

The beginner's guide to sales prospecting in the relationship economy

Turn your sales team into relationship rockstars!



“In a Relationship Economy, the primary currency is made up of the connections and trust among customers, employees, and vendors who create significantly more value in what we sell.

These relationships and connections help make price irrelevant. The Relationship Economy is about building a culture that recognizes the importance of each individual and of making everyone a part of a community that is working toward something bigger — a community that makes them feel cared for.

The Relationship Economy is how strongly you feel about the people and businesses in your life.

Relationships are the biggest differentiator in customer and brand loyalty. Relationships are at the center of all we do.”

— John R. DiJulius III, The Relationship Economy:
Building Stronger Customer Connections in the Digital Age



Not long ago, things like price, convenience and savings would drive customer preferences.

But as we've moved towards the relationship economy, consumers increasingly prioritize customer service, brand loyalty and personalization.

Sales reps need to know how to prospect with these values in mind so they can build relationships and rapport with potential clients.

Beyond happy customers, positive customer relationships can create ripple effect benefits, including improved cash flow, business growth, and overall brand trust and credibility.

Within this guide, we'll dive into how sales representatives can effectively prospect so your business can thrive in the relationship economy.



The difference between a lead and a prospect

A lead is an unqualified contact, which means that they may be interested in your product or service, but may not necessarily be a good fit to work with you.

In contrast, a prospect is someone who is interested and qualified, so now they can proceed through the sales process.

There are a few ways to know if your lead is qualified and can become a prospect.

First, they should match key characteristics of good-fit customers such as demographic location, industry, company size or revenue, and other factors.

They should also meet the criteria to be able to make the most of your services. For example, a business of a certain financial standing likely won't qualify for loans or other support.

And finally, you want to make sure that your lead is a decision-maker. If they're not, you'll want to find the right person to move through the sales process alongside.

In short, while your sales reps should aim to generate leads, they should focus more time on building relationships with those who qualify as ideal prospects.

Defining the ideal prospect

Defining the ideal prospect ensures that you and your sales representatives **know what you're looking** for in a potential client. By developing a clear set of criteria, you can help your sales reps streamline their efforts and focus their time on prospects that are likely to convert.

Generally speaking, an ideal prospect is someone who sees value in your offer, has the budget to pay, and stands to benefit from the results your business can confidently deliver.

To develop your ideal prospect criteria further, examine your historical customer data.

Here are some questions to consider:

- ✓ Which business or industry has the **highest conversion rate?**
- ✓ Which customers have the **shortest sales cycles?**
- ✓ What are some **common attributes** ideal customers share? (This may include things like their industry, job title, location, etc.)
- ✓ Which customers have the highest **lifetime order value?**

By analyzing this data, you'll gain a clear profile of your ideal prospect's priorities, buying habits, and patterns in order to see more return on prospecting efforts.



Understanding the relationship economy

Before we dive into understanding this new way of doing business, let's define the relationship economy.

In today's world, consumers are inundated with choice. **In the relationship economy, consumers narrow their options by considering which business cares about them as a customer — and which businesses will deliver the best experience.** Customers may also choose to do business with companies and brands that most closely align with their personal values.

As a result, the relationship economy is the idea that today's consumer prioritizes personalization, rapport, brand loyalty and customer experience over factors such as price, discounts or savings.

And thanks to things like increased connectivity through social media and improved customer data, the shift from the consumer economy to the relationship economy has only accelerated. A study by PWC showed that **86% of customers** believe that their experience is just as important as the actual product or service they purchase. Companies that have a system to **tailor and personalize their customer experiences** are more likely to **win customers and retain their business**.

This means that sales prospecting needs to consider things like rapport, loyalty and relationships to build trust and credibility with their customers.

Luckily, thanks to tools like smartphones, social media and advances in customer data – businesses with the right prospecting systems in place can build and maintain relationships on a mass scale.

Previously, things like pricing, discounts and savings would take priority in customer decisions. But now that businesses are able to leverage connectivity to their audience, customers increasingly value relationships and tailored customer experiences.

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— PWC

How prospecting and relationships can impact cash flow

Prospecting, relationships, business growth and cash flow are all closely connected.

Having meaningful customer relationships can support business growth by generating consistent sales and cultivating loyal customers. In turn, this can create a positive cash flow for your business.

Prospecting can also impact your cash flow. If your team has a system to consistently bring qualified prospects into your sales pipeline, you can expect to reliably bring in new customers, which can positively impact your cash flow.

Sometimes, it goes the other way where poor cash flow can impact “internal” relationships.

For example, when Ray Bowman, owner of tree clearing company **Rayzor Edge Tree Service** and a client of Liquid Capital, expanded into commercial contracts, the traditional funding options available to him weren't sufficient to support his growth plans.

In this case, Bowman had to balance his corporate client's needs for longer invoice payment terms with his need to consistently pay his contractors. By working with Liquid Capital, Bowman was able to strengthen his relationships with his subcontractors, meet his corporate clients' needs, and have the cash flow to double his sales.

In summary, every business needs to consider how they can cultivate meaningful relationships with their customers. Customers who enjoy their experience and feel valued will become repeat patrons and help create steady cash flow.

