



Prospecting Plans:

Filling a Gap in Sales Engagement Strategy

FILLING A GAP IN SALES ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Nobody loves a good Sales Engagement Platform (think Outreach or Salesloft) more than me. As someone who cut his teeth prospecting in the age of spreadsheets, sticky notes, and Salesforce Classic, the discovery of a better way to do the job was nothing short of revolutionary. As a closing rep with pipeline generation responsibilities, it was life-saving (well, quota-saving, at least).

So, when I talk about some of the challenges related to the successful deployment, hygiene, and optimization of Sales Engagement Platforms (SEPs), know it's coming from a place of love.

Deep, abiding love.

But not blind love.

One of the most common SEP adoption and utilization challenges faced by frontline managers and XDRs is not knowing how to get started. Training on SEPs often begins by showing reps how to place prospects into Sequences and execute related tasks, but there are prior questions that need to be answered, especially for outbound hunters:

- Which Accounts should I focus on?
- Which prospects in those Accounts?
- How many prospects from each Account?
- How many prospects should I add to Sequence each day?
- How many prospects should I have active in Sequence at a time?
- Which Sequence does each prospect belong in?



FILLING A GAP IN SALES ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY *(cont.)*

Left to their own devices, individual sellers may make any number of choices, resulting in a variety of less-than-ideal outcomes:

- Too few prospects in sequence, resulting in fewer Accounts engaged, fewer activities executed, fewer replies generated, and fewer meetings booked.
- Too many prospects in sequence, resulting in unexecuted and overdue tasks, prospects stalling out in sequence, diminished sequence effectiveness, and fewer booked meetings.
- The wrong prospects in sequence, resulting in wasted Discovery cycles, fewer Qualified Opportunities, and insufficient pipeline to meet revenue targets.
- The right prospects in the wrong sequence, resulting in lower reply rates, higher opt outs, and fewer meetings booked.

So, how do you make sure you're focused on the right Accounts, engaging the right number and mix of Prospects, and ensuring each Prospect makes it into the right Sequence?

It starts with a plan.



ALIGNING ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TO REVENUE OBJECTIVES

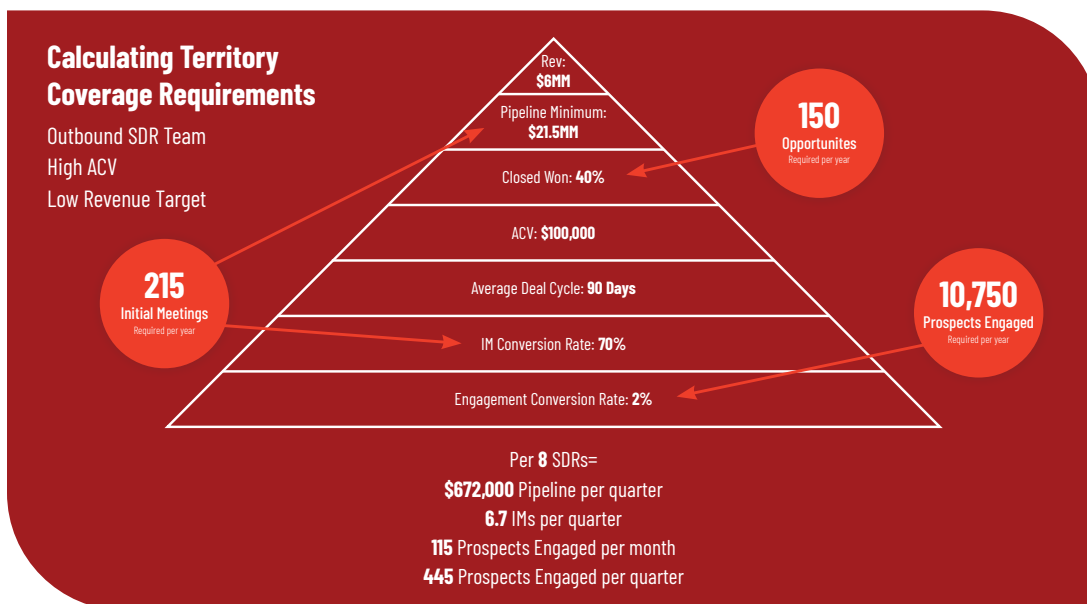
How do I know my teams are engaging enough Prospects from enough Accounts to hit our pipeline commitments?

This question should be at the forefront of every frontline manager's mind. Being able to accurately answer requires more than guesswork, and failing to do so puts your revenue target in serious jeopardy.

