Sales Pipeline Checklist

The sales pipeline.

Maybe you've heard the term before; maybe it's completely new terminology for you.

Either way, if you're looking to build or scale a business that sells anything to anyone anywhere, you need an established sales pipeline to effectively document and track the total sales process.

So, what is a sales pipeline anyway, and why is it so important?

Think of a sales pipeline as a visualization of what happens to a 'cold' prospect along their journey to becoming a paying customer.

It's that simple.

The reason it's called a 'pipeline' is because, typically, there is a kind of flow phenomenon attributable to the new customer experience.
This flow has stages, and each stage should have clear criteria and definition.

Why the Sales Pipeline Is Important

However they're created and implemented, sales pipelines serve as a playbook for sales teams, a source of truth for management, and a critical tool for accountability throughout the organization.

A well-honed sales pipeline helps to monitor progress. It reveals efficiency gaps, and it allows for evaluation of every metric that matters to sales performance.
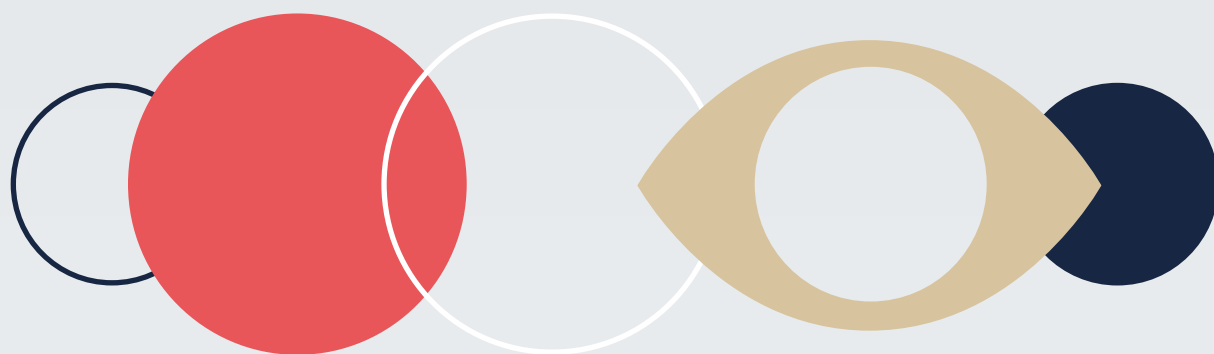
At Orogamis, we know that clients need much more than just a pipeline flow chart to truly integrate a successful sales strategy. Every aspect of the sales pipeline should be identified and developed in a way that is bespoke to you, your target customers, and your correlated business goals. This includes content assets, tech, personnel, and the customer experience.
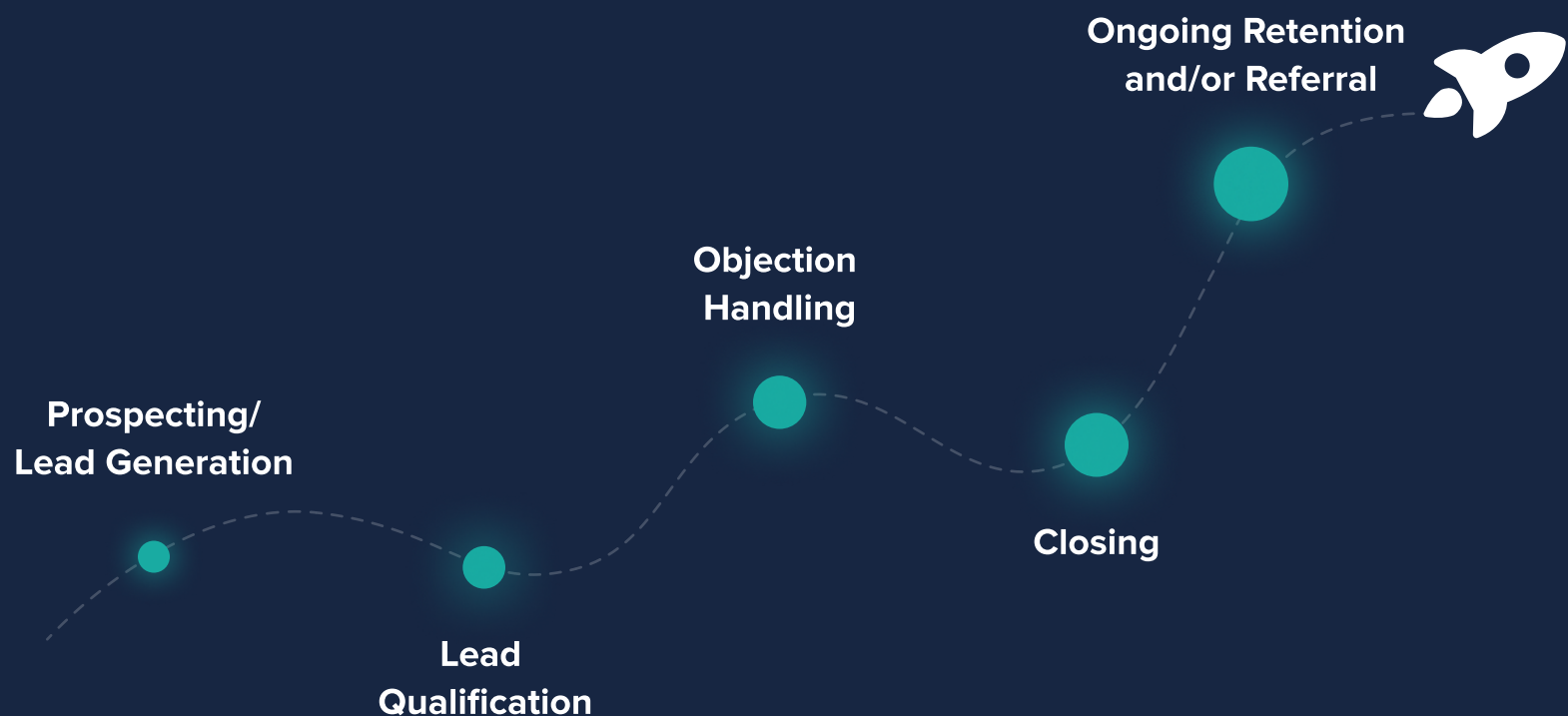
Now that we have an understanding of what a sales pipeline is and why it's so important, we're going to run through a checklist of what is needed to build, integrate, and execute an effective sales pipeline. Lastly, we'll tie up with some ideas related to ongoing improvement and refinement of the sales pipeline as the business evolves.

