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SALES GUIDE:

HOW TO MASTER OUTBOUND SALES WITHOUT A BDR (YET)

Enterprise Playbook Series

INTRODUCTION

There's a lot written about how to build an enterprise sales organization - specifically geared to later-stage startups looking to scale a Business Development Representative (BDR) team or hire a VP of Sales (including our own Work-Bench Enterprise Sales Playbooks).

As Seed-stage enterprise investors at Work-Bench, one of the biggest mistakes we see founders make is hiring BDRs too early in hopes the addition of a dedicated outbound sales team will help produce and close more leads. What founders don't realize is that hiring, training, and managing a BDR team is a heavy and time-consuming lift. Defining the target ideal customer profile (ICP) and crafting effective messaging should be pre-established by the founder before brining on any BDRs (as this strategic process is not be their responsibility).

This Enterprise Playbook outlines how Seed-stage enterprise software startup founders can conquer founder-led sales by experimenting with the sales process until they have defined a successful and scalable playbook, all before hiring a fleet of BDRs.

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OVERVIEW:
SALES AT THE SEED STAGE

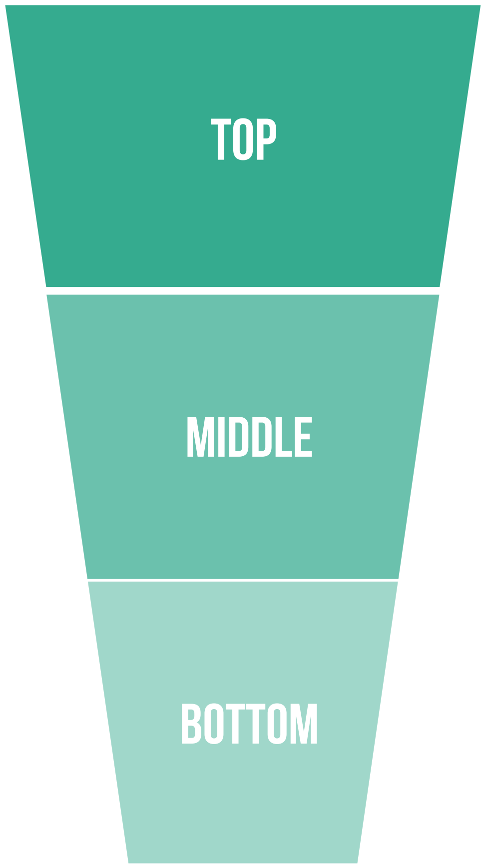
GENERALLY, AT THE SEED STAGE:

- You have figured out early product market fit
- You are resource constrained (for time, budget, resources, etc.), so you need to figure out go-to-market fit as thoughtfully and as efficiently as possible
- Your sales team is just you (the founder)

PMF: HOW DO YOU KNOW?

1. Pay You Money
2. Use Your Product
3. Say Good Things To Peers
4. Retention

Read more on finding product- and go-to- market fit: Bob Tinker's "3 Acts of Growth: Lessons, Patterns & Mistakes from a 3x Entrepreneur"



The key to sales success at the Seed stage is to run thoughtful experiments that allow you to communicate with prospective customers and understand how to move deals down the sales funnel.

Top of Funnel: Awareness

- It may be tempting to bring in as many leads as possible. However, quality is more important than quantity - you don't want leads that are not a good fit (not part of your initial ICP).

Middle of Funnel: Consideration

- Focus on moving qualified leads down the funnel to close, while either removing non-qualified leads all together or moving them into a nurture program if there's potential for them to become a prospect later on.

Bottom of Funnel: Close

- Focus on getting closed-won deals. Don't waste too much time building a strong top of funnel if these leads fall out throughout the process, or you don't have the bandwidth to appropriately follow each qualified lead through the funnel.

THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOCUSED ON TOP OF FUNNEL.

Once you define the playbook for bringing in qualified leads at Top of Funnel, you can scale your sales team. Until then, stay as lean as possible with founder-led sales.

STEPS TO EXECUTE YOUR FOUNDER-LED STRATEGY:

1. DEFINE YOUR INITIAL ICP AND WHO TO TARGET.
2. FIGURE OUT THE BEST WAYS TO REACH THEM.
3. CRAFT THE MOST EFFECTIVE EMAIL MESSAGING.