It's about going beyond a transactional focus – creating a true feeling of connection in the sales cycle, being responsive and following through when it matters. This will strengthen bonds and, ultimately, improve results.



How to improve your team's sales prospecting skills

Without the right skills in place, sales prospecting in the relationship economy can take a lot of time, money and effort.

Two of the most important areas for improving your team's sales prospecting skills are making sure they know how to prioritize their prospects and how to connect with prospects in the digital world.



1. Prioritizing prospects

Knowing how to prioritize prospects can help ensure your team is spending their time where they're most likely to see a return on their efforts.

Here are three ways for your sales team to prioritize their prospect list:

A) Prioritize reconnecting with existing or previous customers.

If a customer is, or already has, engaged with your company, it's far simpler to upsell or cross-sell them on a new offer than a cold prospect. They already know, like and trust you – so it's easier for them to commit to working with you again.

By using customer relationship data, you can send a personalized message to the prospect that recommends a next step and how you can help.

B) Prioritize businesses that meet the ideal client profile.

Make sure your team takes into account characteristics like industry, job title, location and other factors to ensure they're spending time on prospects that are likely to convert.

They can further prioritize based on prospects who match the characteristics of customers who tend to bring ongoing or repeat business.

C) Prioritize industries and businesses that are on the rise.

The company that received investments or is growing each quarter is more likely to work with you than the one taking losses or still in its early stages.

Invest in tools or software so your sales team can do their due diligence and prioritize prospects based on their growth. They can also compare past annual reports to see changes in revenue and general trends.

In addition, sales reps should factor in global trends and events. For example, your sales reps should keep up with business news and trends to make sure they're focusing on industries that are on the rise.



2. Connecting with prospects in the digital 2.0 world

Thanks to digital media, there are many ways to engage with potential prospects in the digital world. Here are three of the top ways to leverage digital marketing to connect with prospects in the relationship economy.

A) Social media

Social media is a goldmine for finding people who are already talking about products, services or topics related to your business. Join the conversation that's already happening and be a helpful and valuable presence. From there, sales reps can build relationships and follow up with potential prospects.

B) Content marketing


Whether it's writing a blog or hosting an informational event, there are plenty of ways to get in front of warm audiences who may be interested in your business. Content marketing examples include creating white papers, informational webinars, eBooks, newsletters and more. Sales reps can track who engages with this content and follow up.

C) Email marketing

Even in a crowded world, email marketing can keep your business top of mind. Reaching out via email is a great way to deliver valuable information, build relationships and stay connected to prospects.

Using digital prospecting methods is key to connecting with a large number of prospects in an efficient amount of time. And thanks to the valuable data they provide, they're useful for improving prospecting strategies and streamlining your team's efforts.

Learn about 6 digital marketing pillars to connect with your audience.



3. What kinds of traditional prospecting are still valid?

Although modern prospecting has become more common, traditional prospecting still has its place in your sales process.

Referrals

92% of consumers worldwide say they trust word-of-mouth or recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising. This statistic shows that it's worth following up with past clients to request referrals.

Warm calls

Instead of a cold call, warm calls can be an effective way to have some rapport before you engage with a prospect. Before you call, get familiar with your prospect by researching and connecting with them on social media or getting introduced by a mutual colleague before making the call.

Attend industry events

These events, whether they're in-person or online, are a great place to network, meet fellow professionals, and uplift brand visibility. By choosing the right events, you'll connect with potential prospects.



4. Networking in the new digital world

Prospecting in the digital world is all about delivering value, building rapport and increasing visibility so you can start conversations on a mass scale

Here are some ways you can use modern prospecting to network with prospects:



LinkedIn

LinkedIn is often described as the professional social media network. It's a great place to do research and leverage your network for connections. Using LinkedIn's Sales Navigator and search engine, your reps can search for prospects who meet your ideal client criteria.

LinkedIn groups are also a great place to spark conversations and build rapport with potential prospects. For example, if someone makes a post related to your business, your rep can chime in with a helpful answer and follow up personally with relevant resources.

Before your reps use LinkedIn, make sure their profiles are clean, clear and consistent across your company for added credibility.



Facebook

Like LinkedIn, Facebook has a variety of ways to reach potential prospects. Have your sales reps join active groups that discuss topics that relate to your products and services. From there, they can contribute to the conversation and follow up directly with potential prospects.

Sales reps will need to adhere to the group rules to ensure they're not removed. To use Facebook for prospecting, make sure your reps' profiles are polished and professional with a personal touch.



Webinars

Hosting informational webinars can attract and engage potential prospects. Although they take preparation and expertise to run effectively, they can be an excellent tool for engaging prospects and showcasing your solution.

The webinar should be valuable and relevant for the prospect by providing educational info on a common challenge or question. Common presentation formats that convert include product demos, content marketing or training on a specific topic.

Webinars also provide valuable data about the prospects who attend, such as how engaged or attentive they were during the training. This can help your sales reps prioritize who to follow up with and continue to nurture the prospect.