Let's say you're the manager of a team of 8 SDRs, supporting a team of 4 AEs responsible for \$6MM in annual revenue:

- Your team's Average Contract Value is **\$100K**
- Closed Won Opportunity Rate is **40%**
- Average Deal Cycle is **90 Days**
- Your IM Conversion Rate (the percentage of Initial Meetings that become Sales Accepted Qualified Opportunities) is **70%**
- Your Engagement Conversion Rate (the percentage of Prospects Active in Sequence that book an Initial Meeting) is **2%** for High Touch/High Priority Cold Outbound Prospecting Sequences

As Figure 1 illustrates, your team will need to generate at least \$21.5MM in pipeline to confidently hit the \$6MM revenue target. That means you'll need to book 215 Initial Meetings, **the result of engaging 10,750 Prospects with High Priority Sequences.**



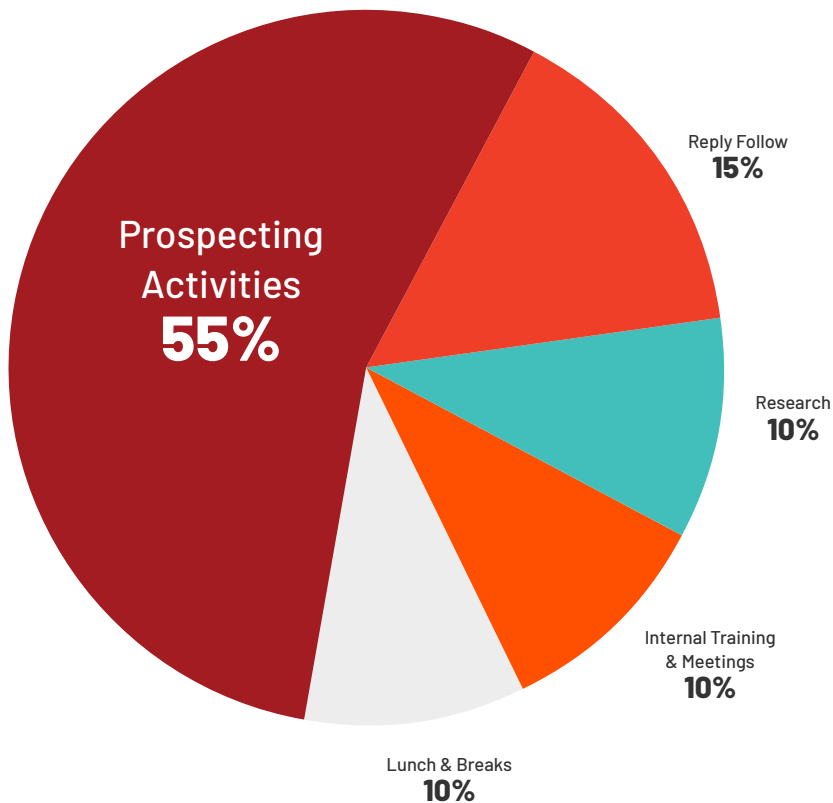
Broken down, that translates to 445 Prospects engaged (Active in Sequence) per rep, per quarter.

No problem, right?

CALCULATING PROSPECTING CAPACITY

If you want to answer that question with something more confident than a shrug of the shoulders, you need to understand your team's Daily Activity Capacity.

Each seller only has so many hours of the day to spend on Prospecting Activity proper - that is, executing the phone calls, manual emails, LinkedIn touches, and other activities associated with Prospecting Sequences.



In addition to Prospecting Activity, sellers are in internal meetings, attending training sessions, doing follow-up, researching and preparing to engage Accounts and Prospects, eating lunch and taking breaks.

As our hypothetical SDR manager, after looking at your team's daily habits, you've found that about 55% of their day is spent executing Sequence tasks.

Each rep has roughly 4.5 hours of Prospecting Activity Capacity each day.

All Prospecting Activities are not created equal, in terms of either effort required or effectiveness. A well-researched and highly-personalized manual email step in a sequence may take 15 minutes or more to craft, while a phone calls takes 2-3 minutes (including leaving a voicemail), and a LinkedIn touch can take as little as 1-2 minutes to complete (if you're doing social selling right).

15 minutes per email = 4 emails per hour

3 minutes per dial = 20 phone calls per hour

2 minutes per LI touch = 30 LI touches per hour

CALCULATING PROSPECTING CAPACITY *(cont.)*

While there isn't a definitive data set against which to validate the wide variety of claims about the relative effectiveness of each type of touch, we can say some things with near certainty.

For almost all B2B outbound sales teams leveraging a Sales Engagement Platform to execute prospecting activity, phone call steps in sequences outperform email steps in sequences for generating replies by a significant amount. Most teams find that phone call touches convert at 8-10X the frequency of email touches in outbound prospecting sequences.

