Creative Account Management

The Writing's on the Wall!

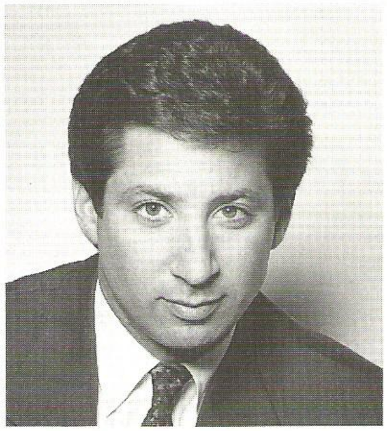
Sales managers who spend more time managing paper than people may need the Management Account Profile, a unique visual system to help monitor and boost sales activity.

by Barry Farber

Today's sales managers are exposed to countless methods of measuring and monitoring their sales teams' activity. Forms like thirty-day account forecasts, cold call sheets, presentation and demonstration reports, and so many other systems "help" sales managers keep track of their sales reps' prospecting and account information. Although these report forms are important, many times sales managers are overwhelmed with the paperwork and spend more time managing paper than they do people!

One of the most basic elements of a sales manager's job is to manage and track the sales teams' activity on an ongoing basis. It's not just knowing what accounts the reps are working on, but also helping them manage, strategize, and move each of their prospects through the key stages in the sales cycle. Yet so many of the common sales problems are due to the low morale of sales reps caused by not having enough business in the pipeline. When sales reps are given a tool to deal with that problem, the payoff is big. And when you are hearing words like recession, nothing fights it better than increasing sales activity.

The following MAP (Management Account Profile) system is a practical visual aid to help sales managers focus on their teams' activity and receive immediate feedback on how sales reps are managing and growing their territories. Their MAP becomes part of them. It's a blueprint of their entire business. Ultimately, the MAP system will result in increased sales activity all around, while pointing out areas where reps need assistance or training.



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MAKING YOUR MAP

Here is how it works. Each salesperson has their own 2 x 3-foot cork board, a set of map tacks or push pins, and 30 to 40 business cards with the blank side showing. The total investment should come to about $15 or $20. Across the top of the cork board are headings that represent each stage of your company's typical sales cycle. Here is one example of those headings for a typical value added reseller:

Stage 1: First Call. Initial meeting with the prospect where introduction of your company, general questions, and needs analysis might occur.

Stage 2: Presentation. A general overview on your company, product, and/or services.

Stage 3: Demonstration. A product demonstration is given based on specific criteria gathered from the prospect in previous stages.

Stage 4: Proposal. A hard copy proposal is handed in and reviewed in person.

Stage 5: Close. This stage is completed by either receiving the check or having the product shipped.

Note that each of your stages may be different depending upon the type of product or service you sell and the length of your sales cycle: i.e., a major account sales rep with a sales cycle of six months to two years may add two or three more stages in the beginning because of additional departments involved in the decision making process.

Let's say a sales rep goes out on a first call with a prospect (an appointment made with the decisionmaker through telemarketing or an in-person canvass call). After finding out specific information that qualifies the account, the sales rep then comes back to the office and fills out an account card using the following information:

1. Name of company;

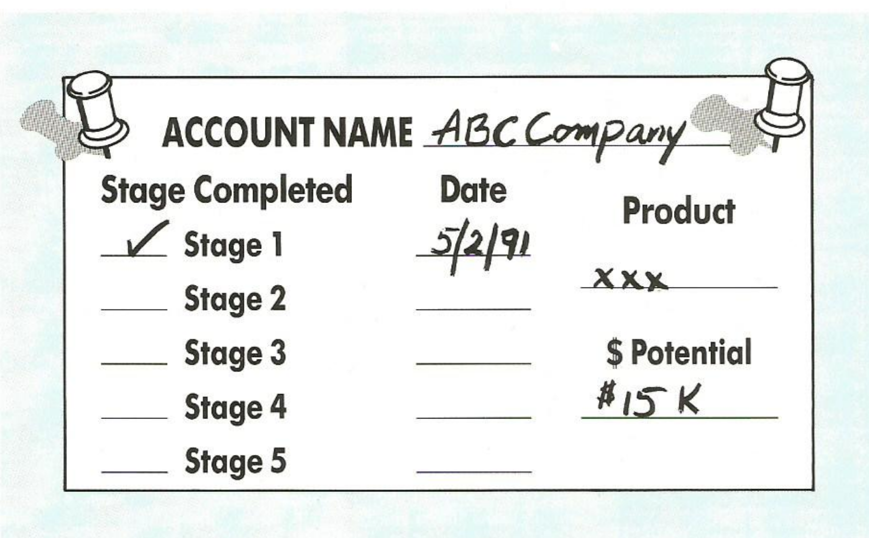
2. Date of the call; and

3. Product and/or dollar potential (if applicable).

Once the card is filled out, it is then posted on the MAP under the First Call column.

Incidentally, if the sales manager or reps are concerned about the confidentiality of their accounts being posted on the wall for all to see, then they can replace the name of the company with the initials of the person they are dealing with. The whole idea of the MAP is visually to show how all sales account activity is being managed at all stages. Only the sales rep and manager need to know the names of the accounts posted.

One of the most important steps in the MAP system is recording the date at which each stage has been completed. This helps the sales manager and the salesperson see how long the prospect has been sitting under a specific col-



Sample account card. Blank business cards can be used, or a custom batch for your company can be printed up inexpensively.