Let's get started!

Review the Sales Cycle

Depending on how your business is structured, your sales cycle might be short and succinct (transactional) or complex and protracted (relationship-based or technical). Whatever it looks like, reviewing your sales cycle is essential in developing a sound sales pipeline.

Most sales cycles have—at a minimum—the following stages:

Ongoing Retention and/or Referral

Objection Handling

Prospecting/ Lead Generation

Closing

Lead Qualification

For each of the above, there might be more involved substages or processes that each customer will go through. The point here is to get a clear understanding of how and where your leads come from, how they're curated into closing, and what happens after they've become a paying customer.
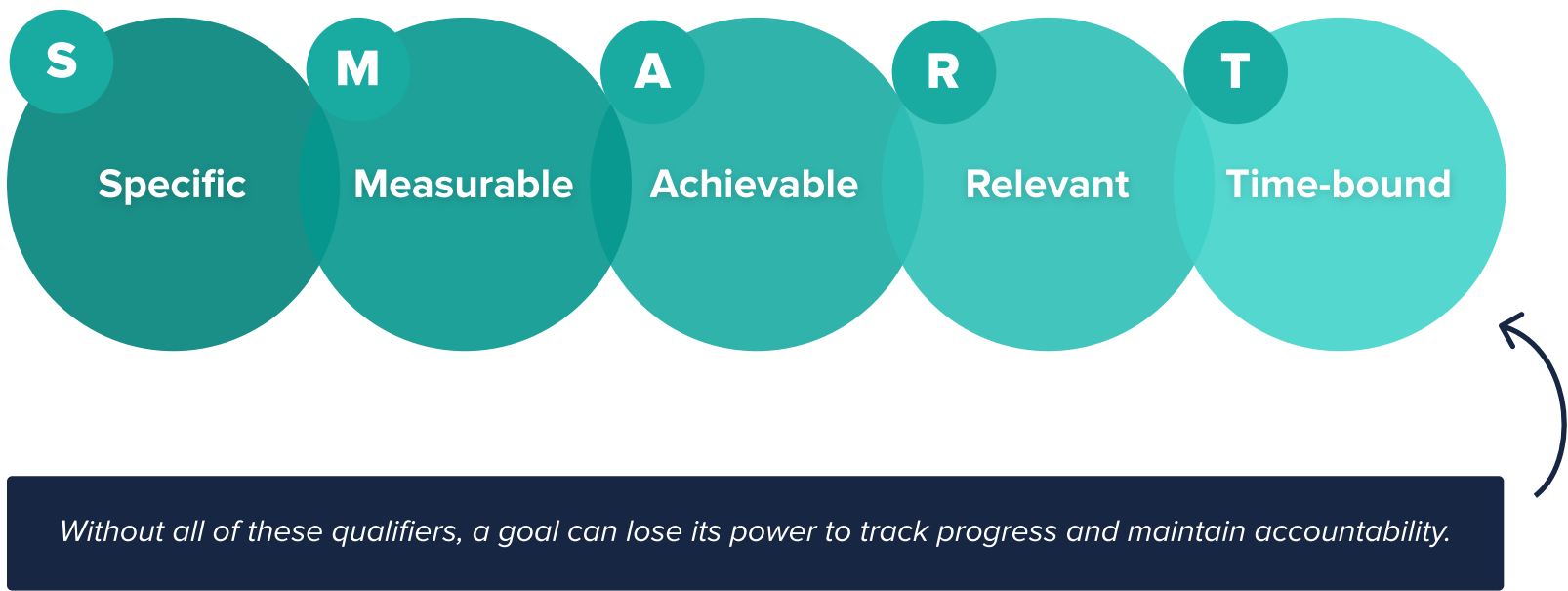
Develop Goals

"A GOAL IS A DREAM WITH A DEADLINE."

- Napoleon Hill

A sales organization without goals is, quite literally, flying blind. Every step of your sales process should have a concrete goal attached to it, whether it has to do with conversion rate, revenue, defection reduction, or some other metric.

For each goal you set, try to follow the SMART principle.
SMART goals are:

S	M	A	R	T
Specific	**Measurable**	**Achievable**	**Relevant**	**Time-bound**

Without all of these qualifiers, a goal can lose its power to track progress and maintain accountability.

Some example SMART goals might look like this:

01

Close $200,000 in total sales by the end of the first half of 2023.

Is this specific? The specificity is the sales metric.
Is it measurable? The measure is the dollar amount.
Is it achievable? Current and historic sales numbers can tell us that.
Is it relevant to sales growth? Absolutely. Is it time-bound? Yes.

02

Make 100 new connections on LinkedIn every quarter.

Is this specific? The specificity is the LinkedIn connections.
Is it measurable? The number of connections is concrete.
Is it achievable? Reasonably, yes.
Is it relevant to sales growth? Yes, as these connections could each be new lead sources.

03

Maintain a 50% qualified lead close rate for 6 consecutive weeks.

Is this specific? The specificity is the sales cycle stage metric (qualified lead).
Is it measurable? Yes, 50% close rate.
Is it achievable? Probably. Historic close rates can help us to decide.
Is it relevant to sales growth? Absolutely.

In a perfect world, you would have SMART goals associated with every step of the sales cycle. Remember that you don't have to develop these goals in isolation; collaborate with your team to determine what goals are realistic, and go from there.

Develop Your Customer Persona(s)

It is all too common for businesses to skip the critical activity of developing a customer persona, or multiple personas.

A customer persona is a personal profile of a hyper-typical customer. Within this profile, there are often demographic identifiers, personality traits, professional objectives, etc.

Here's an example:

Professional Priorities
Defining and integrating new features and capabilities into software. Meeting project deadlines. QA-ing team contributions. Reducing time spent on repetitive tasks.

10-15 employees

Jarred Aguilar, 35

Director of Development

Seattle, Washington

Personal Priorities
Stopping work at a reasonable hour. Managing a demanding schedule. Spending quality time with friends and family. Staying healthy.

Customer personas help you to tailor your products, messaging, processes, and channel-specific sales strategies that impact your customer's experience with your brand.

