

Startup Sales for Dummies

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Published Date	02/20/2024

Why Does This Guide Exist?

If you're a founder and you would like to demystify the process of finding and landing customers, this guide is made for you. My aim is to help startup founders and early stage companies land their first 10 - 20 customers and create solid foundations of a revenue generating machine. While this guide is created through the lens of B2B software startup sales, these principles can be applied to most businesses.

I decided this guide needed to be created because I was building a sales machine at an early stage startup and I was looking for an easy to read playbook that I could reference. This is my best attempt at distilling the most impactful details I have learned from nearly a decade of sales experience and reading countless sales books and blogs. Some of them referenced in the guide. This is 20k hours of learning in a 15 page PDF.

My aim is to get you the highest calorie information so you can start executing right away. We are merely scratching the tip of the iceberg on each of these topics and I encourage you to continue to read further on each subject as you continue to grow

Don't read this cover to cover and then put it away. Use it as a reference to check your work. Jump to whatever section you are working on currently.

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Assumption of what you have done before you start using this guide

- You have a fleshed out business idea and either an MVP product or service you are ready to start showing customers.
- You are confident your target market is large enough to support the type of business you want to build.
- You have an idea of who your potential end customer is.
- You understand how your idea fills an unmet need or gap in the market.
- You have a thesis of your own competitive advantage with current players in the market.



Step 1: Establish Your Ideal Customer Profile

Let's get started. Before reaching out to prospects it's important to take a step back and understand your market. I mean *really* understand who it is you're selling to. Start by ensuring you have answers to the questions below. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but a good start. The answers to these questions will also likely change over time, especially at the beginning.

- **Who is your target buyer?** The more specific the better. If your answer is "all accountants" I challenge you to narrow the scope of your target ICP at the beginning to "head of accounting at digital native startups, Series B - Series D and at least 1 direct report".
 - Vertical / industry:
 - Company size: (FTEs & Market cap)
 - Title(s):
- **Why do your prospects need your product?**
 - What are your prospects doing today instead? (Nothing, DIY, competition)
 - How significant is the pain? (measured in hours wasted, dollars lost, revenue lost)
 - What happens if they do nothing?
- **Who are your competitors & what is your competitive advantage?**
 - If there are no competitors, why not? Has anybody tried before and failed?
- **How does your ICP currently solve this problem?**
 - Do they use another product, how is your solution different?
 - Have they made their own solution? For many SaaS companies, Excel is their biggest competitor
 - What is the cost of solving the problem? (engineering time, subscription costs, etc.)
 - What is the cost of not solving the problem? (lost revenue, wasted hours, liability)
- **Is there an established market for your product? Or are you creating a new market?**
 - For example, If you built an insulated, sealable travel coffee mug, there's already a well established market and people are actively searching for these products.
 - If you're building a robot that cleans your bathroom for you, you will need to create the market. You will need to identify the people who are most likely to pay for your product today and convince them they need to buy this new product that they don't already know they need.
 - What is the Google search term a buyer would enter to find your product and how many people are searching for that topic?
 - If there is a significant volume of search traffic, you can capture via Google Ads and SEO.
 - If there isn't significant volume, you will need to create demand. Common best practices are blog posts, Executive guides, webinars, etc.

Non Negotiable

- You must be an Expert in your field of discipline.
 - Be Interesting: Always teach your prospects and customers something.
 - 6+ Prospect / Customer meetings per week.
-

Step 1.1: Expertise is Table Stakes

If you are not in the 99th percentile of knowledgeable people in your field of discipline, it will be very difficult to succeed. If you aren't there yet, you can learn. If you are already there, you have to keep your knowledge up to date. Spend time every day reading and learning. This habit of dedicated reading and researching time didn't feel like work to me at first, but it's extremely necessary.



Step 2: Build a List of Prospects

Startup founders often want to wait for their product to mature a bit before engaging with close friends and family. I strongly disagree with waiting - just because you're having a conversation doesn't mean you're immediately going into hard sale mode. At this stage you are simply looking for conversations to be had to get feedback and the more conversations the better.

