enter into the system are added to an automated call queue based a lead priority defined by management. This ensures that all leads are routed to sales reps in order of importance and thoroughly worked based on workflow priorities. When a sales rep finishes a call and enters the call result, the next lead is presented immediately.

There are major differences between list-based and queue-based selling in the distribution of qualified leads. With list-based sales CRM systems, efficiently managing leads can be daunting. After the initial contact, the lead can get lost or simply fall out of the system. List-based platforms let salespeople choose the next lead to call by cherry picking prospects from a list. Many important leads are neglected or missed altogether as the rep may use personal bias when choosing leads. In contrast, queue-based lead management platforms give management the power to develop criteria and implement workflows for the automatic prioritization and distribution of leads to sales reps. Another difference between the two types of lead management systems is that list-based platforms typically don’t have the ability to efficiently track, follow up, and report on leads after the initial contact. This is essential for inside sales teams to effectively manage leads throughout the sales life cycle. Queue-based lead management systems implement these features from initial contact to sale.

Handling Lead Types Differently

The way you handle different types of leads can make a big difference in the closing ratio for your inside sales team. Just like your children have different personalities, each type of sales lead is unique and different. The methods you use to handle one type may not work for the others. So the key is to ensure that your sales reps or qualification team work and process leads according to each leads’ unique characteristics. For example, with fresh or new leads, no matter how they are generated or where they come from, speed to lead is essential. A prospect may be seeking information from several other companies at the same time, often within minutes, that they are requesting information from your company. Research also tells us that close to half of buying decisions are made with the first company that contacts them. That’s why it is extremely important to distribute these leads immediately before a competitor reaches them first. Using a queue-based sales CRM system, such as VanillaSoft, can make new leads a priority and have them automatically routed to your sales reps for an immediate sales call.

Understanding the context of a lead will go a long way in helping you determine how that lead should be worked and how that lead should be prioritized in relation to the other leads your sales reps are working. Mastering this part of the process is crucial if you want to see the sales performance gains you desire.
Web Leads

Web leads come from prospects providing their contact information via a form on your website. Good Web leads are created by attracting target prospects to your website and enticing them to register for free content, free trials, or other valuable offers. If you use a form that asks the right questions to qualify prospects, you will have good leads for sales rep follow up. Good Web forms capture details such as:

- **Complete contact information, such as name, email, phone number or address**
- **Questions about specific products or services**
- **Preferred days/times and contact methods**

Timing is critical when it comes to good Web leads. Studies show that responding to a Web lead within five minutes of submission substantially increases the chance of converting it to a customer. Since many prospects are still on your website after submitting the form, a call from a sales rep while the information is fresh in a prospect's mind may more effectively convert the lead to a customer. On the other hand, some people simply complete the form to get your freebie. They are not at all interested in your product or service.

Your qualification team can usually tell which type of lead it has very quickly because bogus leads will often give fake contact information or will be unavailable when a team member tries to reach him or her. Thorough qualification through telemarketing will tell you which leads should fall out of the system and which ones to prioritize for immediate sales rep attention.

Aged Leads

Aged leads are previously worked leads that are no longer on your sales team's active call list. While some may think these leads are dead, you can easily turn aged leads into hot leads with the right sales or marketing campaign or by contacting these prospects at the right time. For example, maybe the prospect company's new manager has a completely different perspective on business, or your new email campaign intrigues prospects so they want to find out more.

It is important to contact these leads from time to time to keep your company's name front and center. Reach out and nurture these leads with a sales CRM system that can schedule planned follow-ups at certain intervals in the form of calls and emails. For example, you can email prospects to invite them to your next webinar or special event.

Aged leads are often just misaligned opportunities. Unless the prospect company changes drastically and has no use for your product or service, there is still the opportunity to sell. Nurturing these leads over time may help you close the deal.

Event Leads and Purchased Leads

Leads that come from events such as trade shows, webinars, and purchased lists should be handled differently than Web and trigger leads. Some of these leads may be more of a “slow simmer” for follow up since these prospects may not have specifically sought out your product or service and may not have an immediate need to purchase. In the case of event-based leads, it’s possible the prospect was attracted by the topic you presented. Nurturing can help develop that mutual interest into a real sales opportunity in the future.

