

DO NOT OPEN UNTIL 4TH QUARTER:

THE GETTING-READY CHECKLIST FOR THE NEW YEAR



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Introduction

If you are reading this, it must be the fourth quarter of the fiscal year (or worse, it is the first quarter!). The old adage, “no one ever plans to fail, they just fail to plan” is never more true than at the end of the year. No matter if you have out performed your plan by a mile, are on target, or are scrambling to post respectable results, everyone in sales and marketing (management and individual contributors alike) should pay attention to this article. One of the best sales reps that ever worked for me made the very astute statement a while back when responding to the classic question asked to sales people, “Did you sell anything today?”. His response was, “Isn’t the correct question, ‘What did we do three months ago to sell more today?’ ” The message here is this, don’t let your first month or first quarter or next quarter be a wild card... start planning today. While this article is focused on the beginning of the year, **the questions included in this paper are appropriate any time of the year.** Here is a checklist of items to consider in planning for your future success:

“What did we do three months ago to sell more today?”

1. **Do you know where you want to be on January 1 (or the beginning of your fiscal year)?** I’m not talking about being at the beach. I’m talking about any and every metric that is appropriate for your business. Do you have a plan to get there? More importantly, do you know clearly and confidently how you currently measure up to each of these metrics? Imagine if you were lost in the desert and wanted to get to the nearest city... it is hard to know which way to go, how fast to go, what you will encounter on the way and what tools you will need to achieve your goal if you have no idea of where you are at the present. This is a good time of the year to review your actuals vs. plan as well as take stock of your CRM system and other sales and marketing tools and decision support systems.
2. **Can your data quality be improved?** Speaking of decision support systems, how reliable is the information coming out of your CRM, marketing and customer support systems? Is the information comprehensive, timely, and accurate? Depending on who you talk to, you will get different answers as to the total cost of improving data quality, but one thing most all experts in data therapy will agree on: it is many times less expensive to put in place good processes to ensure good data quality up front, than to try to correct it later in the life cycle of the record. That said, the good news is that

cleaning up your data is a finite task, IF, you solve the upstream issue of dirty data coming into the system.

3. **Is the team equipped with the correct tools?** Forgive the sports analogy: You can take the most talented professional football players and send them onto the field without pads, helmets, play-books and competitive intelligence and watch them get slaughtered. If you have a sales team, marketing team or customer care team in your organization and they aren't FULLY equipped, expect excuses, turn-over and disappointments. Being fully equipped doesn't mean un-measured spending. It does mean understanding your expectations and measuring results (and putting in place controls and measurement systems) to ensure you get the ROI from business tools.

4. **Are your business processes efficient?** Because I love comedy, I'll offer you an allusion to an October 1988 *Saturday Night Live* sketch, a replay of which is available [here](#). If you don't have the 1:07 it takes to watch it, the story is about a bank called "First Citiwide Change Bank". All they do is make change. When asked how they make money, the answer is... "Volume". Being an ex-banker myself, I always found this absurd skit hilarious. First Citiwide Change Bank was running on a treadmill that would never allow them to get ahead and at best break-even (setting aside the cost of doing business). What is concerning to me are companies that have business processes that cause them to LOSE money. For these organizations, sudden improvements in the results of their sales organizations can cause the losses to mount even more spectacularly. From a self-reflection perspective, consider where you have a business process where there are multiple ways to get something done, no agreed upon process, manual processes that have many steps or involve many touch points or processes that have been around for a long time. Are your processes losing money or at best rivaling those of First Citiwide Change Bank?

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5. **Is a well-oiled enterprise CRM solution in place?** There are THREE (3) key terms in this question. Can you find them? First, "ENTERPRISE". There is a huge difference between sales or support reps using personal copies of Act! or Outlook, a sub-group using a departmental version of Goldmine and an enterprise solution that connects the organization and has organizational support. Many organizations will start at the individual or group level and work towards connecting the organization in an enterprise fashion. I would suggest that getting to the connected enterprise as fast as reasonably possible, even for companies with 2 people, is both critical and will be a decision that will differentiate the company in the marketplace and will easily pay for itself. Second, "CRM solution". There is a big difference between contact management software, case management software, marketing management software and CRM. CRM which is understood by most as "Customer Relationship Management" and in other circles, "Constituency Relationship Management" spans all fundamental

constituencies within the enterprise: prospects, current accounts, partner channels, vendors/suppliers, employees and other stakeholders. Does your solution address all of these markets? Finally, “well-oiled”. Having personally implemented dozens and dozens of CRM solutions for other companies and having managed or supervised teams that have implemented hundreds of such systems, I call tell you that at best, the CRM solution is “well-oiled” on the day it goes live. Period. Not the next day, not the week after, but only on the day it goes live (at best). For every hour and day that goes by afterwards, things change - that’s a fact. Your competition is active, your customer and prospects demand new solutions and I would suspect that people, processes and technologies within your organization come and go. In addition, see #7 below to understand how your company’s own changes impact your efficiency. The battle to maintain a well-oiled enterprise CRM solution can be challenging, but with planning and forethought, it is quite manageable.

