



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO **SALES PLANNING**

Land and Expand Key
Accounts to Drive Revenue



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What is Strategic Sales Planning?

Simply defined, a **sales strategy** is a plan developed by an organization's sales leadership that includes processes, methodologies, and technology that help guide the sales team to reach their goals and revenue predictions.



Harvard Business Review found that **50% of high-performing sales organizations have “closely monitored, strictly enforced, or automated” sales processes.**



Every organization should create a sales plan for a rolling 12-to-18-month period. By doing so, every team member has transparency into expectations as well as the tools that can be used to make their number. Sales executives and senior leadership should be heavily involved with creating the sales plan. They should also have an open dialog with front-line sales managers to understand what is achievable as the topline number is being established. Once created, ensure those managers are leading each team member to learn and adopt the process.

Having a sales plan not only fuels your revenue growth but also helps mitigate risk. It gives your team insight into when they might hit a roadblock. They can save time and money by establishing certain items early:

- ▶ Is the customer's budget way off your price point?
- ▶ Is their timeline too short or too long?
- ▶ Are they much further along in the sales process with someone else?

If nothing else, make sure you create a sales plan that works with your customers and key accounts to **help them buy**. Establishing a partnership with the customer ensures that you are viewed as a trusted resource that can provide real solutions.

“*The job of the B2B sales representative is no longer to convince customers to buy but rather to **help them buy**.*”

In this eBook, you will learn about everything from accurate sales forecasting to closing a sale. All the time, we will be referring back to the overall plan and those processes, methodologies, and technology to help you make your number. So, it's time to get planning!



Accurate Sales Forecasting

You can't escape it. Accurate forecasting is a ~~myth~~ must for any sales organization. When projecting future revenue growth, you need to ensure your sales team's forecast is based in reality to ensure the company is budgeting properly.



No pressure, right? We get it. That's why we put together a few tips to help you improve forecast accuracy.

At its most basic level, sales forecasting is predicting the revenue your organization will earn over a quarter/period/year. The forecast will inform critical business decisions in the coming year. For example, a forecast will account for seasonality within the sales cycle. This way, leadership can plan for slower periods and make more informed strategic financial decisions.

01 Use historical data. Many organizations find that revenue fluctuates on a cyclical basis. For example, a SaaS company knows to plan for a lull in pipeline during the fourth quarter due to the holiday slow down. Knowing this, they can prepare by frontloading early funnel activities and pushing the sales team to increase engagement with key accounts and prospects during the first three quarters of the year.

02 Improve visibility into key accounts. Anyone can throw a number out there based on past sales and hope it sticks. The most successful sales leaders take it a step further. Their sales forecast is far more accurate because they have a deeper level of visibility into critical deals and the variables that could impact revenue. By understanding the objectives your largest accounts are seeking to accomplish, you can work *with* them as a partner. Together you can build a compelling business case that will help them achieve their goals. Revenue growth for them, revenue growth for you, and better visibility for management. Boom.

03 Organization and repeatability. No matter how many accounts your sales organization is working with, having a repeatable, scalable, and collaborative process helps you quickly see where your team is winning and where you need to drop in and provide coaching. You can also more quickly weed out the opportunities that waste your sales reps' time. A consistent sales planning process is a must for achieving predictable revenue growth and forecasting.

In a [recent webinar](#) with Jeremy Donovan, SVP of Sales Strategy at SalesLoft, he admitted that early in his career he thought, “humans are terrible at making judgments about highly uncertain things. So why don’t we just take the humans out of the equation? What I ultimately came to realize was, especially in the enterprise sales forecasting world, that it’s a combination of things. There are people, there’s process, and there’s technology. *Now*, I would argue that the people side is by far the most complex and the most important.”

Ensuring you have the right tools, talent, and methodologies is essential for maximizing revenue throughout the year. An overarching sales strategy for achieving your revenue goals requires research and the ability to position your organization as a partner within [key accounts and opportunities](#). With the right plan, you can more easily see the way to win.



Sales Methodology

A sales methodology is a set of guiding principles that define how a business sells its products or services to customers.



Unlike a sales process, which focuses on defining the steps or stages on the path to purchase, a sales methodology offers a framework for how sales reps should approach each stage to win the deal.

It's easy to yell, "sell, sell, sell!" But that doesn't inspire the sales team or give them the guidance needed to achieve maximum revenue growth. Really getting down to the nitty-gritty and creating an approach that supports your values will make your team better salespeople **and** better partners to your clients.