Trigger Leads

As the name suggests, trigger leads are generated after a specific event. These types of leads are very industry specific. When a consumer pulls the trigger on an event, such as the purchase of a new home, new auto, or a refinance, he or she becomes a preferred lead for companies looking for these types of new prospects. These leads are usually generated from data derived from the consumer’s credit report.
Lead Nurturing

An important part of lead management is nurturing leads throughout their life cycle. Keep in mind that some leads may not be qualified right away. A company may not be ready to buy right now, but lead nurturing will keep your brand top of mind at a future date when conditions are right for the prospect to purchase. Lead nurturing builds a relationship and trust through consistent messaging over time. It enables sales reps to send highly targeted messages based on recorded criteria about the company and prospect.

Queue-based sales CRM systems enable sales reps to nurture prospects who aren’t yet ready to buy. Lead nurturing emails can be tailored for each record based on its lead status. Sale reps can remain in touch with these prospects providing targeted collateral and content so that your brand remains top of mind when need recognition occurs. Lead nurturing is crucial, and the cycle of the nurtured lead may last many months or even years. A sales CRM system, such as VanillaSoft, can automate lead nurturing allowing your sales reps to focus on current leads that are further along in the sales cycle. This allows for greater productivity gains from your sales reps while also the benefits of effective lead nurturing implemented by the system.

Email Marketing

Keep your company constantly on the prospect’s mind with email. A study by Econsultancy revealed that email marketing is the best channel for return on investment since you can reach many prospects with the least amount of time invested. Automated email marketing lets you easily stay in front of prospects between phone calls to nurture leads regularly, increasing the chance of a sale. With systems like VanillaSoft, you can create templates, manage mass email campaigns, schedule automatic drip emails, and even know exactly when an email is opened for quick follow up.

There are several types of emails that will help you engage prospects. The first types are the initial and follow-up emails that sales reps can send if they’ve missed the prospect. You can set up different email templates based on where the lead is in the process so that sales reps can just click to send after the call. Some other types of emails for nurturing leads include educational emails that offer expertise about a specific subject, invitation emails inviting prospects to subscribe to a blog or newsletter, and emails to register for a special event such as a webinar or demonstration. Whichever type of email your team sends, ensure that you have an effective sales pitch to bring the sales rep one step closer to closing a deal.

Companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales at 33% lower cost.

Forrester Research

Track Leads

Tracking leads is one of the most crucial processes of inside sales, yet many businesses have no idea how many leads are in their system and where they are at different times. If your leads don’t get tracked properly, they will affect your bottom line. Important leads can get lost or fall out of the system resulting in lost sales. The easiest way to track leads is with an automated tracking sales CRM solution. This way managers know where leads are every step of the way.

Track Pipeline with Lead Statuses

VanillaSoft enables organizations to effectively and easily manage leads by coding them with a lead status and user assignment. The lead status tells you what state the lead is in, such as “sold” or “dead,” and the user assignment routes leads to the appropriate individual or team for follow-up. The lead status determines where the lead stands in the sales pipeline. Use the lead status for tracking and determining the next step in your lead management process. It is essential that the tracking and sales process is triggered automatically by the result codes sales reps enter in the system. This ensures that each lead is tracked properly.
Track Your Stats

Since it is impossible for managers to monitor and evaluate every sales call, they need to track stats closely to home in on opportunities. When possible, use real-time stats to watch sales call activities, such as the number of calls, qualified leads, sales, etc. If real-time monitoring is not available, be sure to run daily reports to get insight into what’s going on overall and individually. Use these numbers to identify trends, averages, and best practices. Compare the stats of your best and worst performers to determine their work habits, strategies, and what is working. Use these numbers for training, to set goals, and to scale best practices. It is also a good idea to post and discuss stats to reinforce those best practices with your team. Important stats to watch:

- Calls per hour
- Contacted vs. not contacted
- Call duration
- Qualified vs. unqualified leads
- Emails vs. conversations
- Sales per contact
- Value of sale

Quality Assurance

It’s critical to review your inside sales team routinely to ensure it’s running efficiently and achieving consistent results. Identifying inconsistencies and opportunities, solving problems, and implementing measures for improvement can:

- Increase sales by monitoring sales reps to ensure that your message is getting communicated on a consistent basis and that sales reps are performing optimally.

