



TRANSLATE GROWTH AND PROFIT STRATEGIES INTO SALES ACTION

How to Use Data and
Artificial Intelligence to
Reimagine Sales Growth

WHITEPAPER



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For B2B companies to compete and win, executives must have a means to tie their strategies to how sales teams engage with customers through each interaction. Yet companies lack a systematic, scalable way to do so.

If the company strategy is to increase profitability and revenue, how should that impact prices and sales decisions across various customer types, multiple channels, agreements, regions, products, and much more? How should those actions change to meet P&L goals as costs change, demand spikes or plummets, volume growth stagnates, or new competitors sneak in?

Ideally, guidance reflecting corporate strategy would be immediately disseminated across channels, and tailored to all the various, and sometimes competing, market realities that can be present at once across a business.

IS CLOSING THE STRATEGY-EXECUTION GAP A B2B FABLE?

The example above is a notion that business executives know well – closing the gap between corporate strategies and sales actions. Yet, truly achieving this state can feel akin to trying to find the fabled lost city of gold. *Harvard Business Review*¹ put the conundrum well:

“Even the most brilliant strategy is worth nothing if it isn’t executed well, especially by your front line — the employees who interact daily with your customers. Unfortunately, these employees are regularly asked to execute strategies that others developed and that they may not understand, never mind feel committed or connected to. In fact, according to Robert Kaplan and David Norton, the founders of the Balanced Scorecard, only 5% of employees understand their company’s strategy.”

While this excerpt was written ten years ago, it’s still widely applicable today. Why? Because despite significant investments in mobile, eCommerce and sales intelligence technology – a market estimated to reach \$5 billion by 2027² – companies still lack a centralized, connected solution.

However, software, data science and AI have made significant, pragmatic advances to address challenges in the complex and dynamic B2B business landscape. The result being that **it is possible to translate growth and profit strategies into sales action**. It just requires an inquisitive mind to discover the solution and reimagine what’s possible.

In this whitepaper, we’ll explore why significant investments and traditional means have failed to close the strategy-execution gap and share how you can use software, data and AI to achieve what wasn’t previously possible.



COMPLEXITY AND DISCONNECTS FAIL TO CLOSE THE GAP

Before you can cast a vision for how to translate executive strategy into action, it's important to consider why investments and methods have been ineffective.

From the executive's perspective, the goals of the company are clear: Increase revenue growth, do it profitably, stave off competitors, and grow market share. Sounds simple, right? Not so simple for sales reps on the front line. For strategies to be realized, each sales rep must sell the right products to the right customers, at the right moment, at the right price.

To give sales reps better information to meet those ends, companies have traditionally relied on back-office staff to give sales reps information in the form of spreadsheets, or perhaps discrete reports from a business intelligence tool.

These teams, typically, the pricing analysts, sales operations, category managers, product managers, marketing promotion managers, business intelligence analysts and more, are tasked with a creating guidance for the sales teams to help them sell smarter. This is often an extremely time intensive and manual effort for the analysts, which generally falls flat.

The problem with manual approaches in complex B2B environments is that it's impossible to identify all of the opportunities for sales growth across all customers and products. Consider a large B2B company with 500,000 products and 20,000 customers. There are more than one billion potential sales decisions to make. Given the sheer volume and complexity, these teams can't possibly perform analysis and generate guidance at the pace of change within a modern business.

On top of the analysis challenge, there is the challenge of speed and consistency. Each back-office team is creating sales guidance for discrete goals, and once set, must disseminate that information across multiple channels. The result for sales reps, then, is a mountain of various reports and promotional flyers that they must sift through before they can begin selling. According to HubSpot, only 39 percent of a sales reps' time is spent selling. Sales reps aren't analysts, and despite their best efforts, can't reasonably know precisely what to sell, when to sell it, and how to sell it. When reports are emailed out to sales reps, they are rarely actionable, and therefore are ignored.

Throw in new eCommerce and self-service channels and the challenge for the back office only gets more complicated. Now, they must determine product, pricing, sales and promotional guidance that is consistent with sales guidance, while meeting customer expectations for a consumer-like experience in terms of pricing and recommendations.

The result is that, despite significant investments, executives still struggle to ensure that their sales growth strategies are fulfilled with every commercial interaction.

HOW TO TRANSLATE SALES AND PRICING STRATEGIES INTO ACTION

Enterprising companies, however, are embracing a new centralized approach that uses AI to generate sales growth intelligence faster and bridges discrete strategies and systems to drive specific actions across the entire customer lifecycle.

Zilliant Sales IQ™ uses advanced data science to determine which customers have incremental revenue opportunities and what products and quantities customers should be buying. As a result, Sales IQ customers typically see a 5 to 15 percent increase in same customer sales. The solution can generate a wide swath of customer actions, including:

- Prospecting or whitespace actions to determine the best fit products for prospects
- Recovery actions to identify when customer defection begins
- Growth actions to determine what a customer should be buying
- Win-back actions for tailored product pitches for lost business
- Inventory actions for the targeted selling of excess inventory
- Contract compliance for contracts not meeting volume commitments
- Product substitutions for the targeted selling of preferred brands or substitutes

When used in conjunction with **Zilliant Campaign Manager™**, the guidance from Sales IQ and other sources can be translated into direct, multi-channel actions. Users can create and manage campaigns, each with their own set of action types, thresholds, customer and product scopes, and talk tracks. This includes informing sellers about what to sell, when to sell it and how to sell it. It includes publishing timebound customer-specific, highly personalized promotional pricing and product recommendations on your eCommerce site. It includes building ultra-targeted, personalized marketing offers and ensuring customer agreements and quotes have the most current and relevant pricing.

To set these campaigns, users can leverage insights generated from price optimization, price management or predictive sales analytics to inform their campaigns or upload custom-defined actions from any source and publish those actions into any business system. Robust closed-loop tracking and reporting capabilities provide managers with the financial metrics they need to maximize campaign and sales team performance, and ensure corporate objectives are being met. And, closed-loop feedback from previous campaigns can be used to inform the prioritization and delivery of subsequent campaigns.

There are a wide variety of use cases for Campaign Manager, some of the most prominent include: guided selling, targeting marketing campaigns, moving excess inventory, eCommerce site promotions, and contract compliance. With these use cases at hand, companies can drive significant improvements in realizing strategy across the customer lifecycle, including: Acquiring new customers and expanding customer wallet-share, retaining and upselling existing customer accounts and maturing customer relationships while winning back lost business.

With advanced technology and data science at hand, it is possible to translate growth and profit strategies into sales action.

To learn more about Sales IQ,
visit www.zilliant.com/products/salesiq

To learn more about Campaign Manager,
visit www.zilliant.com/products/campaignmanager

Reference

¹Harvard Business Review, "Making Your Strategy Work on the Frontline," June 24, 2010

²Grandview Research, "Sales Intelligence Market Size," August 2020