- Friends & Family referrals - Ask those closest to you who you should talk to.
- Start with your warmest professional connections - people you have worked with in the past, previous customers or clients, etc.
- Work your 1st degree connections on LinkedIn - Filter down those people you have connected with in the past.
- Investors network - Ask your investors for a few referrals. Start with a small list, come back with results, and ask for more.

A few more tips

- Start with a list of 100 names - how many meetings did you get from that list? What feedback did you receive? How many wanted to have a follow up conversation?
 - Don't hit everybody at once when you're first starting. Try messaging 20 people at a time. Measure your results and adjust accordingly with your next batch.
 - It's like dating - just because you're reaching out for a conversation, doesn't mean you want to marry them. Remind yourself this is low stakes.
-

Cool and Cold Contacts

As you begin your prospecting efforts within your immediate network, you also want to simultaneously reach out to... everybody else. Start by focusing on accounts or personas you would want to sell to. Industries, accounts, titles, etc. Another LinkedIn strategy would be to search a given domain, keyword or ICP in the last week. Connect with the people who are posting about the topic at hand.

Narrow the Aperture

If you're selling a piece of software to licensing professionals at music publishers, that's a great niche. There are few enough music publishers that you can talk to every single one of them in a short amount of time.

On the flip side, let's say you are building an accounting software product to make it easier for your employees to log receipts. Before you start reaching out to your ICP, you must get much more specific and think really deeply about the problem you're solving. Who in the finances organization would find the most value in your product? Does it favor larger organizations or smaller? Can you find a vertical specific pitch? As you continue to have more conversations, the answers to these questions may become more clear.

Other considerations: Can you tap into an existing software ecosystem? For example cloud providers, SAP, Shopify, Salesforce, etc. have an enormous ecosystem of software vendors. Professional networks, Open Source Software, Industry verticals and more.

- [LinkedIn Sales Navigator](#): Using the filters you can search by title, account, degree of connection, etc. You can export lists to use in other tools like...
- [Apollo / Zoom Info](#): Datamine of prospect contact info.

Homework for the more curious: [Fanatical Prospecting](#)



Step 3: Sales Mindset

My first software sales job was at a boutique mobile and web development consulting firm. The CEO was an engineer and he shared a great parable about sales that articulates the difficulties you may encounter in the sales process.

*“The thing I don’t like about sales is sometimes you turn a knob over here *motions hand* and the other knob over here *motions hands* doesn’t turn for another 6 months. I’m an engineer. I don’t like that. When I turn this knob over here I want to see the other knob turn immediately.”*

Sometimes in the sales process you do something like send an email, leave a voicemail, send a quote, etc and you don’t see the desired result for weeks or months down the line. This is one of the many tricky aspects of sales that requires mental toughness and discipline to succeed.

There is a lot of rejection involved in sales. For every deal you close with a customer, you will have to speak to 20 or more people who say “no”. That’s a lot of rejection.

Sometimes when you call a prospect they will be rude and even say nasty things or maybe hang up on you when you call them on the phone. You will have to learn to not take it personally. You might also gain a new degree of patience the next time you receive a cold call

Sales is hard enough on its own. As a founder you’re going to have to balance outbound prospecting and taking meetings with customers on top of all the other responsibilities of running a new company. There will be a temptation to hire a sales person right away so you can focus on all the other things, but stay strong and do the first few deals yourself.

If the founder(s) can’t close the first few deals, [how will you know who to hire in the sales role?](#) After you have closed the first few deals you will know what qualities your first GTM hire will need to possess. As a founder or CEO you will also need to be one of the best, if not the best sales person in the company. You are going to constantly be involved with large customers at every stage of the company. The better equipped you are to handle sales conversations, the more you will be able to help.

Let’s Do Some Math

We established that sales is a vexing task. There’s plenty of data out there that says somewhere around [2% of cold calls will result in closed deals](#). If our goal is to land 10 customers, that means we have to call 500 prospects. So let’s go back to stage two and start building a list of 500 names, right?

Those numbers are for companies who have established product market fit to some degree. For an early stage startup that number will likely be in the multiple thousands. To land ten deals at 30% close rate means you need to find 33 qualified opportunities. If you’re really compelling on your sales calls and you convert 50% of prospect conversations to opportunities then you need 60 conversations to find 30 opportunities. Startups average a [response rate of 1-5% of from cold](#)

[outreach](#) meaning it may require anywhere from 1,200 to 6,000 outreach touch points to close your first 10 customers.

