BONUS SECTION!
COMMON PROBLEMS (AND THEIR SOLUTIONS)

In this final section, we're going to cover the most common go to market problems that we see, along with actionable, practical advice on how to overcome them.

You are not winning over new prospects

In B2B product marketing, if qualified leads (opportunities) are not being won by the sales team, you should try to dig deeper into why that's happening. To do this, you want to generate a report in Salesforce or a similar system. Look at the opportunities that are "closed-lost" and look at the reason codes. The reasons could be something like:

- Lost to competitor
- Timing
- Price is too high
- Not decision maker
- Missing features

Let's say that in the last 6 months, the results were something like below:

Reason	# of lost opportunities
Lost to competitor	13
Timing	3
Price is too high	10
Not decision maker	2
Missing features	3

As you can see, the #1 reason you are losing opportunities is because of your competition. You'll want to look deeper into this. Look at each opportunity in Salesforce to identify which competitors show up the most:

Competitor	# of lost opportunities
A Corp	9
B Corp	1
C Corp	3

As this table shows, A Corp is one of the leading reasons that you are not getting new sales. What you might find is that they offer a much lower price than you do.

A sudden drop in website performance

One month, I experienced a precipitous drop in performance of leads coming in from a website. That month I had changed the homepage, but not without first running an A/B test.

Step 1: Re-run the A/B test

The first thing I did was re-run the A/B test. Yet again, my new homepage design performed better with a significantly higher conversion rate.

Step 2: Isolate the problem on the website

Looking more closely at where the conversion drop was most substantial, I noticed that the pricing page was the biggest contributor. This in and of itself was not proof that the pricing page was the problem. That’s because people tend to convert on websites based on the ENTIRE website experience, not just the experience of one particular page. So while the pricing page tends to generate a lot of conversions, all the other pages that the visitor sees contribute to the pricing-page conversions.

Step 3: Isolate the problem at a broader level

Looking at the data for the past few months, I identified that pricing was the primary reason we were not closing prospects, particularly with respect to larger prospects.

Step 4: Talk to the internal team

I spoke to a business development rep (BDR) who told me that he was having a hard time selling our holistic software because the prospects already had software that did much of what we offered.

Step 5: Look at external data

I looked at external data and found that about ¾ of larger prospects (our new target) already had software to do much of what we offered.

Conclusion

The problem was that we had changed our pricing page, in hopes of aligning better with our target customer which was much larger than our previous target. Ironically, larger customers were actually quite price sensitive because they didn’t value the holistic nature of our software as much since, at that size, they already purchased software to fix many problems. We simplified our pricing structure and updated the pricing page to improve performance.

Leads are up but pipeline is down OR leads are down but pipeline is up

A common psychological mistake humans make is associating recency with causation. This leads to problems with demand generation, because metrics move on different time scales. For example, your leads may be up for the month but your pipeline may actually be down. That's because the pipeline for this month could be generated from last month's leads. Similarly, leads could be down this month but pipeline may be up, because lead generation last month was strong.

It's important to measure results on the appropriate timescale. If you've made a bunch of changes to your landing pages this month, then the appropriate gauge of success is improvements to your leads (form submissions like these might be defined by "marketing engaged leads" in your company). The impact on pipeline may not happen until the following month.

Lots of leads but sales aren’t going up

This is a very common problem. Marketers can have a very low standard for what constitutes a lead, whereas salespeople have a very high standard for what constitutes a lead. So what happens is all those top-of-funnel leads leak out in the middle.

For example, someone who watched a thought leadership webinar is not the kind of lead an account executive wants to talk to. The top and bottom of the sales funnel are easy. The real challenge is the middle of the funnel (i.e. MOFU). This is where you take the top-of-funnel leads, nurture them with educational content, and warm them up so that they’re willing to have a conversation with a sales person, see a demo, or engage in some other high-bar offer.

