

Foreword by **TIM SANDERS**

Author of the New York Times bestseller Love Is the Killer App



ESSENTIAL
ACCOUNT
PLANNING

FIVE KEYS FOR HELPING YOUR SALES TEAM

DRIVE REVENUE

MARK DONNOLO

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Foreword

I first encountered Mark Donnolo's work when I read his book *The Innovative Sale*. I was impressed with how he applied a step-by-step approach to thinking creatively as a sales professional. His observations about the link between teamwork and sales innovation resonated with my experiences as a practitioner and consultant. When he approached me recently about reviewing his new work, I leapt at the opportunity, and later agreed to write this foreword.

Essential Account Planning: Five Keys for Helping Your Sales Team Drive Revenue is an important book for sales leaders and contributors because more than ever, strategic accounts are critical to enterprise success and harder than ever to win and keep.

Your most strategic accounts are your marketing department's best friend when it comes to building a brand as a trusted winner in your market. With so many cloud and niche companies eating away at the midsized and smallest accounts in your market, only the strategic ones serve as a barrier to entry. Moreover, strategic accounts offer your enterprise a volume of transactions, challenges, and insights that enable you to stay one step ahead of your market.

Ten years ago, your strategic account likely had a decision maker or two, in a situation where you sold belly-to-belly against a handful of competitors. Today, the game has changed significantly, as your average high-quality sale involves six or more decision makers, end users, sign-offs, and influencers—many of which you'll never get face time with! Globalization, cloud computing, and crowd-sourcing have created a highly competitive marketplace in which any strategic account can be lured away by a hungry startup looking to work cheap or for free to “win more logos.”

In this book, you'll discover five imperatives, or strategies, that will help you cut through the rising complexity of the sale, win the account, and keep it—growing it year over year. It's likely that your current sales methodology was not created with the strategic account in mind, opting instead to “average out” the account mix so the funnel works right at any sales level. Few if any methodologies possess a detailed plan that treats strategic accounts like the unique

animals they are. To paraphrase a chief sales officer at a major computer-hardware maker, “When it comes to your most critical accounts, without a process, you get a mess.”

I’m not just a fellow author; I’m also a business-book reader, just like you. I buy books like this one because I want to be on top of my game and solve sales challenges. The best way to approach reading *Essential Account Planning* is to put yourself inside the many great stories shared in the coming pages. Note how the challenges and organizational issues described are similar to yours. After you finish the book, locate at least three situations where you can apply the imperatives immediately. Use the templates in the appendices as your tools; they will be very helpful in implementation.

Share what you learn with your team and challenge them to think about the existing strategic account planning process (if there is one) and how important it is to master. If you want to make the leap from contributor to sales leader, driving a winning process that moves the needle is a good path to success. If you are a sales leader who wants your team to win in the market consistently and grow in their professional skill set, invest the time to learn and then share Mark’s elegant framework for strategic account management.

There’s an underlying perspective to *Essential Account Planning* that offers you a chance to dramatically boost your sales performance: Strategic account management is a team sport. Unlike transactional accounts, which buy off-the-shelf products or services based on price, convenience, and reliability, most strategic accounts require customization and compromise. This means that sales must work across departmental lines, with strategic account managers serving the role of quarterback, marshaling political and organizational resources to satisfy the demands of high-value clients.

I believe too many people practice fake strategic account planning these days. They confuse activity management, forecasting, and service-plan review with the type of defined process this book lays out. To them, I quote my old friend, quality guru W. Edward Deming: “If you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you are doing.”

Tim Sanders, Former Chief Sales Officer at Yahoo!
Author of *Dealstorming: The Secret Weapon That Can Solve
Your Toughest Sales Challenges*

Introduction

I sat across the table from the head of sales for a multinational manufacturing company. The end of Q3 loomed near, and he said it had been a tough quarter for the sales team. Last year, most of the team members nailed their quotas, and the organization overall came in above goal. In fact, sales were strong enough to carry revenue into the first quarter of the new year. But by midyear, the team's hot streak had cooled. The team was scrambling while its forecasts fell short of its goals. Everything had been great: "We're hot. Who needs a plan?" he said, describing the sentiment of the team until that time. Now they needed to do something—quickly.