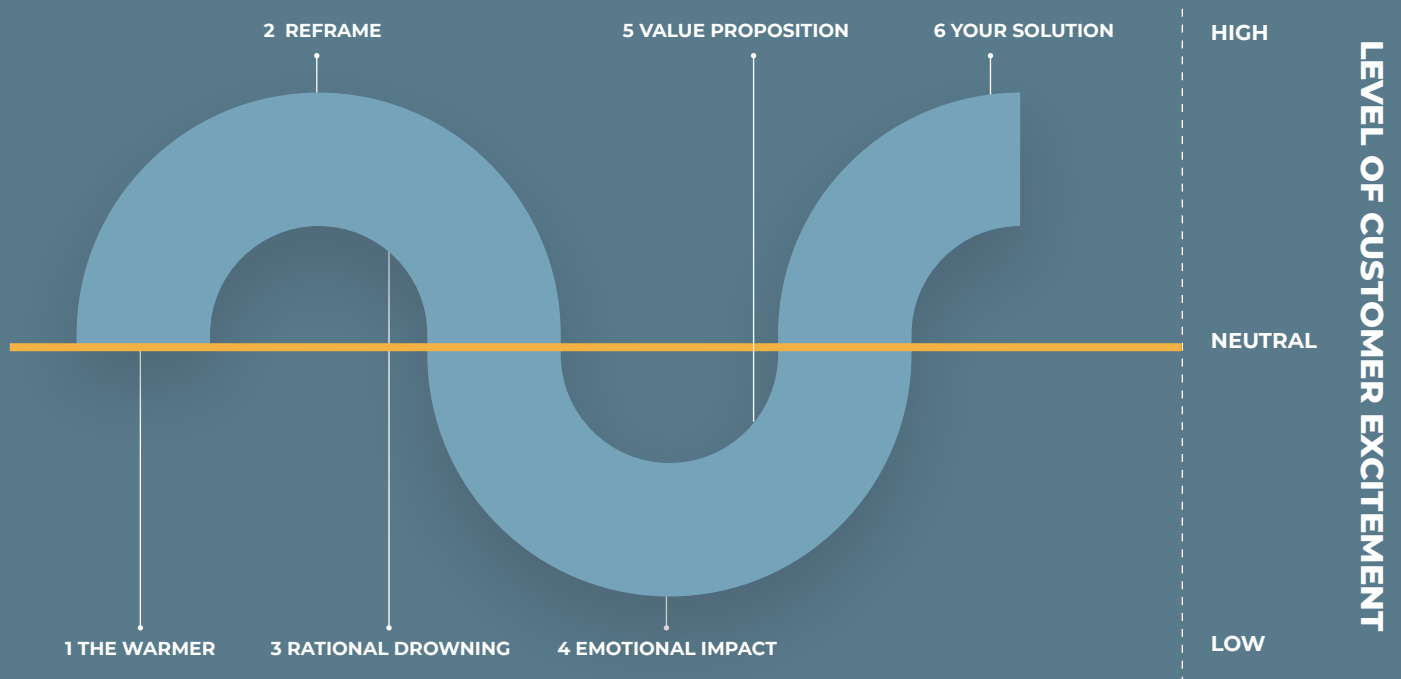
While there are as many methodologies as there are consultants, three seem to be the most prevalent: The Challenger Sale, Solution Selling, and Conceptual Selling. Each has its unique process, but they also have some similarities.



THE CHALLENGER SALE

Challenger has a very disruptive core view. Challenger is meant to do exactly that: challenge your prospects rather than build relationships. It refers, not to a duel, but to a friendly confrontation to test their way of thinking.

Many organizations have been running their business the same way for a very long time. It's hard to successfully present a solution outside of the status quo in those situations. Challenger teaches sellers that if you teach a prospect how to solve their own problems in a novel way, you can be more successful selling your product in the end.



This selling style takes the prospect on a journey from FOMO to the high of purchasing your solution.

Challenger loyalists believe that building relationships is the *least* effective strategy in closing sales. Instead, they argue that sales reps who take control of a deal and teach their prospects how to solve their problem, instead of focusing on building a relationship, are more successful.



SOLUTION SELLING

Solution Selling includes the “9-box vision process model” for a deeper dive into discovery. As it suggests, the process is built to help find the best solution for your prospect or customer. This process consists of three stages: Diagnose, Explore, and Visualize.