OVERVIEW: HOW TO CREATE A REPEATABLE FOUNDER-LED SALES STRATEGY

At the Seed stage, you've had a number of sales conversations with prospects. Now, it's important to analyze these conversations. Sit down and complete a "20 Deal Grind." This means walking through 20 deals (wins, losses or stalls) - who's the customer, why did they buy now, why didn't they buy now, how did you engage with them, what messaging was most effective? After a few quarters of doing a "20 Deal Grind" you should see patterns including the category with most urgency and volume.

1 Who are you selling to? Define your ICP.

- Buyer title or seniority
- Size of company
- Geography
- Tech stack
- Industry
- Pain points

2 How do you engage with them? Pick your platform.

- Email
- LinkedIn
- Phone call / text
- Other social media platforms

3 What do you say to them? Find the most effective messaging.

- Test email subject lines
- Test email body: Template vs. personalization, and length
- Call to action: Demo, white boarding session, etc.

STEP 1:
DEFINE YOUR ICP & WHO TO TARGET

Figure out the "signals" that makes a prospect a likely buyer:

Utilize **social media** (including Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, conference talk recordings) to help research more personal information about a prospect - what are their likes/dislikes, what type of personality do they have, etc.). Also leverage LinkedIn to see if they have mutual connections with a prospect and then utilize that connection to make a warm intro.

Prioritize time with individual prospects and accounts based on where you can win in the next two quarters.

Prioritize based on:

- Who has the most acute pain
- Who has the most referencability and where will give you the biggest beachhead
- If there are any compelling events in your target accounts (ie. new executives 2 - 10 months on the job as they are often settled in enough and now looking to make an impact in their first year)

Know your product limitations and avoid prospects who will not buy or will churn based on those limitations:

- Product maturity
- Security and compliance certifications (ie. SOC 1 and 2) or features
- Tech stack and integrations capabilities

EXAMPLE: IDEAL PROSPECT SOURCED ON LINKEDIN

Experience

Canva
2 yrs 1 mo

Director- RPA - Platform Delivery
Full-time
Apr 2022 - Present · 8 mos

Within 10 months of a new role, which shows they have budget for new tools/projects.

Skills: Blue Prism · Agile Project Management · UAT Coordination · User Acceptance Testing · Agile Testing · Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

Manager- Digital Automation
Full-time
Nov 2021 - Present · 1 yr 1 mo
Oriskany, New York, United States

Lead and manage a team of skilled PA Configurators and Business Analyst to deliver digital solutions to different Lines of Business across | Canva. Responsibilities include establishing an PA delivery roadmap, working on budget & costs, collaborating with the Solution Design and Infrastructure teams to present and utilize new technology, and ensuring the team operates in agile work frame.

STEP 1:
BUILD A TARGET ACCOUNT LIST (TAL)

Knowing the different “signals” for your ICP now allows you to create a specific and targeted ICP list.

Tools and services for searching and collecting sales leads:

- Pitchbook
- Crunchbase
- Apollo
- ZoomInfo
- LinkedIn Sales Navigator
- Leadfeeder
- Seamless.ai
- Looker
- Lusha
- RocketReach
- Clearbit
- People Data Labs

FURTHER READING | How to Build the Ultimate Sales Prospect List by ZoomInfo

STEP 2:
DETERMINE YOUR OUTREACH STRATEGY

Start with highly personalized, individual messages:

Emailing personalized messages at a slower pace. This is best in the earliest days when you may not have enough customer proof points yet and you need to do in-depth research on each individual prospect to determine if they are a fit.

Then move into scalable messages:

Templatizing certain aspects of your emails, while incorporating some personalized elements to ensure your emails stand out. See more on slide 14.

Avoid the 'Spray and Pray':

Emailing at aggressive scale or using automation with no personalization. While this might be a faster strategy, high bounce rates, low open rates, and unsubscribes, will start to mark your emails as spam, hurting you in the long-run.

FURTHER READING | Sequence Example Copy by Sam Nelson

STEP 2:
DETERMINE YOUR OUTREACH STRATEGY

While it's common to send emails directly from your own domain/email provider at the start, as you scale your outbound sales efforts operations, continuing to send high volume (hundreds or more) emails in this direct manner will result in your emails getting caught in spam filters or not getting delivered at all due to IP blacklisting.