6. **Are you and your company focused?** Ok, I’m guilty. In fact, I’m on America’s top-10 most wanted list of offenders of this rhetorical question. With shareholders, board members and other executives bearing down on organizations to do “more, better, faster”, it is easy to find many projects and initiatives that will respond to organizational pressures. That’s the problem. To get results, these initiatives have to be completed. Too many such projects can delay completion and frustrate organizations. So how do you prioritize or decide? Doing what matters is the key. We recommend making an inventory of your current and planned projects and initiatives and assessing the impact on the organization and its constituencies.

7. **Do you want different or improved results next year?** Again - rhetorical question. While I have met companies that expect sales to decline because of the economy or because their product or service is being replaced or commoditized, normally this isn’t what people want or expect. So to get different results (improvements), we have to do something different. I’d also bet that in most cases you won’t have more resources, proportionally bigger budgets, or lower expectations. Examine your people, processes and technology. All are candidates for review. What will you do differently to achieve different results next year given higher expectations and flat to lower resources?

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8. **Are you prepared for a down economy?** Numerous debates and discussions have occurred and continue about the economy, its impact on our lives and the depth and duration of a down economy. Even though the economy has been depressed for some time now, it is never too late to assess this question and your organizational and individual responses and preparedness for it. Furthermore, what if it happens again or gets worse? In good times, customers *want* more positive results and in bad times, customers *need* more positive results. So how does your company’s product or service contribute to helping your customers get these results? Perhaps the answer indicates a need

for reworking your marketing or holding your solution up to a mirror. Doing so may offer the realization of the need to diversify, differentiate or refine your solution. Talk to your customers, be sure in good times you understand how they value your solution and how willing they would be to give it up in bad times.

9. **Is time being utilized wisely?** Perhaps this is just expansion on #6 above, but I thought it deserved its own section. Time is one of those items that is not your friend. It marches on when we are sick, during vacations and during meetings. Once spent, it can't be recaptured. How do your people spend their time? With customers, on paperwork, selling internally or selling externally? How would you and your colleagues prefer to spend your time? What is the highest and best use of your personnel? Occasionally, I'll take 15 minutes and write down big buckets of where I spend my time (hopefully keeping it to 10 or less categories). Next I will add a column listing the approximate percentage of my time allocated to these various buckets (ensuring the totals equal 100%). Finally, I will add a third column listing what percentages of time I believe SHOULD be spent on each category (again, making sure the column totals to 100%). Have your team or colleagues repeat this exercise. Reviewing these results on an anonymous basis is a great team exercise and helps individual contributors understand where they are out of balance with expectations or with their peers. This is also useful for management to look for ways to unblock their teams and allow the correct balance to transpire.
10. **Will you have an annual team meeting and if so, how will you use that time?** To meet or not to meet, that is the question. In my opinion, having an annual team meeting is well worth the investment, especially if your people work in different locations. But have no doubt, it is an investment. With travel, hotel, opportunity cost, speakers, etc., the expense can add up, so consider video conferencing as an option. To get the most out of your meeting, we recommend soliciting agenda topics not only from your team but from colleagues in other departments. This is a great opportunity to knit the organization together by allowing them to collaborate and share. Consider speakers from other departments, from partners and subject matter experts throughout the organization. Be sure the meeting is participatory and assign someone the task of taking action and follow-up items and review them on the last day. Most importantly, assign the follow-up items to people during the last day and hold those individuals accountable for the follow-up by creating transparency as to who is doing what. A great portion of the benefits that come out of a sales meeting is not the knowledge shared during the day or week, but in identifying action plans as a group and accomplishing those items on a post-meeting basis. So what does your agenda look like?

Conclusion

So there you have it. Ten great questions to reflect on. While we have offered you lots to think about and perhaps relatively few answers, rest easy knowing that you are ahead of the game if you are already considering these questions. If you need help in facilitating these discussions or working on strategies, plans and change-management around your people, process and technologies, consider engaging Mellow Ventures (see below) as an advisor for a short project that is bound to generate results. If your CRM systems (or lack thereof) or data are in need of repair or review, consider contacting akaCRM.

About Mellow Ventures

Mellow Ventures is a professional services firm which provides efficiency and growth services to improve resource utilization and maximize top line results. The company was founded on the belief that before growth and scaling can occur, a business must understand and enhance its business efficiency. Mellow Ventures helps clients capture these efficiencies so they can achieve business result improvements. For more information, call (877) 459-1572 or visit www.mellowventures.com.

About akaCRM

akaCRM is a professional services firm which provides comprehensive services for salesforce.com and the Force.com cloud platform. akaCRM also offers consulting, system implementation and training for leading salesforce.com partner-based solutions. The company selects solutions that improve the results of its clients' relationships with their constituent audiences including prospects, customer accounts, partners, suppliers and employees. akaCRM offers project-based services, time-based support services and senior-level consulting engagements. Headquartered on beautiful Cheyenne Mountain in southwest Colorado Springs, Colorado, akaCRM is a stone's throw from the Denver International and Colorado Springs airports, allowing it to easily serve clients nationally, with the majority of services provided off-site and through video and Internet conferencing. For more information, call (877) 459-1572 or visit www.akacrm.com.