A common way to do this is to provide a series of emails that educates the prospect on a specific pain point. This might include a video case study of someone similar who overcame the problem. It could also include an email on best practices for overcoming that pain point. Eventually, you have to sell the hard offer—which is the demo or consultation.

In some cases, there is an SDR (sales development representative)—also known as a BDR (business development representative)—who sits in the middle between Marketing and Sales. The SDR might push the prospect to schedule a demo, or the marketer might. Increasingly though, SDRs are reporting into marketing, becoming another channel for marketers to play in.

Another problem might be even further down the funnel. When you’re going to market, there are guaranteed to be some sales growing pains. As a go to market leader, your job is to make sure that sales has the capability to close the deals that marketing is delivering, which enters the world of *sales enablement.*

Sales enablement is the process of building, delivering, and maintaining the content, processes, systems, and tools that sales teams need close business. Generally, sales enablement as dedicated role will only happen after 50-75 sales reps are hired. If you're going to market for the first time, then sales enablement will likely be owned by marketing (product marketing in particular).

There are dozens of things you can do to try and improve your conversion rates, but for a first effort, content is your best bet. Specifically, you should produce internal content to help sellers have better, more relevant conversations. This kind of content might include:

1. Battlecards

Battlecards are a short document to help the account executives (sales reps) land sales. The purpose is to prepare the sales reps to respond when customers ask about competitors.

This can be a daunting task, because the number of competitors could be endless and there could be very nuanced differences in features among the competitors. The mistake most marketers make is that they attempt to define their competitors based on whether they offer similar products. The first problem with this is that the competitive set can become too large. The second problem is that prospects will start naming competitors you've never heard of, or ones you never thought were worthy to be considered competitors.

The main takeaway is that customers don't define competitors the same way your internal product team does. Instead, you should focus on who your “bullseye” target customer is, and then let this definition narrow down the competitive set. You should also look at what competitors you're running into and losing deals to based on your CRM data.

Once you’ve identified who the key competitors are, analyze them based on your value propositions. For example, if the main benefit of your product is that it speeds up assembly lines, then analyze your competitors based on that benefit. Perhaps they are lacking certain key features that make their assembly lines move faster.

Typically marketers create a master table that details each of the competitors and the key features they have (or don’t have). I don’t like this process because it’s not customer-centric. In sales conversations, customers will likely name just one or two key competitors rather than an exhaustive list, so I prefer to just go through each competitor one-by-one and identify their deficiencies in terms of delivering value. That way the sales rep can quickly look at the specific competitor and speak about each issue.

Try to condense the information into a single sheet.

In addition to providing the deficiencies for each competitor, make sure that your battlecard speaks more broadly about where your product stands in the market. For example, you might say something like: “Unlike most competitors, we offer 24 hour support,” or “In general, our products save more in energy costs than most of our competitors.”

2. Sales wiki

A sales wiki is just an aggregated (ideally searchable) record for your sales team all about the market, the product, the target customer, and content to send, and more.

This repository could include PowerPoint slides designed to educate the sales team on the target customer—or other internal-facing materials. It could also include customer-facing materials such as handouts on specific product features, or brochures catering to specific customer groups or buying personas. For example, you might have one handout for CEOs that talks about profit-and-loss and another handout for CTOs that talks about IT infrastructure integration capabilities.

3. Crib notes

Sales reps are busy, and are unlikely to read and then action the longer content that marketing produces. So part of the deliverable for sales enablement to help increase close rates and sales velocity is to condense it down into 1-2 sentences per point. If you can deliver it contextually when reps need it, that's even better, but the goal should be bite-sized content pieces that are hyper-relevant to the rep at a specific time. Crib notes are an easy way to deliver that value.

Large customers aren’t buying

Often products go to market serving small companies. Then, they “ladder up” to the mid-market, and finally to enterprise.