	DIAGNOSE REASONS	EXPLORE IMPACT	VISUALIZE CAPABILITIES
	PAIN		
OPEN	01 Tell me about it: what is causing you to have this (pain)?	04 “Besides yourself, who in your organization is impacted by this (pain) and how?”	07 “What is it going to take for you to be able to (achieve goal)? Could I try a few ideas on you?”
CONTROL	02 “Is it because...?”	05 “Is this (pain) causing...?” “If so, would (title) also be concerned?”	08 “You mentioned (reason)...what if there were a way... <i>when, who, what</i> would that help?”
CONFIRM	03 “So the reasons for your pain is...?”	06 “From what I just heard...(who & how) it sounds like this is not just your problem, but a company one?”	09 “So, if you had the ability to (summarize capability visions). Then could you (achieve your goal)?”
↑ BUYING VISION			

1. **Diagnose:** Begin by identifying the pain point. Ask questions that direct buyers to diagnose the problem in a way that leads them towards your solution. Reconfirm what you’ve discussed with a summary.
2. **Explore:** Now, inquire about the impact of the pain on the buyer and others in the organization. Then dive a little deeper by having the buyer reflect on how it affects the organization as a whole. Summarize what you’ve heard to drive impact home.
3. **Visualize:** Finally, ask open-ended questions that you can solve together. Present ideas that favor your solution. Help them visualize how your solution could relieve their pain.

Due to the number of questions, this methodology could be a bit complex. However, if you’re solving a complex problem for your buyers, then this might just be the perfect approach.

CONCEPTUAL SELLING

Conceptual selling is the idea that you're not selling a product; you are selling the *concept* of your solution. Salespeople who are successful with this methodology ask a series of questions to understand what the prospect aims to accomplish and tie what they are selling with a solution. Basically, you find a need, and you fill it.

You want to align the prospect's buying process with your selling process in a way that results in a win-win solution. There are five steps to the process:

1. **Confirmation:** Question your buyers based on the information you learned while researching.
2. **New Information:** Ask clarifying questions to ensure alignment on what a solution would help them achieve.
3. **Attitude:** Deepen your relationship with a consultative approach to explaining how your solution pertains to their needs.
4. **Commitment:** Make the intangible, tangible with a vision of outcomes that frame your solution as a necessity to increase the buyers' investment in it.
5. **Basic Issue:** Be prepared to address objections thoroughly and honestly. The solution must be mutually beneficial.

Overall, the sale must be a win-win for both the buyers and the seller. Confirm this by learning the true nature of the problem, giving relevant information, and getting commitment.

There's no perfect methodology for every sales team, which is why we see variations. You may even decide you want to take a little from one and a little from the other. Deciding on your unique methodology is up to you. The most important part is how you apply them.

Choosing and communicating your process to the team is critical. Buy-in is crucial to ensuring your team has a repeatable and scalable way to win. Make it easier for them through reinforcement and providing the right technology to support your team in whatever process you choose.



Creating Account Visibility

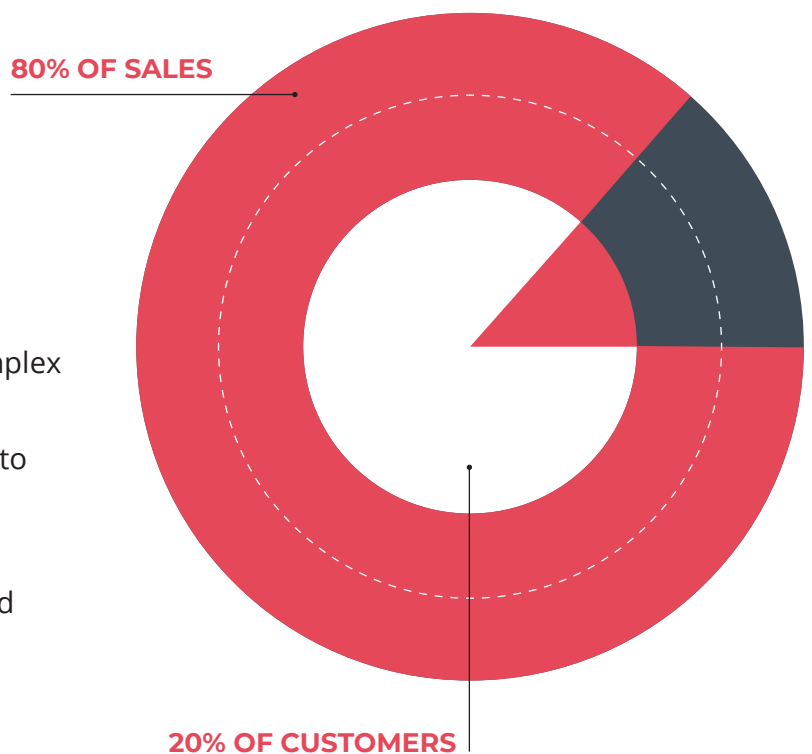
First and foremost, having visibility into account plans will enable your sales team to stay flexible and agile. By removing the “siloeed” sales approach, your team will have the insight needed to make informed decisions when things turn on a dime. With the appropriate technology, entire account teams can access critical information that may uncover a blindspot.

