

Make your SKO a catalyst for sales growth

Planning your sales kick off or annual sales meeting?

Latest [research](#) from the Sales Management Association identifies the factors that set apart effective SKOs from the rest. This article builds on the research with actionable examples to make your SKO a success.

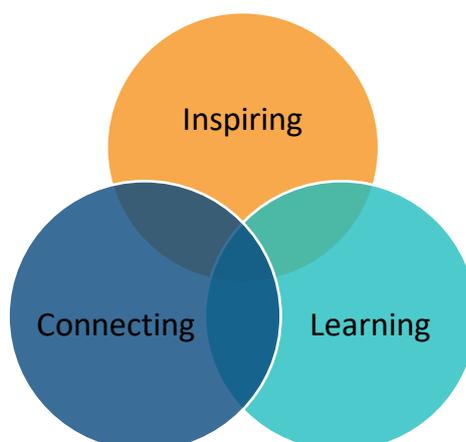
To highlight two key takeaways from the '[Best practices in annual sales meetings](#)' report:

1. There are five characteristics that highly correlate with sales kick off effectiveness:
 - i. The ability to accurately measure ASM (annual sales meeting) effectiveness
 - ii. Incorporating participant feedback to improve meeting effectiveness
 - iii. Effective planning
 - iv. Early planning
 - v. Considering an ASM essential to the sales organization's success

Obvious and common sense? Probably. Always done? Not according to the study.

2. Educating and training salespeople score high in importance yet show the biggest gaps between importance and effectiveness. The report, in fact, marks these as two of the top three areas for improvement. As a result, training and education is a key focus of this article.

Ninety-three percent of companies use their SKO to set the strategic focus for the sales organisation. From the research and my experience of supporting, facilitating and attending SKOs, this usually translates into three inter-related goals:



So, how do you make your SKO a true catalyst for sales performance?

First things first

Plan your SKO for the year not the week.

A. Purpose

It's important to be clear about why you are holding an SKO. 'Because we always do' is not a good enough answer. Do you have clarity and consensus on these questions?

- Which business goals does the SKO need to support?
- Do we have focus around one or two 'big bets' or a clear unifying theme that aligns to these goals?
- What are the priority outcomes for the event?
 - i.e. As a result of the event, what do we want our salespeople to
 - Know?
 - Do?
 - Believe?
- Do we have commitment and sponsorship that recognizes the importance of the SKO?

Use these answers to guide the format and content of your event. Find different delivery platforms or events for topics that don't support these objectives.

Early planning and bringing in the right stakeholders will make a big difference here. The report identifies that many SKOs are 'overweighted' on sales leadership's input to theme and focus so consider who else can bring value.

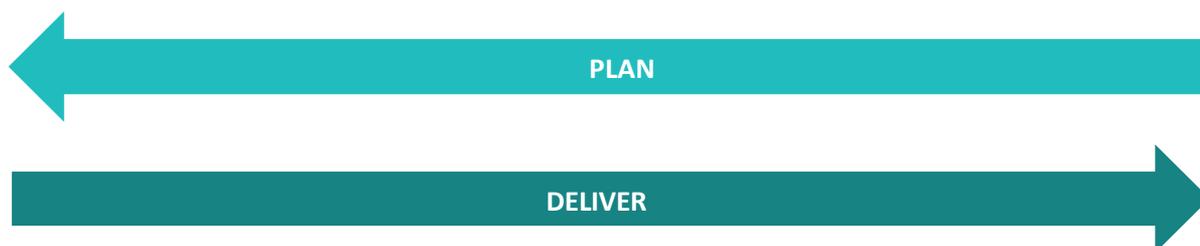
B. Measures of success

Only 20% of companies surveyed can accurately measure the effectiveness of their SKO but those that can have more effective SKOs.

An SKO should be about accelerating your performance through the financial year, not about putting on a standalone event. You should therefore associate metrics to the calls to action in your SKO. In practice, that means defining your success in terms of behavioral and performance outcomes through the year.

A useful path is the High Performance Learning Journey, developed by [Robert Brinkerhoff](#). Planning from right to left and delivering from left to right, this model facilitates clear performance steps.

Learning objectives	Behavioral outcomes	Performance outcomes	Business outcomes
<p>As a result of the learning, the sales team will Know / Do / Believe...</p> <p>e.g. Reps will know the top three qualification criteria for the new proposition</p>	<p>The sales team will perform the following actions</p> <p>e.g. Reps will follow the new qualification process for all new opportunities</p>	<p>We will deliver against performance indicators</p> <p>e.g. Reps will generate a pipeline of \$X for the new proposition within X months</p>	<p>We will deliver measurable business results</p> <p>e.g. We will generate revenue of \$X from the new proposition by the end of the year with X new reference accounts</p>



Brinkerhoff High Performance Learning Journey

Being clear on purpose and metrics is the first step. Then you can design the format and content accordingly.