5. Relationship economy and business growth

Focusing on relationships is more essential than ever for long-term business growth. When your sales reps can consistently create meaningful relationships with your customers, you'll generate activity and engagement that promotes business growth.

Word of mouth marketing

According to a Statista report, nearly **19% of purchase decisions** for financial services were impacted by word-of-mouth marketing. By having great relationships with your customers, you're more likely to benefit from word-of-mouth marketing and attract new business.

Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is driven by dependability, quality and excellent customer experience. If you master these, you'll enjoy the benefits of seeing higher lifetime value per customer, which can benefit your business growth.

Referrals and access to new networks

When you create a great impression in someone's network, they may introduce you to new potential leads and prospects. Having relationships can help accelerate rapport and shorten the sales cycle – making it faster to connect with new prospects and increase sales.

Testimonials and case studies

When you have great relationships with your customers, they're more likely to volunteer to share a positive review or testimonial. You can also follow up to interview them for a case study. These kinds of social proof can help you attract additional prospects and support business growth.

Overall boost in reputation

With **84% of people** trusting online reviews as much as their friends, having a great customer experience can uplift your reputation and attract new customers to your business.

Remember, when your customers are your best cheerleaders, they can help generate business growth and reduce the amount of time, money, and effort it takes to generate new customers.

“84%
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personal recommendation.”

— Inc.

6. Where to find solid leads and qualified prospects

Finding awesome leads starts with having reliable sources. There are lots of online directories, tools and resources that can help provide insightful prospect data.

Let's explore five places you can source qualified prospects for your pipeline.



1. LinkedIn Sales Navigator

LinkedIn Sales Navigator uses the power of its 500-million-member network to help sales professionals find and build relationships with prospects and customers.

They have advanced search tools like job title, industry, location, and more to help your team find and connect with ideal prospects through social selling.



2. Dedicated prospecting tools

There are plenty of paid prospecting tools that can help your sales reps secure emails to decision-makers. Tools like VoilaNorbert and ZoomInfo can help your sales reps get accurate contact info and reach your potential prospects.

The great thing about these prospecting tools is that they're designed to support your sales reps in the relationship economy. They usually have features to help start conversations, schedule follow-ups, track conversions and more.





3. Twitter

Beyond being a helpful ticker for industry news, Twitter has an excellent advanced search feature.

It allows you to search for keywords, exact phrases or exclude certain words from your search. You can also search for high-intent hashtags that might reflect interest in your company's area of expertise, such as #productnames, #manufacturinggoods, #events and #geographiclocations. (Naturally, replace these words with hashtags that match your business opportunities.)



4. Job boards

When a company is recruiting for a new role, it might signal that they're investing in that general area or department. For example, a company looking for a new Head of Accounting may be searching for funding, grants or loans.

By searching job boards, your team can look for listings that match your buyer persona job titles. From there, you can reach out to the role's hiring manager, who is likely a decision-maker.



5. Industry publications, networks and associations

Niche trade events and industry associations may be filled with members that fit your ideal client profile. These organizations often list their members, partners, affiliates and other stakeholders on their website. These directories are a quick way to find potential prospects.

To find these memberships and associations, run a quick Google search such as "best [industry] membership." You'll likely get results for nationwide associations, events and organizations.

“87%
of B2B businesses use
Twitter as a digital
marketing tool”

— Statista



7. How to nurture relationships with prospects

So your sales rep has reached out to a prospect. How do they keep the rapport going?

Here are four ways to nurture the relationship:



1. Leverage a variety of channels.

By using an engaging mix of content types like social media, blog posts, whitepapers, product demos or even direct mail, you'll keep your prospect interested and stay top of mind.



2. Deliver targeted content.

Instead of using the same emails or content marketing for every prospect, aim to deliver relevant content that speaks to the prospect's specific needs. Doing this helps build the reputation that you understand their challenges and that you know how to help.



3. Schedule consistent follow-up.

Having consistent touchpoints and follow-up are essential for building relationships and nurturing your prospect. Make sure your sales reps have a system in place to track conversations and follow up in a timely manner.



4. Personalize your emails.

Personalizing emails isn't just about using their name. Instead, sales reps should tailor to prospect's interests and buying behavior. For example, if someone downloads your pricing guide off of your website, they should follow up to see if they have any questions or if they'd like to schedule a call to learn more.

Nurturing your prospects is all about delivering value, offering support and showcasing your dependability. From there, the relationship will grow, and they will begin to move down the sales funnel.

8. Authenticity drives lasting relationships

Relationships are at the foundation of every successful business. Although relationship building takes time, the efforts will generate sustained ROI for your business.

Once your sales reps have a reliable system in place to find, engage and follow up with prospects, you'll begin to see the benefits of sales prospecting in the relationship economy.

At Liquid Capital, we're business owners, too. If you are running a business, whether you're an owner, C-level executive or in another decision-making role, we understand the challenges and pressures you face on a day-to-day basis. And we also realize the importance of evolving your organization amidst changes in the business world.

While we're dedicated to helping our clients out with their financing needs, there is more to business than just the numbers. We get to know you, your organization and your business opportunities, so we can work out how to be the most useful partners.



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