



# Correcting Mistakes for Your Q4 Sales Push

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With the fourth quarter's arrival, many companies have looked at their numbers and increased the pressure on sales teams to make up for losses earlier in the year. Only 58.2% of sales reps made their quota in 2013 according to a 2014 Sales Performance Optimization Study of over 1,200 B2B companies by CSO Insights. While every company has unique circumstances affecting its sales cycle, there are common threads that can be identified across the majority of organizations in terms of errors that directly correlate to sales losses.

**Improve response time** – One of the major contributors to missed sales opportunities is slow response time to incoming leads. Many companies use automated email replies to notify a customer their message was received. However, these messages should not be relied on to buy additional time before an actual response to a lead's questions is generated. Customers are well informed and have many tools at their disposal to locate numerous potential businesses that provide the services they require. Failing to be the first company to respond to a customer can mean losing that business.

**Nurture** – Equally as important as responding to leads in a timely manner is nurturing those leads. According to Forrester Research, companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales ready leads at 33% lower cost. However, data from MarketingSherpa reveals that only 34% of B2B organizations nurture leads on a monthly basis. That number drops to 22% for weekly nurturing and 9% for daily nurturing. Determining the proper amount of lead nurturing is part of the optimization process for any sales funnel, but the numbers are clear. Companies that reach a customer first and then nurture that lead are more likely to close a sale.

**Personalize automated responses** – Now, nurturing is not a task that should simply be relegated to a mindless, repetitive email blast. Relevant emails drive 18 times more revenue than broadcast emails according to Jupiter Research. And, a study done by the Aberdeen Group confirms this with findings that personalized emails improve click-through rates by 14%, and conversion rates by 10%. Personalizing nurturing campaigns does not mean that the process cannot be automated. Gartner Research has found that companies that automate lead management see a 10% or greater increase in revenue in six to nine months. Sales automation tools have advanced to meet the needs of the modern sales professional. They offer features that allow for customization without sacrificing speed and without putting the responsibility of developing messaging on the shoulders of the sales professional.

**Diversify your strategies** – It is also important to note that email is not the only tool businesses have at their disposal for lead follow ups. Social media or SMS campaigns can be a more effective nurturing strategy than email in certain situations. Not capitalizing on all available channels for follow up on a lead can be a costly mistake.

For example, social media provides businesses with a unique opportunity to create one-on-one relationships between their sales people and leads. A sales person can establish an online identity as an expert in their industry using popular social media networks. By posting articles relevant to customer interests, sales people can spark conversations with leads they have connected with on social media that can lead to more sales. Text messaging has also been proven to be a valuable sales tool. Text messages have a 98% chance of being opened and read within minutes of their arrival, which is an open rate well above email (13.2%) and conventional mail (3.4%). While a drip email campaign is an easy step that companies can take to begin nurturing leads if they are not already, testing other options such as social media or SMS messaging can be a worthwhile investment.

Companies looking to increase their sales in the fourth quarter to make up for lost ground earlier in the year need to start with their sales process. Management needs to ensure that sales teams are provided with the tools they need to respond to leads quickly, to nurture leads once they are in the system and to reach leads through every possible channel. Failure to adjust now will result in a year-end sales report that is lackluster and another year of missed quotas.

*John McGee is CEO of [OptifiNow](#), a software as a service (SaaS) that helps sales teams engage with their customers through an integrated marketing communications platform. OptifiNow provides organizations a single platform to connect with customers via Email, mobile, social media and direct mail.*

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