

Sales Cycle Template: A Detailed Look

As promised, here's a detailed look at each stage of the sales cycle:

1. Initial Contact

Timeline: Less than 1 day

The shortest, yet one of the most important, steps is the initial phone call or email. This is something you'll handle very differently depending on whether the *lead contacted you* first (inbound lead) or *you're contacting them* first (outbound lead):

- **For inbound leads** the hardest part is over. The lead has already expressed interest by reaching out to you with a phone call or email. You should respond as soon as possible and answer any questions they asked. Then, ask a question for them to keep the conversation going.
- **For outbound leads** (also known as cold emails or cold calls) your job is a little trickier. Since the lead may not even be familiar with your business, your first challenge is to capture their interest by explaining your company and the features and benefits of your product or service. Spend some time writing an email template or phone script that condenses your pitch in just a few sentences. *Check out our [top 6 sales email templates](#) for inspiration, or our [top 25 cold calling tips](#).*

In both cases, initial contact should happen as soon as possible. If you're emailing, be sure to keep the message short and sweet. Details can always emerge in later messages.

2. Qualification

Timeline: Within 3 days of hearing a response

So you reached out to a lead and heard a positive response. *Great*, now it's time to close the deal, *right?*

Not so fast. Most sales require a **qualification** stage, in which you gather more basic information about the client. The goal is to determine if the lead is serious enough to allocate more resources. At the same time, you can use this information during the next step to write a more personalized sales presentation.

Here are the questions you need to answer in order to qualify a lead:

- Do they have a **need** for my product?

- Do they have the **budget** for my product?
- Do they have the **authority** to make a purchase?
- Do they have a realistic **timeline**?

Ideally, a quick phone call is all you need to find these answers. If you can't get the customer on the phone, however, and you aren't getting responses to your emails, the lead has likely fallen **dormant**.

Your first instinct may be to delete them from your CRM, but in fact, a far better response is to add them to a special dormant list. In SAP Digital CRM, you can create a mailing list specifically for dormant leads. Send them occasional follow up messages, and you may be surprised how many rediscover their interest and respond.

3. Presentation

***Timeline:** Within 1 week of Qualification*

Once you've qualified a lead (confirmed they're interested and capable of making a purchase), the next step is make a personalized sales pitch. This can happen a number of different ways:

- Physical meeting in client's office
- Online presentation over video conference
- Submitting a written proposal

Regardless of how it happens, the presentation marks a major pivot in the sales cycle: Your language should now be entirely *client-focused*. Instead of talking about your product's features, talk about the *benefits* it will bring your client. Reference specific pain points for them or their business, and ways you'll help solve them.

For more specific advice on giving a sales presentation, check out our guide [The Sales Cycle Explained](#), or for writing a proposal, [How To Write A Business Proposal In 5 Easy Steps](#). Also, if you would like to add a visual component to your sales presentations, check out our review of [presentation software](#), including slideshows and other animated presentations.

4. Evaluation

***Timeline:** Immediately after presentation, up to 2 weeks*

During this next stage, your client responds to the presentation/proposal. They "evaluate" it by telling you their concerns, asking questions, and negotiating terms of the sale.

The length of this stage can vary widely depending on your product. It may just be a short conversation after your presentation, or take several weeks of negotiation. Regardless, you

want to be as attentive as possible during this stage. Respond immediately to any questions, and don't be shy about following up.

5. Closing

Timeline: *Immediately after evaluation, up to 1 week*

Closing the deal can happen anytime after your presentation. Depending on how much evaluation there is to do, it might happen on-the-spot.

As soon as you sense your client is ready for the purchase, you should adapt your language. Start dropping in "closing lines" that shift the conversation towards the purchase. *"Should I mark you down for 7 units or 8?"* Or, *"would you like implementations to start Thursday or next week?"*

Ideally, you want to move the conversation towards closing without the pressure of an upfront question or an ultimatum - i.e. *"I'll give you 10% off if you buy right now."* These tactics can be offputting to customers. Of course, at the same time, you don't want to unnecessarily stall a sale either.

6. Asking For Referrals

Timeline: *Immediately after closing, up to 1 year*

Though sometimes excluded from the sales cycle, this final step can be the most important if you're one of the many businesses that rely on referrals. Formally adding this stage to the sales cycle serves as a strong motivator to pop the question. *"Do you know of anybody else who might be looking for XYZ?"*

At the same time, you may find ways to *automate* asking for referrals. You can add customers to an email list with follow-up messages. Ask how they're doing with your product, offer tips, provide updates, ask for online reviews, and... every so often... ask for referrals.

Unlike the other stages, asking for referrals can continue for a while. Though you shouldn't hesitate to ask as soon as the deal is closed, it's something you can continue to ask months down the line - especially if you maintain more long-term relationships with your customers.