More bluntly, it takes you 5X as long to execute a personalized email touch that will be 8X less effective than a phone call.

And less personal.

In terms of Daily Activity Capacity, your team can manage 18 highly-personalized manual emails per day - or up to 90 evenmore- personalized phone calls per day.

Even if those emails outperform phone calls, the delta would have to be significant enough to compensate for this huge throughput gap. Are you able to engage enough Prospects per quarter to hit your pipeline contribution target with a manual email-heavy strategy?

That will depend on your Engagement Conversion Rate.



ENGAGEMENT CONVERSION RATE & PROSPECTING STRATEGY *(cont.)*

Your Engagement Conversion Rate (ECR) dictates how many Prospects will need to be engaged (sequenced) in order to hit your Initial Meeting target. The higher the Conversion Rate, the fewer the Prospects you'll have to engage to meet your goals. A 2% Engagement Conversion Rate means 2 of every 100 Prospects engaged will book an Initial Meeting.

This metric is also a barometer of the overall success of your engagement strategy. In addition to knowing your teams are engaging enough prospects to hit their targets, frontline managers should also be asking, "How do I know they're doing enough of the right kind of activities to book enough meetings to meet our pipeline commitments?"

As you improve sequence performance by fine-tuning touchpoint combinations and intervals, determining optimal duration, and honing email messaging for key segments (industries, market segments, buyer personas, use cases, products/services), you'll drive up the ECR and reduce the effort required to meet your pipeline contribution commitments.

Several factors impact Engagement Conversion Rate:

- **Target Selection** - Are you focused on highest value Accounts, and Prospects who are the best starting points for an engagement?
- **Product-Market Fit** - Is your offering a good fit for those key targets (and is it a good fit now)?
- **Brand Reputation** - Is your company well-known for delivering high quality?
- **Prospecting Strategy** - Are you executing multi-touch, multi-channel engagement following industry best practices?
- **Sequence Structure** - Do your Sequences balance personalization and duration against Territory Coverage Requirements and Daily Activity Capacity?
- **Sequence Messaging** - Is your messaging tailored to support segment-specific engagement at scale?
- **Task Execution** - Are your sellers following the Prospecting Plan, focusing on the right Targets, and efficiently and effectively executing Prospecting Activities?

Of these factors, Target Selection, Product-Market Fit, and Brand Reputation determine the optimal outbound engagement strategy for your customer segments (your Prospecting Strategy), which in turn dictates the form of your outbound engagement (Sequence Structure).

ENGAGEMENT CONVERSION RATE & PROSPECTING STRATEGY *(cont.)*

Companies with high recognition and strong brand credibility will have an easier time winning the attention of prospective customers - and likely spend less time on outbound prospecting and more time converting inbound leads.

The opposite is true for companies selling into emerging markets, trafficking in new technologies, or pursuing cash-strapped customers who may not even know there's a solution to the problem they don't realize they have. It will take a lot more effort to win their attention through cold outbound engagement.

Likewise, the effort will be significant if you're selling into a crowded niche, in which case your sellers must break through the noise kicked up by you and your competitors as you converge on a mutual target.

If your niche isn't crowded, your customers will likely fall into the don't-know-it's-a-problem and/or not-looking-for-a-solution category - requiring more effort in pursuit of new business.

Effort in pursuit of new business through outbound engagement translates to sequence structure: the duration, intensity, and level of automation appropriate to each category of Prospect.

If you're pursuing larger customers (commercial, enterprise, or strategic), targeting senior and executive buyers, selling high-ACV products or services, engaging a buying committee, or selling into new market categories, your most successful outbound prospecting sequences will share common features:

- **Longer Duration** - 20-25 business days (4-5 weeks)
- **Higher Intensity** - 13-20 touches
- **Brand Reputation** - Is your company well-known for delivering high quality?
- **Multi-touch, Multi-channel** - combination of manual and automated emails, phone calls, and LinkedIn engagement
- **Moderate Automation** - 35-50% automated emails
- **Designed to Scale** - Is your messaging tailored to support segment-specific engagement at scale?
- **Task Execution** - focus on efficiency and effectiveness (more phone calls than manual emails = higher throughput and higher conversion)

ENGAGEMENT CONVERSION RATE & PROSPECTING STRATEGY *(cont.)*

It may be tempting to truncate sequences or ramp up automation to reduce the drain on Daily Activity Capacity, but resist the urge. Diverging significantly from recommended best practices for Sequence structure (within segments) will negatively impact your Engagement Conversion Rate. Your sellers will have to engage a much larger share of the market (email-only sequences for larger companies/senior personas convert at <0.5%). As a result, your focus will expand to include a larger bucket of priority targets, potentially further diminishing the quality of Initial Meetings and your IM Conversion Rate. Furthermore, your customers will be subject to a suboptimal sales engagement experience, which isn't good for conversion rates or brand reputation.