For example, defining a customer persona for inbound leads using established paid advertising demographics will result in a persona with a different overall profile compared to a persona tailored to an outbound sales strategy.
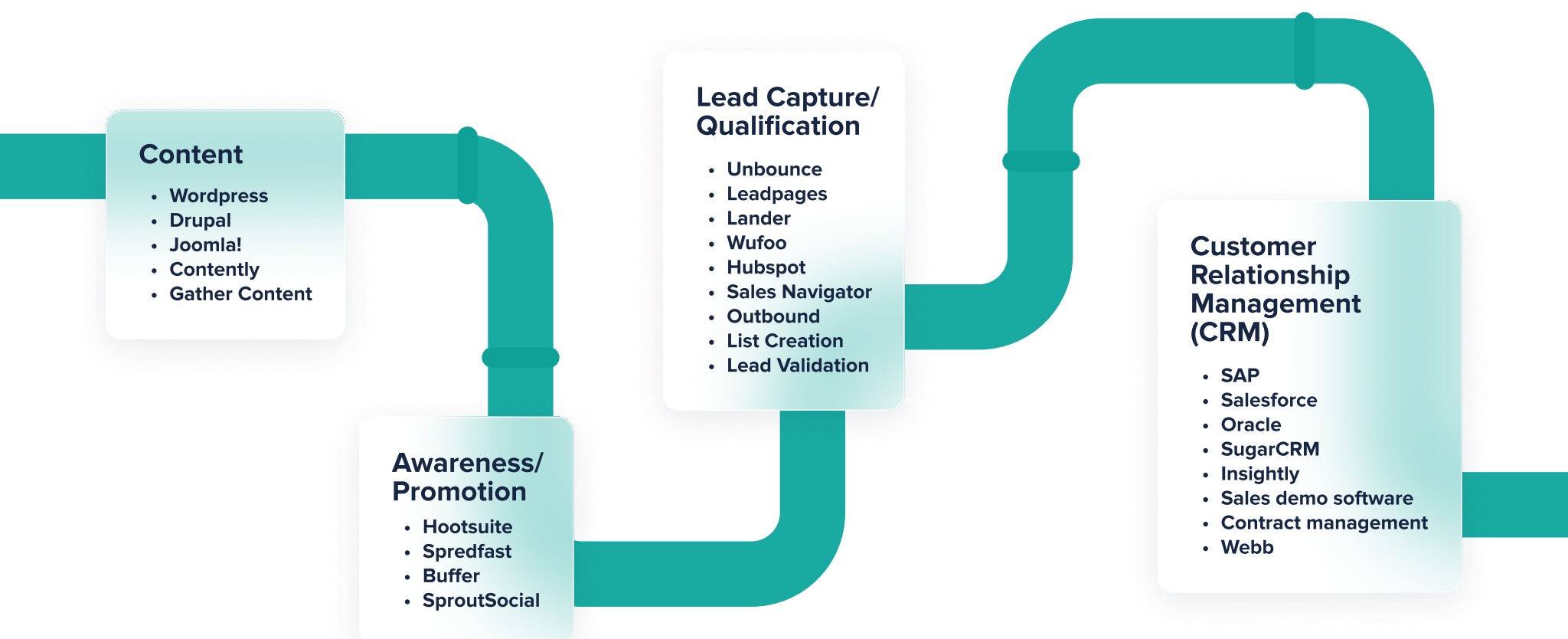
Creating customer or buyer personas can be a lot more work than it seems. Market research, customer interviews, sales team input...all of this information comes together to generate a buyer persona that can then be used to inform other aspects of the sales organization.

Examine Your Sales Tech Stack

Whether you're a brand new company or an established one looking to make a change, it's a good best practice to really take the time to examine how your salespeople are making the best use of technology throughout the sales process.

Essentially, a sales tech stack is a unique-to-you collection of technology tools that reduce or automate administrative tasks, enable faster and higher-quality sales engagement, and streamline the overall sales process.

Here's a sample tech stack that might be used by a modern sales organization within a small-but-growing company:

Content
- Wordpress
- Drupal
- Joomla!
- Contently
- Gather Content

Lead Capture/ Qualification
- Unbounce
- Leadpages
- Lander
- Wufoo
- Hubspot
- Sales Navigator
- Outbound
- List Creation
- Lead Validation

Awareness/ Promotion
- Hootsuite
- Spredfast
- Buffer
- SproutSocial

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
- SAP
- Salesforce
- Oracle
- SugarCRM
- Insightly
- Sales demo software
- Contract management
- Webb

Regardless of what you sell, who you're selling to, or how you are going to market, an effective sales tech stack is going to enable salespeople to spend their time on activities that are closer to the customer and have more impact on the bottom line.