This is a proven pathway for many SaaS companies because the needs of small companies or freelancers are usually less complex and the sales cycle is shorter. But their lifetime value is usually small, so you would need to acquire a massive number of customers to build scale. It can be a lot easier to scale by serving enterprise clients, once your product is sophisticated enough to meet their needs. It’s worth nothing, though, that these are not mutually exclusive: it’s quite possible to serve both enterprise customers AND small customers simultaneously. When I worked for a Google-backed startup, we catered to micro-companies, small-medium companies, and also to enterprise clients.

You may find it difficult to sell to large companies for a number of reasons:

- **They don’t value your holistic solution**. While small companies may have appreciated the breadth of your product, you may find that large companies already have specialized products to serve most of their needs. They’ve already developed systems and work-arounds to get to the size they’re at today. They’ve also already purchased products similar to yours. Your value proposition may actually narrow the further you move up market. You may need to focus more on one benefit that you deliver strongly on.

- **They don’t realize customization is an option**. Large companies may dismiss your solution because they don’t realize you offer thorough customizations to accommodate their workflows.

- **You’re too expensive**. Ironically, large companies may actually be more price-sensitive. This isn’t because they don’t have money; it’s because they simply don’t derive as much value from your product as smaller companies do. You may have overestimated how much more large companies are willing to pay.
- **You haven’t enabled your account executives**. Often larger companies have buying groups, and these may include multiple stakeholders who need to be sold to. As a marketer, you should develop selling tips that cater to each of those groups. For example, you may have an outline of the profit-loss impacts of your products for CEOs or general managers, and a technical product benefits sheet for engineering leads.

Event marketing is not producing qualified leads

Events can eat up the majority of the marketing budget for B2B companies. Investing tens of thousands of dollars on a single event is a risky investment, but the possibility of having keen buyers, all grouped in a single place, is too tantalizing for many companies to pass up. However these big-ticket events often don’t lead to the same return on investment as low-cost activities like webinars. So what’s going on here?

- **Your events are not targeted enough**. Big events attract broad audiences who often don’t care much for your product. You want to focus on events where the majority of attendees are your bullseye target customers—not just people who could buy our product, but the specific group that is most likely to buy it.

- **Your event attendees aren’t attending with intent.** Some events attract people to evaluate solutions and buy products. But not that many. For most events, the draw to attendees is the education and sessions, not the opportunity to shop around the vendors. You want to either focus on events with the intent to buy, or change the objectives of events.

- **The majority of attendees are not customers**. Sometimes the majority of attendees at events are not actually end buyers of your product. They may actually be potential partners or collaborators. For example, the attendees may be web developers or professional service providers who cater to your end customers. You went to the event expecting new customers instead of building our your partner marketing.

- **The attendees are not your buyers**. For B2B tech companies in particular, the end user is often not the buyer. If the majority of your attendees are end-user and not buyers, it's going to be difficult to have meaningful conversations. For example, if you sell sales automation software, you end user might be an account executive, but your buyer is the VP sales, VP marketing, or VP operations. A conference where the attendees are sales reps isn't going to generate qualified opportunities.

- **You've set the wrong expectations**. Events have lots of auxiliary benefits beyond lead generation. Specifically, brand awareness—essentially, top of funnel impressions—and deal acceleration. Events are really good at both these things, so as a savvy marketer, you may need to change the objective of your event to match what they're good at.

PPC ads aren’t producing the same results at scale

When you’re small, you may see great results with PPC ads once you’ve properly optimized your keywords, ads, and landing pages. But at a certain point, you may find that you cannot grow the advertising to get more customers cost-effectively. What’s happening here?

The thing with marketing tactics like Google Ads is that they often work best at the bottom-of-the-funnel. In other words, they cater to people who are already on the verge of buying a product like yours. But the size of the bottom-of-the-funnel is always smaller than the top-of-funnel. So it’s very easy to saturate the bottom-of-the-funnel with keywords like “buy X” or “integration for Y.”