Before you start hyperventilating and call your investors to tell them you're giving their money back, take a deep breath. Even if you don't have a strong network, and you don't know your market well and it takes 6,000 contacts, that's somewhere around 115 cold emails per week or 23 per day. If it's closer to 1,200 emails, that's 23 per week or 5 per day. Anybody can handle that.

Step 4: Tactical Outbound Strategies

How do we systematically approach these thousands of contacts? Start with bespoke messages that clearly state the problem you're solving. Eventually you can automate the outbound process using sales tools highlighted later in this section, but as you begin to know your ICP, start with individual tailored messaging.

Tactics for landing 15 minutes with your ICP

Asking for advice or feedback: When I first started early stage startup sales I did what I tried using traditional sales methods like sharing outcomes or what my product promised to do. This strategy did not work that well at the beginning, especially without any social proof.

Many people want to support founders. Workers at larger companies might want to get a glimpse of what the builders at an early stage company are doing to make them feel alive again.

Example: *"Hi Mary - I see you're Director of Finance at ACME Corp. I'm building a product that helps finance teams like yours save 10 hours per week on managing expenses. I started building the tool because I used to have the same role as you and spent half my week logging receipts.*

Would you be open to trading notes to give us feedback on what we're building and share how you're thinking about use cases for?"

As an Executive or VP for a Referral on Their Team: Identify an executive, break down why you're reaching out to them and ask "Is there somebody on your team who would be a good person to talk to?"

- The executive doesn't need to spend their own time up front.
- You now have two contacts within that organizations.

"Bob - I saw your LinkedIn post about ACME Corp's initiative to improve your sales team's productivity using AI. I'm building a product that qualified inbound leads using AI to help your reps close spend time with customers more likely to close.

Could you connect me to somebody on your team to find out if our product might be helpful in your sales process today?"

Write A Blog Post, White Paper or How To Guide That Relates To Your Prospect: Establishing trust is key in the sales process. By sharing some content you have created

- Creating content that showcases how you are approaching solving your problem.
- An Executive's Guide To _____. Much like this guide, give your target market valuable information so they understand how you think. If it's truly insightful they will want to talk to you.
- You are starting off your relationship by giving them something, not asking for something.

Is this too good to be true? Put yourself in your prospects shoes and consider the nuance of your pitch. I receive lots of emails promising things like: "we increased Customer X's lead volume by

495%!”.

My first reaction is that those kinds of results are just not realistic. I simply do not believe an outside vendor with zero knowledge of my business could bring me 5X the number of leads at a quality that is worth my time. I also have never heard of a sales team who worked with a consultant and saw these kinds of results. Therefore, I never respond to these messages that seem unrealistic.

More Ideas to Get In Front of Your ICP

Host a product launch and feedback event at your office or an event space

- Good chance to re-engage with previous contacts who didn't work out the first time.
- It's helpful to include a mixture of warm friendly leads and cold leads.
- Pizza and beer helps :-)

Get involved in Slack groups & local meet ups

- Share your ideas in slack groups where the people in your industry exchange ideas.
- Attend local meet ups and get to know the people in your space.
- Lineup speaking engagements at local meetups. Many meet ups are always looking for new speakers looking for a fresh perspective. You don't have to talk about your product, just become a known entity in the space.

Video: [Snowflake's CRO Chris Degnan on his strategies for navigating the 15 minute ask](#)

- Chris found his niche with digital native companies in AWS.
- He was more successful with directors than CIOs.
- If he could solve the problems for the directors they would bring him to the CXOs who held the budget.



Your message needs to stand out. It can't sound like the rest of the noise.



Create Cold Outbound Sales Message:

Subject	Make the subject of your email a solution to a problem .
100 Words, Max	Reference some specific about them and why you're reaching out. Showcase that you know something about them and you took time to research who they are.
Introduce yourself	<i>My name is Jon and I'm creating a sales manual for startup founders like you.</i>
Get Right to the Benefit	<i>My goal is to help founders demystify the sales process and help them land their first 10 customers.</i>
Grab Their Attention	<i>I'm guessing you're looking for ways to land more customer meetings at XYZ Company that aren't a waste of your time.</i>
What Do You Want?	<i>Would you be open to trading notes for 20 minutes to provide feedback based on your experience at _____?"</i>
Custom Tailor	<i>P.S. - I see you worked at Apple back in the day, same here. Do you still use those lominger competencies like I do?</i>

Final Product:

Hi! My name is Jon and I'm creating a sales manual for early stage startup founders like you. My goal is to help founders demystify the sales process by helping them land their first 10 customers.