Remember that there are risks to not using a well-developed sales tech stack. Wasted time, lost revenue, and customer defection are among them.

Standardize on Sales Enablement

Put simply, sales enablement is anything related to the resources needed by your salespeople to source, qualify, or close sales.

These resources could be cold calling scripts, videos, product guides, or data sheets. They could be prospect contact information databases or follow-up email templates designed to further customer engagement further along the sales cycle.
Sales enablement is everything that helps your salespeople do their job. Period.

Many organizations view sales enablement as iterative and ever-changing. As new products are released and market dynamics evolve, so too should the tools, content, and information used to grease the skids for new sales.

Standardizing on sales enablement means arriving at a consensus about what tools to use, when, and how.

Sales enablement involves developing or defining:

- Stakeholders, contributors, and internal decision makers (i.e., Marketing and Product Management)
- Messaging (including Brand Positioning, Voice, and Tone)
- Email formatting and best practices
- Collateral (bifolds, trifolds, one-sheets, brochures, and FAQs)
- Presentations
- Sales Playbooks
- Software
- Market research

Not standardizing on sales enablement can result in confusion, lowered conversion rates, lost opportunities, frustration, and stressed salespeople.

Thankfully, partnering with a qualified sales development partner (like Orogamis) can hasten the sales enablement process and streamline your sales team much faster than trying to do things on your own.

Know Your Leads

Every sale starts with a lead.

It follows that the sales pipeline must have the lead phase well-defined and intimately understood. This means documenting where your leads comes from, how they are handled and tracked, who is responsible for them as they make their way through the sales cycle, and what processes are in place to make the absolute most out of every single lead that comes your way.

Lead Generation

—or initiating interest with a prospect—can include driving traffic to your website, prompting form completion on your Contact Page, and working with your marketing team to strategize on PPC and other forms of paid advertising.

Lead Prospecting

is a bit more like taking a sniper approach versus a shotgun approach to landing new leads. Developing prospect lists through refined data mining and getting specific about who you'll be targeting are foundational to lead prospecting.

Lead Qualification

is the fastest way to separate the wheat from the chaff, qualifying prospects based on budget, location, purchase intent, or some other criteria. Lead qualification can also involve lead self-selection, an incredibly efficient way to save time on the front end of the sales pipeline.

Lead Segmentation

is the categorization of leads into groups based on preset parameters, like SIC code, employee count, or annual revenue. Segmenting leads and then tracking their performance can deliver deep insights that can inform ongoing changes to how to focus your efforts.

Track Outreach, Demos, and Conversions

One of the most powerful features of most modern Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms is the ability to see—often in real time—what phases of the sales pipeline are bearing fruit and which ones need attention.

Q

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This includes outreach activities performed by your salespeople. In your evaluation of sales outreach activities, here are a few questions to ask:

- *How are lead follow-ups being executed?*

- *What customer engagement programs do you have in place?*

- *Where can you get creative with your sales team to increase the number of conversations they have with leads and prospects in a given day, week, or month?*

Providing demos to customers also deserves close scrutiny. Ask:

- *Is every feature and benefit of your product or service on crystal-clear display during your demos?*

- *Are your salespeople trained enough to field technical questions as they demonstrate?*

When it comes to new customer conversions, it's especially important to know what your conversion rate is, what factors impact it the most, and how your salespeople are adding value for the prospect at every turn.

Report, Pivot, and Improve

Virtually every sales metric that is tracked at any point in the sales cycle can be subsequently reported, aggregated, and used to continuously improve.

Be sure you have an established process for doing this ideally every month, but at least every quarter. Your salespeople and sales stakeholders should always have a clear, current picture of where sales are coming from and what their role is in ensuring that the needle continues to move in the direction of progress and higher, healthier sales-related KPIs.

Wherever you are in your journey to success in sales development for your company, remember that Orogamis is here to help. We are a Full-Experience Growth Agency with expertise throughout the growth framework, from product development to branding and from funnel and pipeline development to customer experience refinement and improvement.

Schedule a discovery call

Schedule a discovery call with us today!
Let's work together to ensure that your business is primed for success today and tomorrow.

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