To avoid this, you need to create a sales and marketing email tech stack. Tools and services for sending emails:

FULL STACK SOLUTIONS

Sales Engagement Tools:

- Outreach
- Salesloft
- Groove
- Apollo

Marketing Automation Platforms:

- Hubspot
- Marketo
- Pardot
- Less common, but becoming increasingly popular:
  - Braze
  - Iterable
  - Customer.io

COMPONENT / POINT SOLUTIONS

Email writing tools:

- Lavender

Email APIs / Deliverability Services:

- Sendgrid
- Mailchimp Transactional Email

STEP 3: CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

FIRST TOUCH EMAIL OR LINKEDIN MESSAGE:

This is by far the most important touchpoint and if done properly, will increase the success of follow ups.

- Open by referencing the prospects background (Blogs, Talks, LinkedIn posts or skills, Social Media, etc.)
- Mention the hypothesis for their target pain
- Clearly state how your solution solves that pain
- End by asking for product feedback or a whiteboarding session. Asking for a consultative meeting vs. a sales meeting or demo helps establish a relationship.
- Make sure every email adds value to the prospects day! Leave them with a guide, blog post, case study, etc.

IT TAKES AN AVERAGE OF 7 TOUCHPOINT TO BOOK A MEETING!

FOLLOW-UPS:

Emails: These can be mostly automated. For high-value targets, add manual steps later in the process.

Calls: While cold calling can be grueling and more difficult than ever now that office phones are extinct, follow up phone calls are still a potential follow up method that allows prospects to ask questions quickly and opens up the conversation for technical questions that are more difficult to elaborate on over email. Test out cold calling - if success is low, move onto “warm calling” only prospects who have previously engaged with team or content and gained qualified status.

RED FLAGS THAT WILL USHER YOUR EMAILS INTO SPAM FILTERS

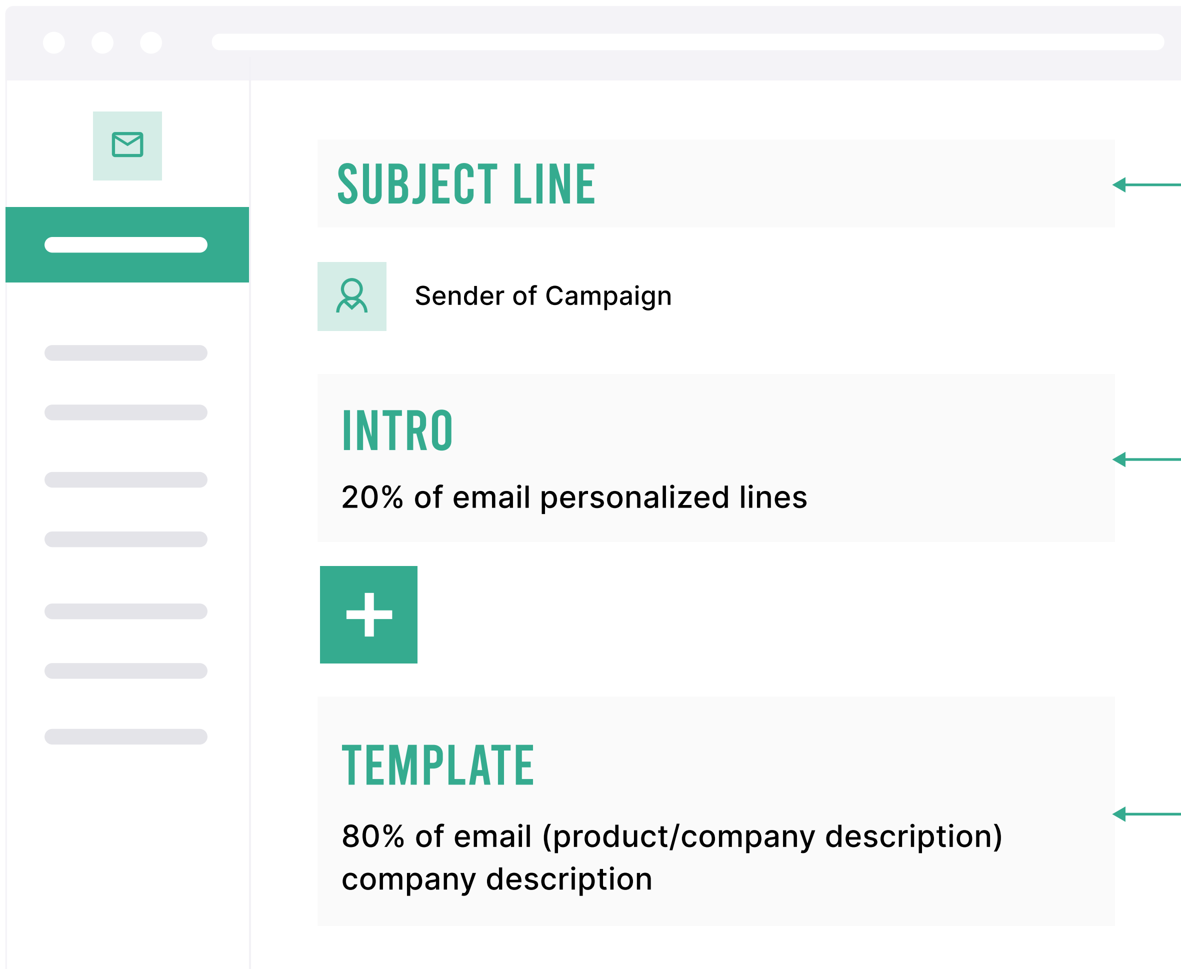
To avoid spam filters, avoid the following:

- No email signature
- Too many links in the email body
- Sending too many emails too fast (Ie. 1000 emails per minute is too fast, schedule 5 emails per minute)
- Using the same subject line for every email
- Sending emails directly from your domain (Ie. Use deliverability tools like SendGrid)

FURTHER READING

The Ultimate List of 394 Email Spam Trigger Words to Avoid in 2021 by HubSpot

TEMPLATE: HIGH IMPACT EMAIL



Subject lines can be tricky, some tips include:

- Keep it short; 3-5 words, if possible
- Write in a human way - lowercase, casual language
- Directly reference the company or prospect’s name
- Include a call-to-action
- Ambiguity is OK

This is the “attention grabber” and allows for detailed, personalization off the bat:

- Why are you reaching out this company or individual?
- What problem can you help them solve?
- What are you asking form them?
- How can you tap into their personal goals and tie that into the product’s value proposition?
- Sell your product’s value, not just features

This is the “information download” and allows for succinct, standardized messaging, as well as speedy emails for scale.

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EXAMPLE:
FOLLOW UP EMAIL

-----Forwarded message-----
From: [redacted]
Date: Fri, Oct 21, 2022 at 10:54 AM
Subject: CX RPA Initiatives
To: [redacted]

Hey [customer first name],

Noticed that you recently joined the team at **[customer]** - congrats on the new(ish) role!

I'm reaching out because I noticed your tenure as an RPA developer at various organizations. Given your goal is to help teams be more efficient through the use of automation in an attempt to find operating efficiencies and your advocacy of RPA, I thought it might be beneficial to connect.

Personalize & show that you did your homework

Not sure how familiar you are with **[company]**, but we're helping teams like yours automate their CX workflows. The RPA platform acts as the connective tissue between your existing CX tools for ticketing, alerting, task management, and documentation. I noticed that you posted about the importance of throughput between tickets - **[company]** helps CX teams continue these efforts for faster ticket resolution and increased throughput.

Think of **[company]** as your CX admin and scribe, taking point on pulling in the right people, updating stakeholders, creating tickets, and documenting everything. Within just a few clicks in Slack, specific automations are generated for responders based on severity and impacted parties. The idea is that responding to issues is standardized across the org. Given the intended growth of your team as you're currently hiring, this would ensure that no matter the tenure of the responder, they have a standardized, repeatable, well-informed process to follow.

And, as you run your post-mortems, the insights (i.e., key communication, major milestones, metrics + data, etc.) are already generated meaning less time sifting through the noise and more time learning from the incident.