I'm guessing you're looking for ways to land more customer meetings at XYZ Company that aren't a complete waste of your time. Would you be open to trading notes for 20 minutes to provide feedback based on your experience so far?"

P.S. I see you also used to work at Apple back in the day - do you still use the Lominger competencies like I do?

TL;DR: Keep it conversational and be authentic. You're talking to another human. There is no hard sale. You're building a product / offering a service and based on their expertise they might offer

valuable insights. If you're approaching somebody with a lot of pull in your industry, you can also appeal to their reputation and open by asking for their advice.

Consider Your Market Size - The more targeted your market, the less concerned you need to be with outreach volume. Let's say you were selling a product for nuclear power plants and your buyer was the operations manager. There are only 54 nuclear power plants in the United States so you probably won't be sending hundreds of messages per week because your target market is so small. That means you should be very thoughtful of how you approach each customer.

[Brex's famous Champagne Campaign](#) is a great example of going after a specific target market. If you are really confident you understand who your target market is, taking a more focused strategy can yield incredible results. This is only a good strategy if you have strong conviction your target audience is your ICP.

Example Outbound Campaign Cadence

1) Using your prospect's LinkedIn profile and anything you can find online, write a targeted email and reach out on LinkedIn.

2) After you have reached out in writing via LinkedIn and email, try calling on the phone a few days later. This will feel terrifying at first. But after a couple dozen attempts it won't feel so scary.

3) If you leave a voicemail, keep it short, like 20 - 30 seconds max. State who you are, why you're calling them (per your research) and that you want their feedback on your product.

4) Follow up via email and LinkedIn 2-3 more times

5) After 3 emails, 2 LinkedIn, 2 phone calls you can let them know you're leaving the ball in their court - ask "is this a bad time or are you just not interested?"

The art of the follow up: Persistence is key

Yet another element of sales that doesn't feel natural is the amount of follow up it often takes to land a meeting. Don't be afraid to send two or three follow ups after your initial message. I can't tell you how many times I have sent a second or third message and the prospect thanks me for following up because they intended to get back to me but life got in the way.

- Prospects rarely book a meeting on the first outreach touchpoint.
- Even if they reply, you may have to bug them a couple times to nail down the meeting.
- If you're not getting a reply, ask if there's a better time to regroup.

Organization is Critical Track everything that you do in the sales process. This will avoid embarrassing mistakes like messaging people more than once or even worse letting contacts slip through the cracks.

At the bottom of this section I have highlighted some sales tools you may want to look at. You can start by using some basic tools like G-Suite (free), Superhuman (\$20 / month) and notion to help keep you on task.

Find What Works After you have had twenty meetings, hopefully you will start to see a pattern of what is resonating with your buyers and you can try automating your message using Sales Tools. As you begin to scale your outreach it's important to track your success rate.

- Once you start to uncover recurring themes, begin to automate messaging and find what sticks.
 - Ideally you want a 1-5% response rate. If you are consistently lower than 1%, your messaging is not working, you're sending it to the wrong people, or both. Back to the drawing board.
- Find a channel that works - at TextQL we found LinkedIn had a much higher conversion rate. We could tailor messaging to the prospect's profile and they can also see who you are.
- What works today may not work tomorrow - initially email may work and then you get better responses
 - At TextQL we get responses from email campaigns consistently early on and then that messaging stopped working.
 - Later LinkedIn proved to be much more effective.

Everybody's style will vary. Maybe you like to be super informal / lowercase, maybe you prefer to have a classic, executive posture. Depending on you and your audience, different styles will yield different results. There is no right answer and it's up to you to figure out what works for you. Try stuff out, rigorously test the results, and do what works!

Broken Arms, Paper cuts, Painkillers, Vitamins, etc.