In my experience, PPC advertising is a baseline marketing tactic. You run it continuously to capture the buy-ready prospects, but the real growth will come from other tactics. For example, you may need to a buy list of 20,000 prospects and start hitting them with Facebook ads promoting your white paper. You then migrate those prospects into an email sequence in Outreach that nurtures the leads to the point where they are pushed to the bottom-of-the-funnel. PPC ads often just hit the low-hanging fruit.

Going to market without product / market fit

This problem is most common if you work for an early stage startup. What happens is that you try to go to market before you truly have product / market fit.

That is, you haven't positioned yourself in a market where you have a proven track record of customers who love your product, that's large enough to achieve your revenue goals, and where you can articulate your unique value over competitive alternatives.

Usually, this step is rushed because a few early deals have closed, and that drives assumed product / market fit, when in reality, those deals are closed because of existing connections and founder selling, rather than true evidence of a market in search of your solution.

Companies rush into tactical execution and demand gen without having a strong foundation and end up spending ineffectively while they figure it out on the fly.

Here are a few signs you might not have clear product / market fit:

- Every deal requires the founder / CEO / executive to be in on, regardless of deal size
- Long deal cycles for SMB / mid-market deals
- High customer churn rate
- Extremely diverse customer / user base (it's difficult to identify unifying factors)
- Low Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- Ideal Client Profile (ICP) is only loosely defined

The only fix here is to go back, reassess your market options, and find another niche that you can crack into with better success.

Nobody is responding to my ads or emails

Usually the problem here is that you are trying to promote your product, company, or brand instead of the offer itself. What I mean by the offer is your consultation, white paper, ebook, webinar, demo, and so on. When you run direct-response ads or emails, you need to sell the offer—usually with bullet points detailing the benefits of the offer.

Nobody is responding to my Facebook or LinkedIn ads

When you’re marketing on Facebook and LinkedIn, you’re mostly marketing to cold leads who haven’t heard of your company. And that means you need to market a little differently. If your ads aren’t converting, it’s probably because:

- You’re trying to sell your company instead of your offer. If they’ve never heard of you, then you need to make sure they’re getting value right away, since there’s no incentive for them to click on an ad about a company they’ve never heard of. Content that has a low commitment for them like ebooks and whitepapers (guides) does this really well.
- You’re ask is too high. Asking someone to attend an hour-long webinar is a much higher ask then getting them to download an ebook. Try lowering what you want them to do.
- You’re asking for too much information. Response rates should improve if all you ask for is an email, as opposed to name, email, company, revenue, etc.
- There’s too much friction in the user experience. Response rates should also improve if you use the lead-gen forms built into the social platform, instead of sending people to your own landing page (especially for mobile traffic).

We’re losing too many deals to the competition

First let’s define how many is too many. A good rule of thumb is that you should win between 35% and 45% of the opportunities you create. And of the 55% - 65% of deals that you lose, only about a third should be lost to competitors. That means if you create 100 opportunities, you’ll win 35 of them, you’ll lose 65 of them, and of that, you’ll lose about 20 to a competitor.

The rest you’ll lose to other reasons (no decision, for example).

So your aggregate competitor loss rate should be no more than 20% of all the opportunities you create. At most.

If you’re near / above this number, then you need to dig into the data, and execute the relevant strategy:

Questions to ask	**Strategic response**
Are you losing deals from a specific segment, company size, or industry?	Identify other segments where you’re over-indexing for won deals and shift your focus to there. If you can't, you need to dig into the specific needs of the market, and reposition your product and marketing to serve it more effectively.
Are you losing the deals for a specific reason?	Invest in product development, or pivot your product to an audience who doesn’t have that specific requirement.
Are you being priced out of the market?	Address your messaging to better convey the value you bring that is unique over the value your

	competitor can bring.
Are your competitors' sales processes much easier?	Streamline and simplify how you sell to make it easier for the buyer.
Is your customer experience worse?	Talk to your happy and unhappy customers. What makes one happy / unhappy? Take those happy customers and replicate that success, and tell that story during the sales cycle.