Introduce the solution & tailor to the customer's problem

I also saw that you're evaluated, tested, and implemented emerging technologies and thought you might be open to what we've built thus far. No expectations of signing the dotted line, rather a chance to show you how similar teams increase efficiency, resolve tickets faster, scale alongside growing teams, and go from there.

Would you be open to chatting some time in the next week or two? Happy to send over lunch/coffee to you while we enjoy the chat.

Level-set and propose next steps

EXAMPLE:

FOLLOW UP EMAIL

-----Forwarded message-----
From: [redacted]
Date: Fri, Oct 21, 2022 at 11:11 AM
Subject: Following up on [customer] case study
To: [redacted]

Hi **[name]**,

I just read your **[customer]** case study entitled RPA without RPA and know we can help remove some of the operational burdens your teams are still facing. It was pretty fascinating to read about the evolution of **[customer]** customer-engagement operations teams have gone through over the past decade and where you've identified as room for further improvement. Some of the outstanding challenges are things our platform can help alleviate.

Personalize & show that you did your homework

Integral to that is your ticketing management process and the manual effort required for post-mortems that you highlight in the case study. **[Company]** manages the full lifecycle of a ticket directly from within Slack. We essentially allow you to automate your Ops-in-Squads and On-Call Handbooks removing toil, headaches, and confusion.

We, like you, understand the importance of service-oriented customer engagement. Our platform allows you to notify the appropriate knowledge experts, escalate tickets when needed, and provide clear communication when it matters most. The idea is that responding to issues is standardized across squads.

Introduce the solution & tailor to the customer's problem

I'd love to schedule some time to show you our platform as you "continue to experiment to find the best solution"! I can even send you a whiteboard for your time!

Would you be open to learning how we can help your team increase throughout with less manual burden?

Regards,

[Name]

Level-set and propose next steps

WHEN TO HIRE YOUR FIRST BDR

WHEN DO YOU KNOW IT'S TIME TO HIRE YOUR FIRST BDR?

1. You've defined your initial ICP
2. You've developed your product messaging

   *Note: Your ICP and product messaging will likely evolve a lot at this early stage, so just make sure you have a solid direction a BDR can run with at the start

3. You've developed a repeatable sales process - email templates and phone scripts, and early outbound email experiments have been successful
4. You have enough demand coming in, but the founder(s) no longer have the time / capacity to work through all the leads
5. You have someone the BDR can handoff the prospect to once they are ready for a demo (this can be the founder or an AE)

FOUNDING & SEED | SERIES A | BEYOND

*Note: These stages are approximate and can vary pending your industry, team, funding, etc.

FOUNDER-LED SALES

Founders are responsible for the end-to-end sales process, including researching prospects and cold outreach, qualifying inbound and warm introductions, and closing the deal.

HIRE YOUR FIRST BDRS

Once you have a sales process in place, hire entry level sales reps - BDRs. Have them test, iterate, and ultimately repeat this sales process.

EXPAND YOUR SALES TEAM

Hire experienced sales reps - AEs with 1-4 years of experience.

HIRE A SENIOR SALES LEADER

Once your sales team is scaling consistently, hire a Head of, VP of, or Director of Sales. Do NOT hire a VP of Sales before you have a repeatable sales motion in place.

FURTHER READING

When You SHOULD hire a VP of Sales: By SaasStr's Jason Lemkin: here & here
Emergence Capital's Doug Landis: here

CONCLUSION & KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Prioritize quality versus quantity outreach by emphasizing relationship building (this can also mean sending swag, gift cards for coffee, etc.).
- Be persistent with touch points so that the prospect is repeatedly hit with valuable information without asking for anything in return; this allows relationship building.
- Remember that there are no silver bullets. At the end of the day, there are best practices to founder-led sales and outbound to increase the rate of new prospects in the sale funnel, but there's are no shortcuts to sales success.

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ABOUT WORKBENCH

Work-Bench is an enterprise venture capital firm based in New York City. We lead $3M - $6M Seed rounds in enterprise software startups throughout the country. We are laser focused on supporting early-stage startups on all things go-to-market and have built a dynamic enterprise tech community in New York City and beyond.

Sign up for the Work-Bench Enterprise Weekly Newsletter, to stay up-to-date on all things enterprise tech with 20K+ subscribers.

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