Knowing the structure of the Sequences you'll deploy to engage a particular market segment will also inform your Sequence Content strategy. Though you may be able

to sell a variety of solutions for any number of use cases into an equally dizzying array of industries, that kind of hyper-segmentation doesn't lend itself to effective prospecting.

In our hypothetical, you manage a team of 8 reps who each need to engage 445 prospects per quarter. Given the customer you're pursuing (high-ACV, complex sale), your average Sequence duration will be 25 days for high-touch Sequences. That's a little over 2 Sequence Cycles per quarter.

To improve conversion, XDRs should engage at least 3 and up to 5 prospects per Account simultaneously. The goal is to triangulate engagement between seniority levels, functional roles, and use cases or value propositions. Persona-based segmentation is also the key to effective, non-robotic automated emails.

Conservatively, let's say each rep engages 4 potential buyers in each Account. That works out to about 111 Accounts engaged per quarter, per rep. To approach statistically significant results, reps will need to add a minimum of 100 Prospects per Sequence. For your team of 8, this would allow quarterly coverage of up to 4 personas across 8 segments (vertical, use case, etc). More segmentation than this will dilute your results and add to the complexity of the prospecting motion. Less segmentation will improve focus and reliability of results, and enable more confident A/B testing. It will also preserve the sanity of SDRs who are supporting multiple closing reps.

Once you've decided the appropriate Prospecting Strategy and Sequence Structure, and you know your sellers' Daily Activity Capacity and Territory Coverage requirements, you can create your Prospecting Plan.

BUILDING THE PROSPECTING PLAN

The Prospecting Plan is a guide your sellers will use to ensure:

1. They're engaging the right Accounts and Prospects (Buyer Personas)
2. They're engaging the right number of Accounts and Prospects
3. They're doing enough of the right kind of activities to hit their pipeline quota

After you've determined your primary target segments and selected the appropriate sequence structure, you can calculate the utilization of Daily Activity Capacity. Create a Capacity Calculator to model the distribution of Prospecting Activities over time. The spreadsheet below (Figure 3) calculates Daily Manual Prospecting Activities (Column A) as a function of Prospects Added to Sequence Daily (Column C) over time (Column B).

In this example, the steps in the Sequence are represented in Rows 1 and 2, Columns D through U (18 touches over 25 days). The distribution of manual activities is based on the Day (Column B) the activity is scheduled. So, Step 1 is a manual action - a LinkedIn touch - on Day 1. Add 10 Prospects on Day 1 and you'll have 10 manual activities to complete.

Step 2 is an Automated Email on Day 1, which requires no action by the seller (thus the blank column - this is a manual activity calculator, after all). Step 3 is a Phone Call on Day 2. If you add 10 more Prospects on Day 2, you'll have 20 manual activities to complete that day (10 LinkedIn touches [Step 1] and 10 Phone Calls [Step 3], represented in Column A).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Daily Manual Prospecting Activities	Day	Add Prospects to Sequence#/Day	Step 1 LinkedIn	Step 2 Auto Email	Step 3 Phone Call	Step 4 Phone Call	Step 5 Auto Email	Step 6 LinkedIn
10	1	10	10					
20	2	10	10		10			
20	3	10	10		10			
30	4	10	10		10	10		
30	5	10	10		10	10		
40	6	10	10		10	10		10
40	7	10	10		10	10		10
40	8	10	10		10	10		10
40	9	10	10		10	10		10
50	10	10	10		10	10		10
50	11	10	10		10	10		10
60	12	10	10		10	10		10
70	13	10	10		10	10		10
70	14	10	10		10	10		10

BUILDING THE PROSPECTING PLAN *(cont.)*

In this example, our Sequence is 18 Steps over 25 Business Days, a High Priority engagement consisting of 9 emails (mostly automated), 6 phone calls, and 3 LinkedIn touches. Our sellers' Daily Activity Capacity is 70 phone calls per rep.

