

# Optimizing Your Sales Plans

By Julie Rhodes, Not Your Hobby Marketing

When selling beer in the wholesale channel, your approach should be strategic, not left to random encounters and sporadic account visits. Walking out the door without a clear plan in mind is never a good idea. After you've created a sales vision plan that will provide you with some direction in your specific market, it's time to start optimizing your efforts for maximum efficiency. Here are six key practices that you can implement to boost your sales activity efficiency in today's competitive beer landscape.

## Create Target Lists:

Not every account is right for your particular beer brands. The goal of creating target lists of potential accounts is to narrow down the overwhelming number of outlets that carry beer licenses to a shorter, more manageable set of businesses that would benefit from the placement of your products. Creating target lists will help you hone in on accounts where your brand will be a good fit and experience consistent sell through. A high rate of sell through helps create strong, long-term relationships with accounts. Target lists also allow you to efficiently plan your route of sales calls based on geographic location or priority. A good rule of thumb is to create a target list of accounts to visit every day that you are making sales calls, whether in person or digitally.

## Route Planning:

After you've created your target lists, it's time to plan your route of account visits. There's no need to waste your time darting around from account to account without any rhyme or reason. Organizing your sales calls by geographic location or priority can help you effectively lay out your visits in a way that maximizes time and effort. Geographic route planning is pretty self-explanatory, but priority planning should be based on the revenue or volume generated from each account. Another good rule of thumb here is to concentrate on the set of currently buying accounts that are generating 80% of your sales revenue. There will also be buyers that require you to make sales calls on specific days and at specific times. Route planning will allow you to work these accounts into your schedule, as well as account for any other appointments that are on your agenda.

## Identify Communication Channels:

The process of selling changes just as rapidly as the beer industry, so you should be paying attention to how you can utilize technology to help you sell more efficiently. The assumption that account visits or buyer interactions should always be in person is a thing of the past. Sales calls can now take multiple forms, including, but not limited to,

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in-person visits, emails, text messages, direct messages on social media platforms, direct mail, and video conferencing. One of the best ways that you can optimize your sales efforts is to figure out your beer buyer's communication preferences right from the start and leverage remote sales calls as much as you can. This process allows you to make more sales calls in less time.

### Document Your Sales Activities:

The more data you can collect about your accounts and their buying habits, the more beer you can sell. A great beer salesperson is also quite an accomplished detective of sorts. But you're going to need a place to store all of this data, as well as be able to access it quickly and easily. A CRM software program is usually your best bet, but a simple DIY spreadsheet will do the trick too if you have a limited sales budget. CRM stands for Customer Relationship Management system. It's like a digital contact list that also allows you to store notes about your buyer, their buying preferences and habits, facts about that particular accounts, and other tidbits of data that will give you a competitive advantage, like the best day to call or visit that buyer and what time they like to speak with suppliers. A CRM tool will also allow you to log your sales calls, promotional activities, and buyer interactions so that you can build profiles about each account. Knowing all these things about your buying accounts will give you a leg up in our competitive landscape.

### Analyze Your Sales Data:

It's great to know how much beer you are selling in the wholesale channel, but when you take the time to really dig in and analyze trends in your data, you're taking your sales optimization skills to the next level. Sales volume and revenue are two common metrics that most breweries track. I strongly suggest that you add a few more trends to this list. You should know what accounts are producing 80% of your sales revenue, what specific items they are buying, how often they buy from you, accounts that have fallen off the radar (lost accounts), and accounts that have just started buying products from you (new accounts). This data will allow you to see who might need additional brand support or customer service, where there are opportunities to add more items to their product orders, or who might need a reminder to reorder. Paying close attention to your outside sales data can help you identify hidden sales opportunities.

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### Provide Exceptional Brand Support:

One of the best ways that you can differentiate your brand from your competitors is to provide each account with above and beyond, personalized brand support. This is more than just showing up frequently and chatting it up with your buyers. This means that you're providing each account with pieces of brand value every time you interact with them. Brand value can be physical or intangible. Physical examples could be a sales sheet with information about all your products and pricing, a tin tacker for their wall, a shelf talker to help create more brand visibility or hosting a product tasting demonstration to encourage customer trial. Intangible brand support could be showing up to talk sales with the buyer on their preferred supplier visit days, knowing their business model and providing them with feasible solutions for their customers, or training their staff about your brands and how to sell them to their end customers. Brand support can take many forms, but the more personalized you can make it, the more you can optimize your sales efforts.



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