In early stage conversations It's important to focus on the pain point your product or service is solving, not the product you are building. Are you solving a pain that your target market views like a paper cut? Something that is an annoyance but doesn't need immediate attention. Or is this a pain point your audience would give almost anything to solve, like if you had a broken arm?

Be Honest With Yourself: Ask your prospects to validate and quantify the pain. Does the prospect think it's a paper cut, but it's really a broken arm? What's causing this pain? How does your product fix it? How are they dealing with the pain today?

Is the pain a broken arm that your ICP thinks is a paper cut? Before I started using note taking tools like Gong or Grain, I viewed using those tools as a nice to have but not necessary. Now that I have experienced the benefit of recording conversations with customers, I can't live without these tools. I don't have to worry about forgetting something important the customer said and I can share those details with colleagues. The pain of note-taking without a recorded call is now more like a broken arm than a paper cut.

MVP Sales Tool Tech Stack

- Super Human (\$20 / month)
- Google Sheets - Tracking prospect list and customers outreach stage
- [Notion](#) (\$15 / month): Quickly create email or LinkedIn message copy using AI, managing company wiki

Sales Tool Tech Stack

- Email campaign management: [Smartlead](#), [Clay](#), [Outreach](#), etc.
- [Linkedin Sales Navigator](#)
- Private & Public Company Info: [Crunchbase](#)
- Call recording tools: [Gong](#), [Grain](#), etc .

Step 5: First Call with Prospects (Discovery)

If your outreach is working, you should be booking a few meetings with your prospects. Your main objective in the initial call is to listen to your prospect talk about their business. Keep it short and understand why they took the conversation. Confirm they experience the pain you described, understand what they're doing to solve the pain today, (DIY? Competitor? Nothing?) How was this decision made? Who else on the team is involved? etc.

The most important thing to learn from this call is whether or not they are experiencing the pain your product solves and is it severe enough that they feel the need to take action.

Prep for the call (15 - 20 minutes)

- Do you have common ground with the prospect? Mutual friends, previous workplace, etc
- What is this person's role? What does the company they work for do? How does their day-to-day role relate to your product or service?
- What do you want to gain from this conversation?
- Is their company publicly referencing a focus on your solution? (Do they have a company wide initiative? Cost cutting measures in their earnings calls? Layoffs?)
- Familiarize yourself with [MEDDPIC](#) - This is a qualification framework to ensure you understand all the major details of the sales process.
- Practice with co-founders and friends!