Practical steps

In this section you'll find proven tips to design the 'before, during and after' to deliver measurable impact.

Create a two-way learning environment

Everyone wants a slot at your SKO! As a result, the agenda often gets crammed full of one-way presentations. Worst case, those presentations are ill-prepared, disjointed 'death by PowerPoint'. Best case, it's good relevant content, well-delivered. But, honestly, how much attention is anyone paying by the afternoon of day two? Especially if reps have travelled from a different time zone and spent most of last night in the bar (or catching up on emails)?

To be more statistical about it. Much research, including the work of Robert Brinkerhoff into [High impact learning](#) shows that if you treat training as a one-off event, only around 15% of training attendees actually do anything different as a result. That's not going to give you an ROI on your SKO or make your revenue numbers. Brinkerhoff and others all demonstrate that the way to develop and embed behavior change is to make it a continuous process. Involve Sales Enablement, L&D or training partners early and center to help create the right learning environment.

This underlines the fact that a SKO should not be considered a standalone event. It's part of an overall process of learning, sharing, connecting and inspiring through the year. Otherwise it's no more effective than new year's resolutions abandoned before January is over.

During the event

1. Focus on engaging, participative content that will help the team execute on the strategy.

- Reduce one-way presentations and ensure every remaining presentation has a clear goal and call to action based on your SKO purpose. Consider recording and sharing presentations in advance and using the time at SKO for deeper discussion or workshops.
- Choose only presenters who really bring value. Consider inviting well-briefed presenters who can add a different external perspective.

For instance

- Partners, suppliers or customers sharing their trends, goals, experiences, pain points or feedback.
 - Expert facilitators or trainers who are aligned to your messaging or methodology.
- Increase participation and discussion. Connecting and relationship building is a key purpose of many SKOs and for that you need dialogues not monologues. Don't shy away from encouraging dialogue for fear of negativity. If that's your concern and it's well-grounded, it's going to happen anyway - behind your back where you won't be able to surface and address it. Provide strong facilitation and create opportunities to learn by doing.

For instance:

- Prepare high performing sales people to share key wins. In my experience most sales reps have scant understanding of how their colleagues are winning business yet find this highly useful. Run this as an interview with Q&A to create a more interesting dynamic and keep the rep on message.
- Create participative break-outs and round tables where you can explore different views, ideas and questions around key topics.
- Provide opportunities for execs to sit down in conversation with reps.
- Set exercises for reps to produce recommendations to meet goals or overcome challenges.
- Run panel discussions to involve more team members. These should be informative for colleagues and give a platform to recognize the star performers in the teams.

As an example, I worked with a company who held a moderated panel discussion in which team members from different departments – from SDRs to Customer Success - shared how they had implemented the sales methodology introduced through the previous year.
- Make it competitive. Create a sense of urgency and competition with challenges or contests that anyone can win, rather than something biased towards current top performers.

2. Be pragmatic and focused.

- Don't attempt too much. Less is more. Allow time for questions and breaks. It's impossible for an entire SKO to only take a 5 minute comfort break!

In summary, most people retain very little of what they hear one-way. If learning is a key objective, make it interactive. Bring in L&D, Sales Enablement or external help to follow best practice. One

common concern about increasing the level of interaction is that it takes more time – both in preparation and delivery. That’s true, but the time saved by simply delivering presentations is a false economy. Reps, in particular, are used to being out and about, in conversation, doing things - so give them topics they can discuss and act on.

To run the SKO in this way, it’s important to plan effectively beforehand.

Before the SKO

According to the report, companies that plan effectively have a success rate around three times the rate of those who don’t. Early planning too is a key success factor. Along with the topics already highlighted in ‘First things first’, follow these practical steps.

1. Involve the sales team

Get rep input to make sure the event is relevant and you have their buy-in. After all, people tend to be more supportive of their own ideas! Encourage those you have involved to enthuse their colleagues.

2. Align and set expectations

Often salespeople turn up at the SKO with no clear expectations. At best, an agenda they looked at the night before. Be clear about purpose and expected outcomes. Communicate how reps will benefit from taking the time out of the field. Establish accountability for what you expect reps to do post-SKO.

3. Prepare

Sales people are busy but, if you give them the right amount of time and clear direction, there’s no reason why you can’t set some prep work before the SKO. It will make your event much more effective.

For instance

- Move one-way presentations to short and punchy video on demand to be watched in advance. Use the time at SKO to drill down deeper, answer more considered questions, gauge commitment and work on putting information into action.
- Share content and collateral for pre-reading.
- Ask reps to prepare questions and recommendations for executing on certain SKO objectives e.g. their ideas for overcoming specific barriers or winning against competitors.
- Prepare Sales Managers and Team Leaders to coach. Set clear expectations and accountability along with the support available to help them to execute. The ability and commitment of line managers to reinforce and embed change is essential to success in any behavioral change process.