Prospecting Capacity Calculator	Steps	Duration (Business Days)	Role	Priority	Automation	Emails	Phone Calls	LinkedIn	Send Schedule	Daily Manual Prospecting Activity Target	Sequence
	18	25	AE - Full Cycle Seller	High	45%	9	6	3	Weekday Business Hours	70	AE Outbound High Touch

The Capacity Calculator will prevent sellers from adding too few or too many Prospects into Sequence. Recall that overdue tasks - the result of having more Prospects in Sequence than your Daily Activity Capacity allows - diminish Sequence effectiveness, driving down your Engagement Conversion Rate. This is the activity component of your Prospecting Plan, answering the critical questions:

- How many prospects should I add to Sequence each day? **10 Prospects per day for 3 weeks (14 business days), then as Capacity allows without exceeding 70 activities per day.**
- How many prospects should I have active in Sequence at a time? **No more than 170 Prospects Active in Sequence per month.**

Prospects Added to Sequence per Day	7
Prospects Added to Sequence per Week	33
Prospects Added to Sequence per Month	137
Average Manual Daily Tasks	58
Total Prospects Engaged per Quarter	390
Percent to Target Prospects Engaged per Quarter	88%
Total Manual Tasks	3,450

Following this plan, an individual seller will be able to engage 390 Prospects per quarter. While that may seem like a high number, notice that it's only 88% of our Territory Coverage Requirement of 445 Prospects Engaged per quarter. If you hadn't gone through this exercise, you'd be flying headlong into a pipeline gap. Without this information, it would be almost impossible to course correct in time to make up that shortfall.

BUILDING THE PROSPECTING PLAN *(cont.)*

In addition to answering important questions about engagement volume, this exercise will help you determine how many high priority Accounts each rep can engage in a quarter (97.5 in this example). Bearing in mind the volume required to achieve statistical significance (100 Prospects Active in Sequence), you will be limited to 4 personas and 1 key segment per rep, per quarter. This provides the limits on other important questions:

- **Which Accounts should I focus on?** 100 per quarter
- **Which prospects in those Accounts?** 4 Buyer Personas
- **How many prospects from each Account?**
4 per Account
- **Which Sequence does each prospect belong in?** Up to 8 Segments, 4 Personas each

For this Prospecting Plan, you'll need to identify 100 Accounts per quarter for each rep to pursue and up to 4 Buyer Personas within those Accounts, and determine how many of each to engage simultaneously and which (and how many) Sequences are required.

Armed with this information, your reps and managers will know exactly how many and which activities are required every day to meet their pipeline contribution commitments. No more flying blind and hoping all of your effort will pay off. Now, you can lead with confidence.



CODA: THE FOUNDATION OF A PROSPECTING STRATEGY

Outbound Prospecting Strategy is dictated by a host of factors, including:

- your position in the market
- your product-market fit
- the severity of the pain you solve
- your ability to demonstrate proof of success
- the budget available to your buyers
- the size of the customers you pursue
- the seniority of the prospects you pursue
- the complexity of your purchase process
- the maturity of your market niche
- the state of the competitive landscape

The 7 factors that influence Engagement Conversion Rate form the foundation of a prospecting strategy designed to deliver a higher return on engagement.

Step 1: Identify Account Segments and Buyer Personas

Account and Buyer Persona prioritization will determine whether or not reps are wasting time on prospects who are a bad fit for your product or service, too junior in the organizational hierarchy to start the buying process, or otherwise unlikely to become a Qualified Opportunity.

Step 2: Align Value Propositions with Segments & Personas

If your Sequences focus on value propositions, use cases, and success stories that don't align with the Prospect's needs or their role in the organization, Engagement Conversion Rate will plummet.

Step 3: Read the Room

A strong Brand Reputation can reduce the effort required to get a cold conversation started, but if your company's reputation is weak or negative, the job of getting a prospect's attention is even more daunting, and your sequence structure and messaging should reflect this reality.

Step 4: Determine Prospecting Strategy

Once you've identified your Account segments and Buyer Personas, you can determine the type of engagement strategy required to convert each, tailoring your outreach by priority, interest, coverage, and capacity.

Step 5: Define Sequence Structure

Reduce variance, enforce best practices, and optimize performance by creating multi-touch, multi-channel Sequence Templates tailored to key segments (industry vertical, market segment, region, buyer persona and seniority), balancing manual and automated activity to personalize at scale, and designed to conform to the constraints of your sellers' Daily Activity Capacity limits.

Step 6: Create Sequence Messaging

Building on the appropriate Sequence Template, create Sequences tailored to key segments and personas, delivering the right message to the right buyer at the right moment.

Step 7: Execute Prospecting Plan

Train frontline reps on the Prospecting Plan and ensure they know where to focus their attention, how to manage their capacity, and how to efficiently and effectively execute the Prospecting Activities that ultimately determine whether all this work will bear fruit. Train managers to monitor their teams' activity and performance to keep them on track with the plan.