“*The rate of change is fast, and organizations need infrastructure to change quickly. For example, **95%** of organizations changed messaging during the pandemic and rolled it out immediately.*”

Another benefit to visibility is that leadership can access these accounts for a realistic view to inform forecasting. They can understand the true health of accounts and opportunities, which might be at-risk or ready for expansion, and know where to focus coaching.

According to the Pareto principle, **20%** of your customers produce **80%** of your sales.

Managing, navigating, and growing these complex accounts is a difficult task and is often made even more challenging by a lack of visibility into critical relationships and initiatives. By having transparent, dynamic, repeatable processes, anyone should be able to jump into a deal and understand next steps.



In addition to internal visibility, you need to see the whole picture regarding external players. Many factors can affect who you speak to and when. Consider the following:

- ▶ Buying committees for many organizations are expanding rapidly. You need to build relationships and get buy-in from all members to succeed.
- ▶ More companies are working remotely, so it may not be as easy to get everyone in the same “room.” This is unlikely to change; two-thirds of companies may permanently shift to a work-from-home model.
- ▶ Internal Account Managers may be segmented by vertical or offering, so you’ll need to pull the right team members into the right meetings.

People need to stay connected, more now than ever. You’ve likely already navigated teams working across multiple time zones, but it is becoming much more commonplace. You need a communication system to serve key accounts, regardless of where the buying (or selling) teams are located.

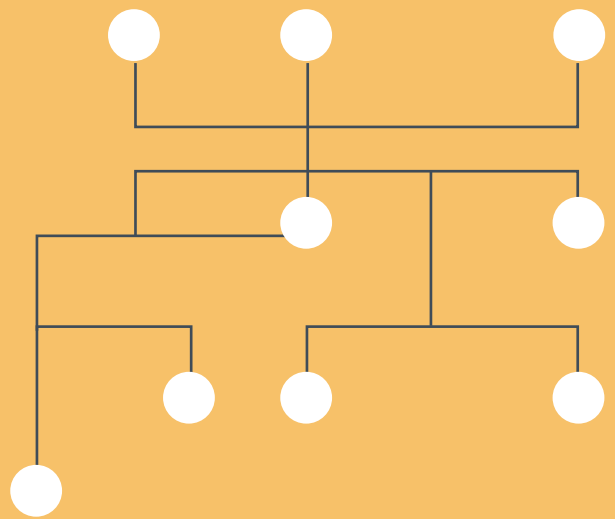
It’s imperative that you know who to speak to and when. You may work with a core buying team in the early stages of the sales process, but you’ll also need to understand who to connect with in the later stages regarding procurement compliance, for example. A potential partner will feel much more confident throughout the process if you anticipate their needs.



Visualization Tools

We covered visibility, but what about the more literal visualization?

The right sales technology can provide an easier way to map progress and gain insight into accounts. Those tools may include Relationship Maps, Strategy Maps, and Close Plans. Each can help sales teams work through your sales methodology, while staying agile in the process.



RELATIONSHIP MAPPING

Relationship mapping provides an essential piece of visibility for both prospects and current customers. In the beginning, you'll want to identify Decision-Makers, Influencers, and Champions and the quality of each relationship. That stakeholder landscape makes it clear who is influencing whom and where your efforts are best spent. You can visually see where you have strong relationships and where you need to build connections to avoid roadblocks.

Maybe most importantly, relationship mapping can help you mitigate risk. Make sure you are using your time productively by considering the following once you've mapped out and updated your account plan:

- ▶ Do you suspect that you lack strong relationships with key stakeholders?
- ▶ Are you in touch with the entire buying committee?
- ▶ Are you missing a Champion to help move the needle?