Goals for first conversation

MEDDPIC: *Identify Pain, Potential Champion, Competition*

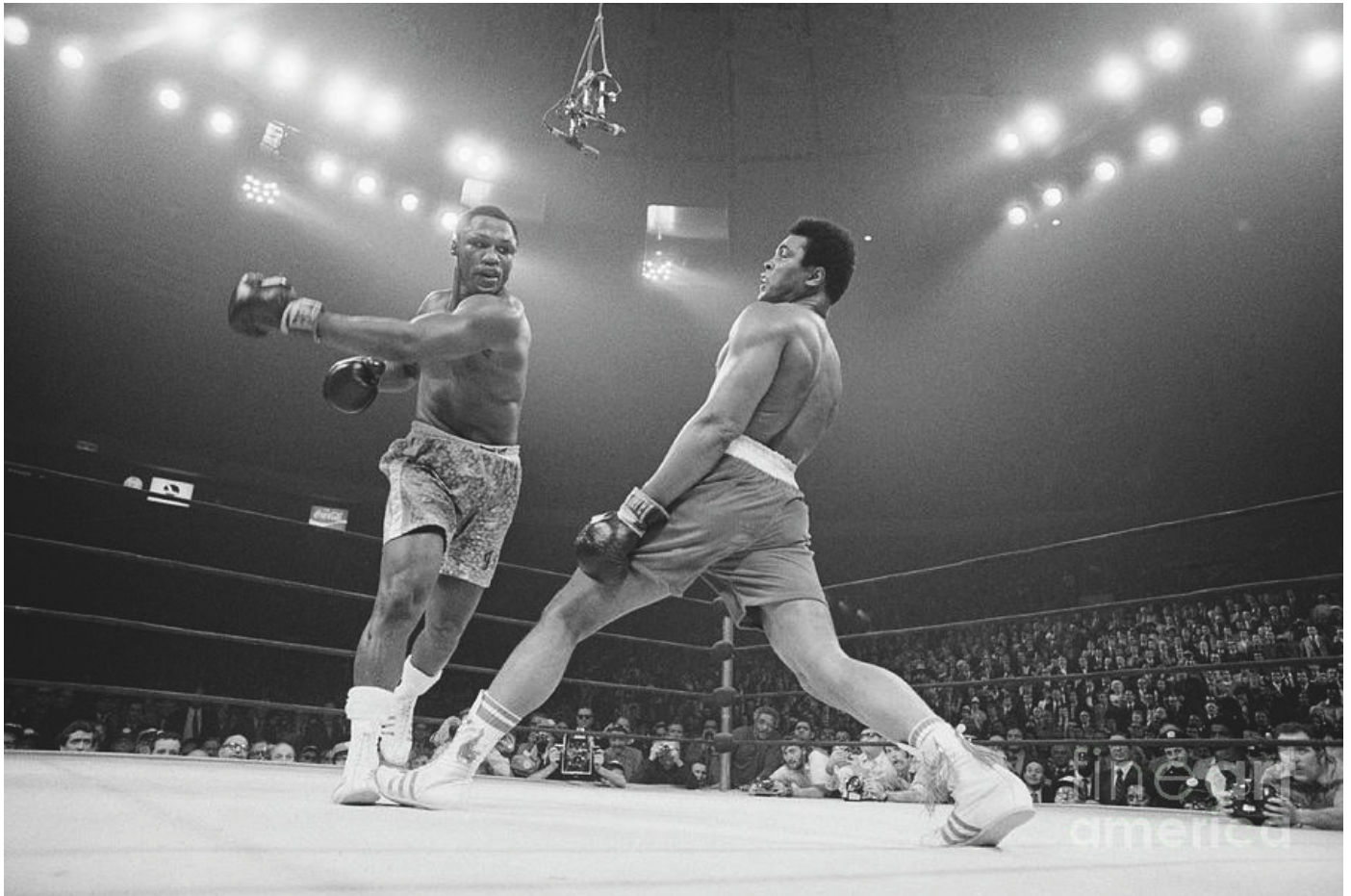
- Understand why they took the call: Curious? Fan of startups? Currently experiencing stated pain?
- Do they agree there is a problem? How great is the pain?
- Is the upside of the product interesting to them? If not, why? Are you missing something in your pitch? Is anyone experiencing the pain enough that
- Share the vision of what their new life is like with your solution.
- Are they currently using or evaluating other solutions?
- If yes, are they in an active buying cycle?
- If not, what would it take to onboard something that you're selling?
- You're looking for people who are potentially interested in doing a POC. Could they see themselves running a POC of this product? Would they be open to seeing a demo?
- If not, why? Is there somebody else in the org you can talk to?

Next Steps

- Qualify out / book a demo / ask for referrals
- If your prospect wants to see a demo, schedule the meeting during the call.

- Who else needs to be on the next call? Does this person have the authority to make decisions on things like a POC?

On Champions: Your champion is somebody who is vested in the interest in your offering succeeding at their organization. Typically they are tying their name to this initiative internally. If it succeeds they will receive praise, a promotion, or a raise. Maybe all three! Most great engagements will accompany at least one internal champion who will help you navigate selling to that organization. A good champion knows the ins and outs of their organization and is somebody you can call and ask very direct questions about the engagement and receive honest answers.



Qualifying Out: In my experience between 40 - 70% of prospect conversations do not result in a demo. That's ok! There is a delicate balance between eliminating the prospects who are going to waste your time and showcasing enough value to convince your prospects they need your solution. If you find everybody wants to see a demo, you might not be qualifying hard enough. If very few are taking you up on the next steps, you need to look at your target market, value prop, and your sales pitch. (Good thing you're recording those calls). If a customer is out today, find out what would have to change for them to be in.

Record your calls: Use Gong, Grain or an equivalent. It will save you from having to take perfect notes on the call. You can review your presentation skills and make adjustments. You can also share calls with other people on your team.