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNT PROFILE

Sample Eight-Week Analysis

First Call	2nd Stage Presentation	3rd Stage Demo	4th Stage Proposal	5th Stage Close
A	H	J		
B	I			
C				
D				
E				
F				
G				

WEEK ONE

This is the sales rep's first week of the month in a 30-45 day sales cycle. We see that three accounts have already been moved to the 2nd and 3rd stage of the MAP. The first stage has room for more cards since this is where most of the activity will be generated. In the second week of the sales cycle, the rep still needs to focus on generating new activity in the first stage because most of these accounts will be lost due to competition, unqualified prospect, the prospect stalled, or hopefully, the account moved to the next stage on the MAP. It's crucial to keep a constant flow of activity in each stage, to insure a consistent closing percentage month to month.

First Call		2nd Stage Presentation	3rd Stage Demo	4th Stage Proposal	5th Stage Close
A	O	C	H	J	
B	P	I			
E		D			
F					
G					
K					
L					
M					
N					

WEEK TWO

Here we see the sales rep has generated six more new accounts in the first stage and moved C,D,H,J accounts across the MAP.

First Call		2nd Stage Presentation	3rd Stage Demo	4th Stage Proposal	5th Stage Close
A	R	C	H	J	B
E	S	I	F		
K	T	D			
L	U	G			
M					
N					
O					
P					
Q					

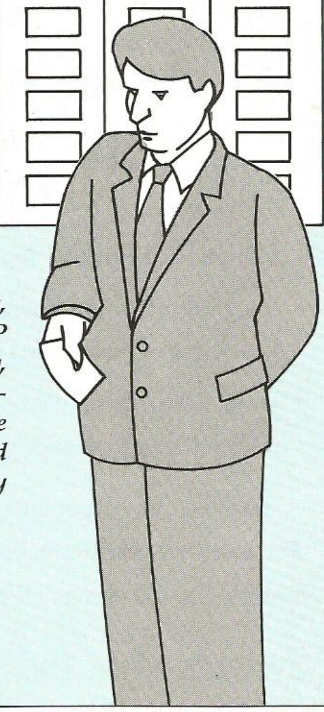
WEEK THREE

Additional prospects have been added to the first stage to compensate for the ones who have moved across the board.

First Call		2nd Stage Presentation	3rd Stage Demo	4th Stage Proposal	5th Stage Close

WEEK EIGHT

Jumping ahead to week eight, we can now see all the MAP stages filled with activity, representing a highly productive sales rep in action. Note that the first stage should always have twice as many accounts as all the others.



umn. Also, management can determine a maximum time frame to be allotted to each stage.

For example, after four weeks that an account card is posted in the same column, the card has to come off the board or be moved across to the next heading. Thus only qualified prospects are posted on the board. The cards that come down are then filed away and reviewed periodically.

As each stage in the sales cycle is completed, the account cards will move across the MAP until they end up in the closing stage.

Extra room should be left for account cards in the first stage of your sales cycle. This is because more activity should be generated here since there's a greater chance for these cards to drop off. As they move across the board and complete each stage, the accounts become more and more qualified.

Probably one of the greatest benefits of the MAP system to sales managers

and reps is eliminating the up and down months that are caused by lack of prospecting for future business. When time is being spent giving presentations, demonstrations, working on paperwork, etc., we spend less time on increasing activity in the first stage of the sales cycle. Now the MAP board is a visual reminder when we see the first stage lacking account cards. This will quickly focus us on generating new activity in that area for the months to come.

IT REALLY WORKS!

Once you have your team's boards set up around the office, you will be amazed how powerful these tools are at focusing everyone's attention on sales activity.

A sales manager from Glastonbury, Ct. says, "MAP has made a big difference for me in several areas. Now I can walk around and see exactly where my reps are in each stage of the sale. And because the boards are in full view, my sales reps tell me the areas they need to work, instead of me having to get on their case. Reps who were not using their card file before now have it out on their desk and are using it more often to keep their MAP updated."

Another branch manager from Chicago says, "The MAP system has made a tremendous difference in my own productivity. Now I can view my sales reps' activity much more clearly and plan strategy right away."

And tracking activity becomes a game. The salesperson gets a feeling of accomplishment when he/she moves each account card across the board into the next stage of the sale. Then, and only then, does the salesperson see the benefit of all the tracking and monitoring forms used in conjunction with MAP.

With MAP there shouldn't be any reason why sales managers don't have the time to review all their teams' work. The key is to make the tracking of activity easy to do and results-oriented for both the manager and the salesperson. Now the old saying, "Don't expect what you don't inspect" really hits home and tells us to read the writing on the wall!

EXECUTIVE • SUMMARY

HOW MAP BENEFITS SALES REPS

☐ The most critical part of using the MAP is for the sales reps to be honest in making sure any account posted is a qualified account.

☐ Make sure that the first stage of the MAP is always generating new activity. A rep who has only two or three accounts in this stage from week to week will see poor results in the final closing stage.

☐ Each sales rep can now see on the MAP (which is posted on his wall) an entire picture of account activity. This is a visual, constant reminder of how they stand on quota for the month and where they need to be!

☐ Moving the account cards across the board gives the rep a feeling of accomplishment, especially when the card goes from the proposal stage to the closing stage.

☐ Writing the date of each meeting on the card tells the rep how long their accounts have been sitting in each stage. This is especially helpful for sales managers monitoring the board; they can take down unqualified accounts, or strategize with the rep on how to move them across the MAP. Also, deficiencies in sales skills become obvious. For example, too many cards for too long in the proposal stage shows that the rep has a problem in the area of closing.

☐ Probably the most useful part of the MAP is posting monthly and yearly goals under the account board. This lets you compare sales activity with the goals. Now the rep has a complete track to run on and can see the relationship between effort and results.

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