- Improve employee morale. When employees feel like their company is running well, morale is higher, resulting in less turnover and absenteeism.

- Increase satisfaction. When you constantly improve your process, prospects will be content. This leads to repeat business, customer referrals, and higher profits.

Monitor Calls in Real-Time and Review Recordings

To ensure that salespeople remain true to the key messages in your base script and your company’s value proposition, managers need to record, track and monitor calls. These capabilities provide them with crucial data needed to evaluate what’s working well and what’s an epic fail. It could be a sales rep’s performance, a script, the lead source, the call queue, etc. You can easily monitor call activity in real time with a comprehensive call-activity management dashboard. Your sales CRM software should enable you to see real-time calling statistics for each campaign and user broken down by lead source, result group, or call result.

Monitoring and recording calls provides managers with the opportunity to get a more realistic view of the way a lead behaves throughout its life cycle. VanillaSoft’s intelligent call recording feature enables managers to eavesdrop on live calls as well as access and listen to existing recordings from any computer or mobile device with Internet access. It connects each recording with the contact record. In addition, you can look up recordings by contact name, date, salesperson, or call result. By monitoring what callers say during interactions, managers can easily identify problems within their teams, maintain quality standards and compliance, improve the customer experience, and increase overall call-center performance.

Train and Monitor to Create a First-Class Sales Team

In general, it is harder for sales reps to change old sales habits than to learn new sales techniques on their own. When you establish your new sales procedures, train sales reps on them to connect your sales training to the needs and priorities you’ve discovered when developing your strategy. Create learning principles and takeaways that are highly relevant to the obstacles faced when dealing with different leads on day-to-day calls.
To ensure that all sales reps are comfortable with the new procedures, explain how the procedures will improve performance and increase sales. Give details about the changes. For example, instead of mentioning that you want more quality interactions, define what constitutes “quality,” and the subcategories that are being scored. Monitor call activity on a regular basis and have sales reps practice calls in mock training sessions. Next, review call activity and recordings to determine whether the new procedures are being followed, and if necessary, set up review sessions to ensure compliance. The key to reforming is to examine the metrics of your inside sales team, develop a strategy, and then make sure that everyone, from manager to sales rep, is focused on implementing your plan to build a first-class sales team to increase your close ratio.

**Transform Lead Management Process with Reporting and Analytics**

You've developed your lead management process, but how do you know if it is working effectively to maximize sales? Easily evaluate and refine your lead management process with VanillaSoft’s reporting and analytics to ensure that leads are moving smoothly through your pipeline. This enables you to track leads and data in an automated system, run reports in seconds, and analyze the results, freeing your time to concentrate on improving performance instead of spending hours manually collecting and gathering data. VanillaSoft lets you know what's going on at each stage of the sales cycle to help increase close ratios.

**Analyze Patterns and Create a Strategy for Improvement**

After you run reports, track and analyze which patterns in your inside sales team need improvement and which successful ones should be implemented throughout the team. You can generate reports on everything from what time of day is optimal for closing deals to what’s the weekly close rate for a campaign or team. Take these insights to develop a relevant, actionable plan to help your team sell more. You may need to change call times, modify your sales pitch, or focus on getting more qualified leads. For example, maybe sales reps who use one part of your script more often than others have a higher close ratio. In this case, you will want to ensure that all sales reps use that part of the script on relevant sales calls moving forward. This multiplies successful performance that once was only practiced by a few to every sales rep on your team. Changes like these empower your inside sales team to maximize sales.

**Conclusion**

Consistency in your lead management process is key. The success of a good lead management plan relies on the development of repeatable processes, shared templates, and definitions. While you can manually implement these “must have” elements of your plan, you are leaving the process open to human error and inefficiency. When you put queue-based sales CRM automations to work for your team, you will see an increase in sales productivity.