Step 6: Qualifying Opportunities

Using what you have learned from your questions in the discovery call, you should tailor this experience as much as you can. This is a chance to impress your prospect by showing them you understand them, the challenges they face and you are worthy of their time because you're an expert on this problem.

The principal goal of the next call is to find out who is serious enough to be one of your first customers. They must be very invested in the success of the project and solving the problem and understand they are a design partner on an early stage product.

Prep for the call (30 minutes)

- Reference your notes / call recording from call one
- What specific problem are we solving for the prospect?
- What is the benefit they will receive (saved time, close deals faster, reduce cost)
- Does this tie into a broader company initiative?

Goals for first conversation

MEDDPICC: *Economic Buyer, Decision Criteria, Decision Process, Champion*

- Share an in-depth demo of what you're building and how it relates to this prospect.
- Tie in use cases you learned from the discovery call
- Customize the demo as much as you can. Impress your prospect!
- Confirm you understand the problem they're experiencing today and they understand how you can solve that problem.
- Highlight a few outcomes they should expect from using your product.
- If they take on this project. Who else would need to be involved?
- If they're serious, why now? What happens if they wait?
- How do we stack up against competition?
- Optional: Share price range (ideally you want your prospect to say that's a little high)
- How serious are they about using your product / service?
- Not serious: what would have to change to make them interested? Referrals?

Next Steps

One of the biggest challenges even the most seasoned sales reps make is not leaving enough time to cover next steps. Earmark at least five minutes to wrap up. Stay disciplined.

- Ask for feedback: Keep this open ended. What do they like about your solution? What do they wish was different? How do they feel about the pricing?
 - Their response will dictate how you address the following. If they're interested use the following. If they're not, figure out what an ideal solution looks like to them.
- Remind them you're looking for design partners / POC participants
 - Define what that looks like (pricing, duration, etc)

- How would they make a decision on doing a POC? (decision criteria)
- Who else needs to be involved? (Economic Buyer involvement is necessary to move forward past this step. Full stop.)
- If you're doing a POC, what does it take to onboard a new vendor? (decision process)
- When would they want to get started?
 - How long does procurement take?

Homework for the more curious:

- [Predictable Revenue](#)
-

Step 7: Scoping & Closing Opportunities

If you have made it this far, you have a prospect who is very interested. You should close one out of three of these conversations. The objective of the scoping exercise is defining the desired outcome of a POC. Said another way - what would have to be true for you to give me the money I'm asking for to deliver this offering?

Prep for the call (30 minutes)

- Review [MEDDPICC](#) - What are you missing?
- Do we have all the right stakeholders involved? Are we sure our champion has the pull to get this done?
- Prepare the metrics / outcomes of the POC you will deliver.
- Do we know their procurement process? How long does that take?

Goals for first conversation

MEDDPICC: *Metrics, Economic Buyer, Decision Criteria and Process, Paper*

- Agree on the metrics your product must deliver for a successful engagement. (reduce sales cycle by x days, save finance team y hours filing receipts, engineers commit z more lines of code each day)
- Share your understanding of decision criteria and decision making process.
- Confirm you have sign off on the above and economic buyer approval.
- Understand their paper process - Have they purchased something like this before? How long does the procurement process take?
- Set a kickoff date - Work backwards for paper process and set milestones
 - ie. Security review needs to be completed by X date to hit the kickoff goal.
- Is there anything preventing them from moving forward?

Next Steps

Confirm Metrics / Confirm Paper Process / Schedule Kickoff

- Confirm timelines
 - Schedule kickoff date with necessary stakeholders
 - Walk through the paperwork process - Do you have the necessary contacts in legal and procurement?

Only the Paranoid Survive: When a prospect gives you the verbal that they are going to move forward with your offer there is always a natural urge to relax and assume the deal is done. Resist this urge at all costs! This is time to get focused and ratchet up the discipline.

Like a good chess player, you need to be thinking several moves ahead. These are a few questions you can ask your customer to make sure you prevent your deal from falling apart.

- Is there somebody else in the organization who doesn't want to see this happen and could block this?
- Are we at risk hitting the end of the quarter or year? (The answer is always yes)
- Do we know the exact steps required to get this through procurement?
- Time kills all deals. The longer the procurement and order processing process takes, the more surface area your deal has to fall apart.

