

# Preparing for Kickass B2B Sales in 2019

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## **Forecasting Continued Economic Growth**

As the United States Economy continues its steady growth, it's time to ask a couple of essential questions about your business.

- Is it on track to keep pace with or exceed market trends in 2019?
- Do you have plans in place to take full advantage of the favorable economic winds?

First, let's look at the big picture.

In 2018, economists predict the U.S. GDP will grow at 3.1 percent — its best performance since 2015. Driving this growth is the increase in personal spending as confident consumers have drawn down their savings, and an unemployment rate has dipped to its lowest level in almost 49 years. Other contributors to the healthy economy are strong business investment levels, spurred by a generous corporate tax cut, and export growth. With the GDP growth rate running at 3.7 percent for the latter half of 2018, the prognosticators expect another strong year in 2019, although it will slow slightly to 3.0 percent.

### **Get Your Sales Boat Ready to Ride the Waves of an Economic Lift**

Since positive economic cycles don't last forever, it's time to make hay while the sun shines and plan for an awesome sales year in 2019.

Planning and preparation however, takes time. So you cannot afford to wait until the New Year rings in to create your sales and marketing strategy and devise your tactics. By getting a late start, you're likely to end up in an unproductive cycle. It starts with the first quarter being lost as everyone immerses themselves in preparations and building a sales pipeline for the year. Next, you rev up your initiative in the second quarter. Just as you get going, there's a slowdown in the lazy, hazy summer days. And inevitably, following on the heels of the sun-drenched days, a frantic last quarter involves the sales team scurrying around, doing everything in their power to close, close and close some more.

That all-too-familiar cycle is neither healthy (for you or your team) nor a recipe for success. There's a better way. To make 2019 strong and as panic-free as possible, plan how you will generate sales and start building your pipeline NOW.

### **Start with Strategy**

While the tactics of sales and marketing have changed considerably over the last few decades, the fundamental elements of strategic planning are still in place. Companies that do a full review of internal strengths and weaknesses as well as

external opportunities and threats, known as a SWOT analysis, are most likely to be able to develop sound sales and marketing strategies.

Your strategy includes defining your target market segments and channels, plus how you plan to reach out to them. Some questions to consider include:

- Are there a few large potential customers you want to target with account-based marketing and sales?
- Are you better off using inbound marketing to attract a large number of smaller customers?
- Would a mix of both approaches work best?
- Which market segments offer the most significant opportunities?
- Do you need to modify current products or introduce new ones?

Make sure you determine a realistic sales target and expense budget. Use your sales target to determine the number of leads you need to feed into your sales pipeline, required conversion rates and pipeline velocity. Your expense budget will help you prioritize between various sales and marketing initiatives required to meet your sales goals. For instance, is it better to spend more on content or hiring a B2B telemarketing company to call your prospects?

## **Mind Your Metrics**

Looking at your year-over-year sales history is a start, but it does not give you much actionable information. Instead, while doing your SWOT analysis, dig into your pipeline metrics. Find out what's working and what's not.

For example, what are your web traffic sources? Which convert best to leads? What are your conversion rates from one pipeline phase to the next, such as lead to marketing qualified lead (MQL) to sales qualified lead (SQL) to demo? What role do white papers, demos and trials play in the conversion process? How many proposals or quotes turn into sales? What is your sales cycle?

Once you understand the knobs to turn on your pipeline dashboard, you can experiment with different scenarios to determine how to meet your 2019 sales goals predictably. For instance, you might consider starting at the top of the sales pipeline and increasing your lead generation by boosting your spending on pay-per-click advertising. Alternatively, you could improve the efficiency of your pipeline by letting fewer leads escape. That might mean following up more rapidly or creating a

more robust lead nurturing program.

Perhaps there's an opportunity to shorten your sales cycle, enabling you to increase revenues within a specific timeframe. Maybe you want to invest in more marketing content to help educate prospects before you talk with them. Another option might be to tighten up the sales calls your inside reps make by ensuring they understand their prospects' goals and schedules. Maybe you don't have an inside sales team and are looking to invest in one. Should you insource it or outsource it to the experts? Better intelligence can empower inside sales to shave off a few days from the sales cycle here and there. Also, knowing exactly what the prospect wants to achieve and when they want to do it enables reps to set call objectives that align with buyers' needs.

### **Don't Wait Till It's Too Late**

As you can see, there's a lot of data to explore, scenarios to examine and questions to answer. The sooner you get going on your plans for 2019, the more likely you are to reap the rewards of the favorable economy.

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