STRATEGY MAPPING

Improve deal velocity with a visual roadmap to help you lead with relevancy and apply solutions in a surgical manner. Visualize the value your solutions provide in the context of the buyers' business strategy and challenges:

- ▶ Pictorially identify the strategies, goals, pain points, and initiatives of your buyers.
- ▶ Drive collaboration with your buyers by sharing your understanding of their business and adding value early in the process to gain credibility and earn access to others in the organization.
- ▶ Overlay your solutions onto your buyers' initiatives to visually illustrate how your solutions can deliver strategic value.

When mapping your strategy with key accounts, one of the first steps is to understand whitespace. Whitespace can show you where there may be multiple opportunities for cross-selling and upselling within an account. Forrester shared in a recent webinar,

“*nearly 78% of all bookings and revenue are coming from existing clients. There is a shift towards retention and renewals, cross-sell, and upsell.*”

Large organizations often have multiple departments, regions, and/or verticals that can benefit from your solution. Whitespace mapping technology makes it visually clear where your footprint could expand, giving you greater wallet share.



CLOSE PLANS

A close plan is essential to successfully managing a sales cycle from Opportunity to Closed-Won. The close plan should include details related to the signoff process, formal stakeholder communication, transition to customer services planning, and the target date for final approval and signatures. It's important to note that the most successful close plans are a collaborative process between the sales rep and prospect.

A close plan, a name that implies it comes at the end, does anything but. "We don't set the close plan and ask for agreement - we build it together and refine it as we march down the path towards close," says Revegy's Senior Director of Enterprise Sales, Chris Cameron.

From the moment an evaluation is agreed upon, it's time to start planning for the close. You'll want to address the following items:

- ▶ What are the next steps?
- ▶ Do we agree on the timeline for next steps?
- ▶ Who owns the deliverables for next steps?
- ▶ Are there any co-dependencies (if we don't do 'y' by xx/xx date, what do we also have to push out)?

Having clarity and collaboration on final steps gives both parties a means to an end. It's just another example of how working with your prospect to find a solution will build confidence in you as a partner supporting their needs.

Visualization tools help sales teams avoid deal-killing blind spots. You can see into an organization and realistically understand their propensity to buy. An honest review of an opportunity can save time and money by identifying opportunities that are unlikely to close... right now. Make a note to circle back when the timing might be better but don't waste time. Focus your attention on prospects that look more promising in the immediate future.



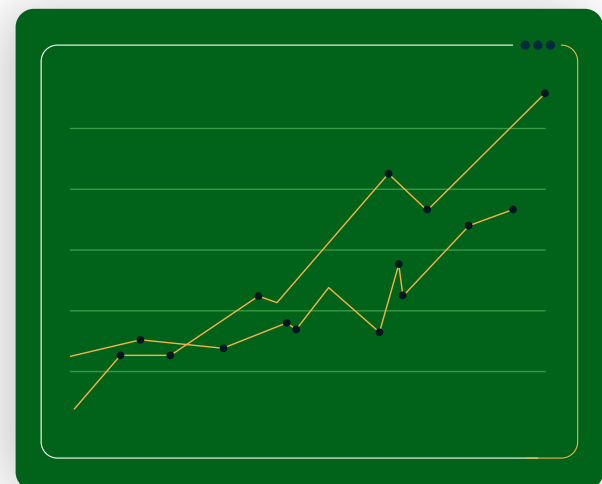
Framework for Opportunity and Account Planning

As we learned in 2020, the way we do business can change in an instant. Your sales planning process needs to be digital, dynamic, collaborative, and agile. You need to be able to pivot at a moment's notice. And you need a plan in place to enable it all.

- ▶ **Be Digital:** It might seem like a no-brainer these days, but it should be said. Get on the cloud! You can no longer file away your processes and keep account info on Post-Its. Digitizing information increases visibility into key accounts and enables repeatability of winning plays.
- ▶ **Be Dynamic:** Having a process does not restrict the “art” of sales. Dynamic processes give your team the flexibility to make decisions based on solid data and an analytics foundation. A good process will enable your team to respond better in fast-changing environments.
- ▶ **Be Collaborative:** Leverage the entire revenue-generating team to get deeper into an account with the information most relevant to them. Digitally share Strategy and Relationship Maps with your Marketing and Customer Success teams to create account-based plays and stay aligned.
- ▶ **Be Agile:** At the TOPO's Summit in October 2020, we learned that “the Fortune 200 is shifting from three to five-year strategic visions over the last decade to a 90-120 day set of triage projects.” They're driving incremental enhancements to their processes rather than launching a digital transformation from the ground up. Therefore, it's increasingly important that your sales process be able to pivot alongside your buyer's needs.