When should you quit leading with POC? Once you are confident in your ability to onboard customers in a repeatable manner, you may want to explore removing the POC provision. This could be customer two, maybe it's customer twenty-two. You can always lead with pricing without the POC provision and use this to overcome any objections or concerns.

On Contracts: I am not a lawyer and you should consult one before you enter any legal agreement. [Y Combinator template](#) is a great resource for your first few deals.

Homework for the more curious:

- [Never Split the Difference](#)
-

Step 8: What is your ecosystem / Solar system?

Partnerships are another way to source leads. A mutually beneficial partnership will lead to win/win/win situations for you, your partners and your mutual customers.

Case Study: Wiz and AWS made an incredible partnership because Wiz's software was able to provide insights into security vulnerabilities so they could be resolved before being hacked. AWS had an incentive to introduce Wiz to customers seeking to improve their security posture AND Wiz's product drove consumption of AWS's storage and compute. Wiz grew their customer base, AWS made their customer's happier and increased consumption, the end customers solved a core problem by improving their security posture.

Examples of software ecosystems:

- Ecosystems: (Salesforce, Cloud Providers, SAP) Do you help improve the user experience of a user in one of these systems? If you solve a problem for one Salesforce user, you probably solve an issue for many and can repeat that story. By capturing the attention of "the sun" in a given solar system, you will have a chance to capture many new leads.
- Consulting Partners: Does implementing your product typically accompany the need for services? Many enterprise software deployments will accompany the need for professional services to help with modernization or configuration efforts.
- Open Source community (OpenAI, Red Hat, Kubernetes, etc) Is your product an enterprise deployment of open source software? This removes a lot of the guesswork out of who your target market is. All OSS have conference series, meetups, slack, etc.
- Innovation Labs: Large enterprises from Lowe's to AARP have innovation labs where entrepreneurs and startups gain access to guidance, users, and various resources to help their product mature. This can be a great place to trial your product.

The One Immutable, Unbreakable Law of Partnerships

If you want to get the attention of an influential partner in any of these "solar systems" you have to put in the initial work. You will need to bring the first few deals to the partner to get their attention. You are the one who has something to prove, not them. These relationships take time.



Step 8.1: Conferences

Attending conferences can be a phenomenal way to meet your ICP in one place at the same time. The ecosystems / solar systems above all have many conferences, if you think that may be the ecosystem in which you will thrive - attend one of these conferences. The worst that happens is that you learn this group is not a good fit for your product.

How to win at conferences:

- ~1 month ahead of time, start researching who will be attending. On the conference site you will find names of speakers and companies sponsoring the event.
 - 3 weeks prior to the event begin reaching out to speakers you would want to talk to. I recommend tailoring every single message to that speaker. You know what they're talking about. Does that tie into what your product does? Why do you want their time?
 - Using the list of sponsors, target your ICP within those organizations to find out if they will be attending and if they're open to meeting.
 - Line up meetings over coffee / breakfast before the conference or drinks afterwards. I like to find a nearby restaurant in the conference center if possible. This ensures you have a predetermined location and reduces interruptions.
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Step 9: Seeds, Nets and Spears

I'm stealing the term coined by Aaron Ross in his book [Predictable Revenue](#). I can't think of a better way to think of your GTM motion. A balance of all three will lead to a healthy pipeline.

- Seeds refers to business that comes to you via word of mouth. Typically by referrals from the reputation you have established or the mindshare that your founders have captured. Seeds can be planted by writing white papers, giving talks, or your customers telling their peers about the work you have done.
- Nets are leads that come to you via inbound leads, or capturing demand. These leads are generated by SEO, Social, blogs, webinars, partnerships, etc. When you are creating quality content that people are searching for it drives customers to reach out to you.
- Spears are leads you capture via outbound sales efforts. Many of the tactics above cover how you can land your first few deals with your spear.

The primary focus of this guide is how to “use your spear”. As you are building your outbound sales strategy you need to be simultaneously creating quality content on your website to either create or capture demand. As you expand your customer base with outbound and inbound lead generation, eventually your reputation (aka Seeds) will grow and you will generate leads that way.

A repeatable revenue strategy must have all three aspects. It will take time and patience to develop (but not that much patience).