Nobody liked to plan. Nobody liked to come in from the field and work through the challenges of devising strategies for reaching sales goals. When it came to planning for the accounts that made up about 70 to 80 percent of the company's revenue, the account managers and sales team members typically avoided it. The voices could be heard throughout the sales organization: "It's a pain." "It takes too much time out of market." "I'm a relationship person, not an operator." "Can't the sales support team put this together for us to react to?" When customer demand was strong and close rates were high, it was easy to find reasons why the team didn't need account plans. But when the dry spell hit, the head of sales realized that they were all victims of their success.

Account planning is one of those hot topics that receive a disproportionate amount of attention and create more than their fair share of heartburn for sales teams. It's right up there with sales compensation, quotas, and coaching as disciplines that tend to catch the spotlight in sales meetings. Companies know they need to do account planning well, but don't. Most times, when the topic of account planning arises in a conversation, I hear:

- We don't do it well, but we really need to get better.
- We already do it. The key sections of the account plan are . . .
- We've tried it in the past, and it doesn't work because the team isn't on board.
- It turns out to be an administrative exercise, and once it's done, we end up putting it away until next year.
- It's critical. But we don't have time for it.

Notice that none of these responses outright diminishes the value of account planning. Effective account planning is one of the most powerful drivers of sales performance, yet it's one of the most overlooked because of its paradoxical relationship to sales: Many salespeople intuitively think that spending more time selling will create more sales. But the salespeople who invest in account planning as they sell actually sell more.

SalesGlobe research shows that the most successful sales teams combine consistent account planning with selling. Poor-performing or inconsistent sales teams typically have a pattern of reacting to opportunities and only planning in response to lagging results.

While implementing a strong account planning process sounds like a no-brainer, most sales organizations face these 10 questions:

1. How should account planning fit within our sales strategy?
2. What accounts should have account plans?
3. Who should own account planning?
4. How do we align functions such as marketing, operations, finance, and human resources?
5. What are the most important components of the account plan?
6. How should a good process work?
7. Can we make the organization conduct account planning, and how do we get compliance?
8. How can we reinforce the value of account planning?
9. How should the customer be involved in the process?
10. How do we keep the account planning process alive throughout the year?

Difficulties in answering these questions sideline the account planning process, hinder the sales organization's potential, and result in missed growth opportunities.

Essential Account Planning concentrates on the big challenges sales organizations face today regarding strategically planning for growth at the account level. This book addresses these challenges with practical approaches and tools you can apply right away with your sales teams to see results this year. It also includes stories, interviews, and wisdom from executives in leading companies about how they use account planning to grow their businesses.

This book begins by addressing why you need account planning in the first place. It will help you sort through the arguments you're certain to hear about organizational commitment, ownership, politics, and time. It will also

help you make the case for account planning and how it fits into your broader sales strategy.

Then this book will look at the five keys for successful strategic account planning:

- **Key 1: Use the right structure (chapter 2).** This chapter will look at the big picture of the sales strategy, account plan vision, and account plan execution, as well as the components every good account plan should have.
- **Key 2: Set the goal (chapter 3).** This chapter will examine how the account plan supports the business plan and growth opportunities, and how to build the revenue goal for the account.
- **Key 3: Create the habits (chapter 4).** Without this key, the account plan is just a document. This chapter discusses how to bring the account planning process to life.
- **Key 4: Understand the politics (chapter 5).** At the core of the account planning process are the people who make it happen. This chapter examines the importance of getting the sales team and others within the company to work together to solve the people, role, and political challenges.
- **Key 5: Think big (chapter 6).** This chapter will focus on moving past incremental thinking and toward planning in an aspirational manner to take your team beyond its current horizons.

Essential Account Planning looks at each of the keys from the perspective of sales leaders and sales enablers by studying their stories, as well as the stories of hundreds of companies I've worked with in the past 25 years, to lay out methods to help your organization profit from these experiences. Once you've read about the five keys, you can use the templates included in the appendix in your account planning process.

I hope you enjoy the book and leverage it to improve your sales team's performance. Let me know about the challenges you're addressing or the results you're seeing by sending me a note at mark.donnolo@salesglobe.com or on Twitter @MarkDonnolo #EssentialAccountPlanning. I'd love to learn about your experiences.