

# Seven Essential Steps to Help You Hit Your Year-end Numbers

## Strategic Selling®

It's a comprehensive process that will help you develop deal strategies to hit your year-end goals. Strategic Selling® shows you how to shorten sales cycles and close business by leaving nothing to chance. It helps you to identify those most likely to close, and with an effective strategy, you can hit your numbers and meet your quota.

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The way I see it, the real end-of-the-year push starts in the third quarter. I remember competing in races consisting of quarter-mile laps, and the key to being a world-class miler lies in the third lap. That third lap puts you in a position to win. That's where you build the momentum you need to come out ahead in the fourth.

The same strategy holds true for selling—and managing and motivating a sales team—through the end of the year: Start gearing up now to guarantee a strong finish. This is the time to prioritize. Just as important, this is the time to stay focused on the customer.

Following are seven steps to help you achieve both those goals—and, as a result, move toward hitting your milestones when the year comes to a close.

### 1. Identify and prioritize your best opportunities.

Too many sales executives make the mistake of giving in to their natural sense of urgency as the fourth quarter approaches, insisting that their staffs try to close as many deals as possible before the year ends. Focusing on quality, rather than quantity, is a far more effective approach. Sales organizations have to be especially careful about how they allocate their resources at this time. They need to make sure their salespeople are spending the right amount of time on the right deals.

That determination requires taking a systematic and collaborative approach to identifying the best opportunities, starting with the ones already in your sales funnel. Focus on those closest to your “sweet spot”—that is, the ones that best match your company's target audience and your capabilities for delivering exactly what those customers need.

Then estimate the likelihood of closing each important deal by year's end. You need to really understand what's happening with your high-priority deals. Take a look at where each of those deals is today and what you need to do to advance it.

Working with facts rather than gut feelings, estimate the odds of closing the most promising deals by year's end. For any given opportunity, is the likelihood 50 percent? Seventy-five percent? Ninety-five percent? Making such determinations will help you pinpoint the high-priority opportunities and set the strategy to move them forward.

### 2. Know the business issues that key customers want to address.

Examine each deal not only from your own perspective, but from your customer's point of view. Figure out how urgent their issue is to them. You really can't prioritize an existing opportunity if you don't know the client's concept—what they're trying to fix, accomplish or avoid.

In fact, trying to move ahead without such knowledge is a common mistake, especially during the year-end push. Salespeople sometimes push too hard too early, trying to close the deal while the customer is still trying to figure out the problem. You have to address that issue first. You need to understand what exactly they're trying to do and why. If you can't quickly articulate the business issue they're trying to address, you aren't ready to close the deal.

If you're trying to close customers when they still don't know exactly what their problem is, it creates a big sense of dissonance. In other words, you might get the short-term gain of a quick sale, but possibly at the expense of jeopardizing future opportunities with that particular customer.

### 3. Align your sales process with your clients' buying processes.

It's also important to understand each client's decision-making process—who's involved, who the key stakeholders are and who makes the final call. With that information, you can understand the specific obstacles you're facing, and you can figure out the specific actions you need to take to overcome them. Then you can craft a plan to move the deal forward—again, focusing on the customer's desired business results rather than on your own.

In the long run, trying to “jam” through a deal won’t benefit you or the customer. Don’t short-cut the sales process in order to try to expedite things. The sales process and the client’s buying process have to stay in alignment. If you lose the deal today, it also falls out of the pipeline for the future.

#### 4. Always Be Creating.

It’s important to prospect for and develop new business throughout the second half, as opposed to just pushing through existing opportunities in hopes of hitting great year-end numbers. You still need to build a robust pipeline to next year.

That may seem like common sense, but it’s not all that common. Most people nod their heads and say, “Of course, we do that”—but few really do it. The rationale: People assume that if they don’t close in the fourth quarter, the business will spill over into the following year and they’ll have the whole first quarter to catch up. No wonder the second and third quarters are often weak.

Change the old sales cliché “ABC” from “Always Be Closing” to “Always Be Creating.” Regardless of the time of year, all sales team members should constantly spend time working on new opportunities and relationships.

Develop some programs to keep the prospects growing. Such initiatives aren’t necessarily formal, complex or time-consuming. They can be so simple. Just encourage people to schedule a little time specifically for identifying new opportunities—even just two hours a week. Then make sure sales managers have good systems in place for talking about those efforts—not necessarily official reports, but regularly scheduled discussions about how and when to proceed.

#### 5. Remember your existing customers.

Everyone knows that it takes far more time and energy to develop a new customer than to keep one you’ve already got. But it’s surprising how often salespeople forget that in their dash to the fourth-quarter finish line.

People often get so busy with new deals that they forget about their largest existing customers. But, it’s very important to remember your biggest clients as you push toward the end of the year.

Why bother, if they’re already your best customers? As you continue to strengthen those relationships, other opportunities will start to emerge. Meanwhile, letting your biggest clients coast puts those relationships at risk.

For those reasons, sales organizations should constantly assess the value they’re providing to their best clients. That way, they can suggest additional solutions that solve those clients’ problems or help them achieve their goals. When you do that, you become a trusted advisor rather than just a provider of goods or services—and that’s likely to pay off with even more business.

One way to gain deeper knowledge about your best clients: Collaborate with colleagues in other departments who also deal with them. They can help you develop comprehensive profiles of those accounts that will, in turn, let you get a better handle on what those customers need—perhaps even before the customers know themselves.

#### 6. Involve and engage your salespeople.

In discussing how managers can keep their employees growing as they push toward the fourth quarter, there are three key sales process categories:

- Identifying and creating opportunities
- Pursuing existing opportunities
- Managing important relationships

At one time or another, everyone on the sales team should get experience with all those processes. Rather than risk having people become stagnant or too specialized, let them spread their wings: Mixing up those activities from time to time will create freshness and prompt some creative new thinking.

### 7. Rekindle the passion.

Contests, bonuses and other incentives are time-honored traditions for motivating salespeople. However, all too often, such activities fall under the heading of “hygiene factors”—that is, they’re nice to have and may even work to some extent. But such short-term initiatives aren’t the most effective way to generate long-term momentum and drive results.

Instead, tap into salespeople’s core values to remind them what about the profession excites them: helping customers solve problems and achieve, even exceed, their goals. Salespeople need to get back the passion for what they do, and for understanding what their clients are trying to do and how they can help them.

I’m meeting with my own sales vice presidents this week. The only thing on the agenda, all we’ll be talking about, is their customers. I want to know everything about their customers: What are they using us for? Why are they excited about doing business with us? Who else like them might want to do business with us, too?

Such discussions should go a long way toward firing up any good sales team: After all, if you can’t get excited about answering those kinds of questions, you’re probably in the wrong business.

### About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman has been a thought leader and innovator in the sales arena for almost thirty years, helping clients worldwide win high-value complex deals, protect and grow key accounts, manage talent and optimize sales strategies and operations.

With a prestigious client list that includes Fortune 500 clients, Miller Heiman helps companies in virtually every major industry to build high performance sales teams that deliver consistent sustainable results to drive revenue.

The company is headquartered in Reno, Nevada, and has offices around the world. More information can be obtained by calling 877-552-1747.

### Miller Heiman – Free Consultation with a Sales Expert

We appreciate your interest in Miller Heiman. There are many ways for you to get to know who we are, what we do, and how we can help you. Below are some suggestions:

#### Call us for a free consultation:

- North America: 877.678.3380
- UK: 0800 132595
- Rest of World: +775.827.4411

#### Contact us by e-mail:

- [info@millerheiman.com](mailto:info@millerheiman.com)

#### Visit our home page for a complete overview of our company:

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