Most importantly, your organization should be functioning as one revenue-generating team.

Siloed sales routes fall short with buyers. As buying cycles and purchase teams expand, **buyers want increased convenience, quicker time-to-value, and more flexibility to move between channels and routes based on their immediate needs and preferences.**



Closing the Sale

When your sales team follows the process you've implemented, you will find more frequent wins and improved deal velocity. When they have identified the pain points, proven your solution's value, and worked with the prospect to **help them buy**... the sale is 'in the bag.' But as you know, the sale doesn't end there.

Coach your team on adding value beyond the close to ensure success throughout the customer's journey. You need to be sure that the customer data from the sales process gets into the hands of implementation and customer success. Data symmetry across teams leads to an overall understanding of the customer's strategic goals and priorities and the ability to demonstrate your impact.

Consider the following:

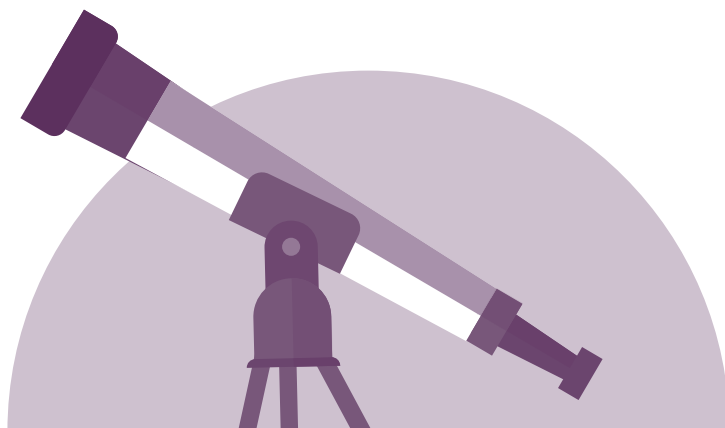
- ▶ How do you document customer data?
- ▶ Who has access to customer data?
- ▶ Who is responsible for maintaining the data?
- ▶ At what cadence does it make sense to review the strategic initiatives and outcomes with the customer?

When the team stays involved in the contract's final signing and works alongside the implementation team, the client handoff will be seamless.



This is where you show your value as a **true partner**.

Being a true partner means that your internal account team continues to work with the customer and keeps an eye out for **opportunities** to increase adoption or expand the use case.



With ongoing visibility into the account, account teams are better able to uncover cross-sell or upsell opportunities.

Anticipating future needs and having in-depth discussions with customers, especially with your existing key accounts, can help in new product development or advancing your current offering to suit their needs (if they need it, others might also!).

As a partner to the customer, the sales team should always be available for a quick call, stay informed on recent and future trends with your client's industry, and continue collaborating with your marketing and customer success teams to add value. Having ongoing discussions about strategic priorities solidifies your position as a trusted advisor and furthers your ability to identify opportunities to increase adoption or expand wallet share.

Instead of "always be closing," try "always be giving." Find ways to stay in touch with relevant, helpful information. Pop up in their inbox with insights and relevant content. Provide introductions to other partners that may be useful.

It may be cliché, but the Golden Rule applies. Consider how you would like a partnership to feel for you and be that to your customers.

Appendix

- 1 <https://go.forrester.com/press-newsroom/forrester-releases-siriusdecisions-planning-assumptions-to-help-b2b-leaders-accelerate-growth-in-2021/>
- 2 <https://www.saleshacker.com/sales-methodology-blueprint/>
- 3 <https://www.pipedrive.com/en/blog/challenger-sales-model>
- 4 <https://blog.topohq.com/>
- 5 <https://www.revegy.com/revegy-benefits/>
- 6 <https://www.revegy.com/blog/visibility-focus-keys-account-planning/>
- 7 <https://www.businessinsider.com/companies-asking-employees-to-work-from-home-due-to-coronavirus-2020>

About Revegy

Revegy is the leading intelligent sales planning platform, helping organizations deepen relationships and drive measurable impact on revenue. Headquartered in Atlanta, Revegy is the only platform of its kind designed to work the way you do, with any CRM or sales methodology. More than 45,000 users around the world from companies such as MarkLogic, Micro Focus, Siemens, and Zoetis rely on Revegy to manage over \$25 billion in revenue.

For more information about how to win more deals, faster, visit revegy.com.



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