4. Plan what happens afterwards

Don’t finish the SKO and then think about follow-up. Have the follow up plan ready to go.

After the SKO

As well as immediate evaluation and feedback to help you prepare for next year's SKO, focus your activities on reinforcing the SKO messages and calls to action.

Communicate

- Follow up on commitments made during SKO.
- Create ongoing communication and collateral. Deliver this via appropriate platforms or repositories so information is easy to find in context and 'on demand'.
- Capture and share wins and losses to support continuous learning.
- Communicate progress regularly.
- Share learning between territories and regions.
- Keep the dialogue two-way.

Reinforce and strengthen

- Ensure managers are coaching and embedding the behaviors you want to see.
- Develop focus or working groups to build on plans started at the SKO.
- Build reinforcement into QBRs and sales meetings. Refresh specific messaging, report on progress and work on call to action topics.
- Publicly reward and recognize successes and important milestones along the way.

Measure

- Correlate behavior change, performance and business outcomes to the SKO objectives.
- Learn from the field and proactively engage sales teams in overcoming obstacles.

The ASM report clearly breaks down the factors that most influence the success of your SKO. Follow these actionable examples to make your SKO more effective and see the results through the year.

The summary overleaf offers a quick checklist for your planning.

SKO as catalyst for sales growth

Here's a quick cheat sheet to make your SKO effective for the year not just the week



- Agree internally that the SKO is essential
- Start planning early
- Involve a wide range of stakeholders who can add value, including input and feedback from sales reps
- Be clear on purpose and priority outcomes
- Define measures of success that align to calls to action and performance
- Design your content around your purpose and priorities
- Create a two-way learning environment
- Involve L&D / sales enablement / external partners to create the right environment
- Align and set expectations
- Give sales reps tasks to prepare for SKO
- Prep your sales managers to reinforce and embed calls to action
- Plan your post-SKO follow up to reinforce key calls to action

- Deliver engaging, participative content
- Reduce one-way presentations to make room for participation and discussion
- Encourage dialogue versus monologue
- Provide opportunities for learning by doing and discussing
- Make it high energy with healthy competition
- Don't attempt too much, be realistic about breaks and energy levels
- Work with L&D / Sales Enablement / external partners during the event to keep learning on track

Communicate:

- Roll out a series of communication, collateral and activities to reinforce calls to action
- Keep the dialogue two-way

Reinforce:

- Support managers to coach and embed the behaviors you want to see
- Build in reinforcement to QBRs and sales meetings
- Share learning, wins and losses across the business

Measure:

- Monitor progress, address obstacles and publicly recognize successes

About Alate

Accelerate sales growth

Our clients are typically in complex, tech B2B sectors and are all looking to grow. Their focus often spans these common goals:

- Scale growth with limited resources — nationally or internationally
- Drive strategic revenue growth into new markets, products or services
- Speed up partner enablement and alignment
- Move from transactional to value-led partnerships
- Integrate sales teams post M&A to increase cross-portfolio sales
- Develop a company-wide, repeatable sales process to connect sales execution to business strategy

Clients



Credentials



How we make an impact

PREPARE

IMPROVE

PERFORM

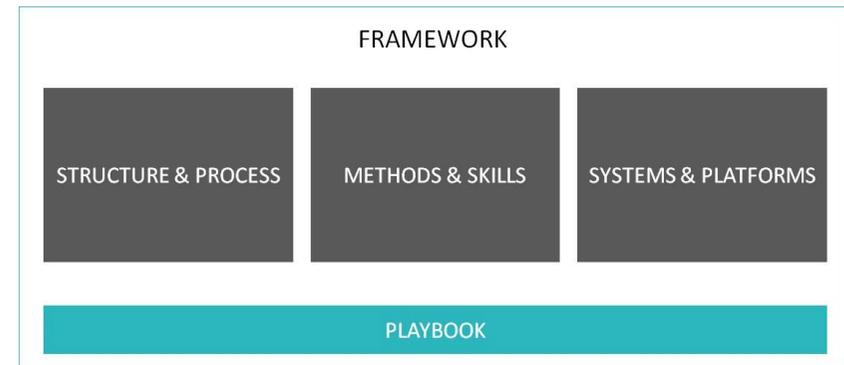
We genuinely tailor our programs to your goals and objectives, your customer buying journeys, your culture and your business.

We begin with the end in mind. Our shared focus is on developing the capability needed to deliver measurable outcomes against your goals.

Using our proven framework, we identify and focus on the things that will make the difference, not methodology for the sake of methodology.

We follow a tried and true approach, including practical consulting, development, training and coaching, which turns our work into your results.

We operationalise your methodology to make it 'business as usual'



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