Sales Playbooks for the 21st Century

Revitalize Playbooks with a User-Centric Approach

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Past vs. Future Playbooks: Why Change?

Since the late 90s, sales playbooks have been dense, content-heavy PDFs peppered with hyperlinks. This format was certainly a vast improvement over paper, both as a reference tool and as training material.

However, people's information consumption habits have changed in the past 15 years. Think of the Google effect: people are far more likely to forget information that they can readily find online—a side effect of having worlds of knowledge at their fingertips as long as they have an Internet connection.

PDF playbooks no longer cut it because they don't really take into account the way people learn, use and retain information.

1. PDF playbooks are too inaccessible and bulky to help with real-time selling situations. Sales reps don't have the time to hunt through different repositories to find the most recent version, much less wade through 20, 30, even 70 pages of content to find the bits they need.

2. The long, static format makes PDF playbooks ineffective reference and support material. Large chunks of information don't play well with human attention spans, or with our limited capacities for storing and retrieving information.

3. PDF playbooks don't offer the interactivity needed to engage sellers and give them the reinforcement they need to retain information for the long haul.

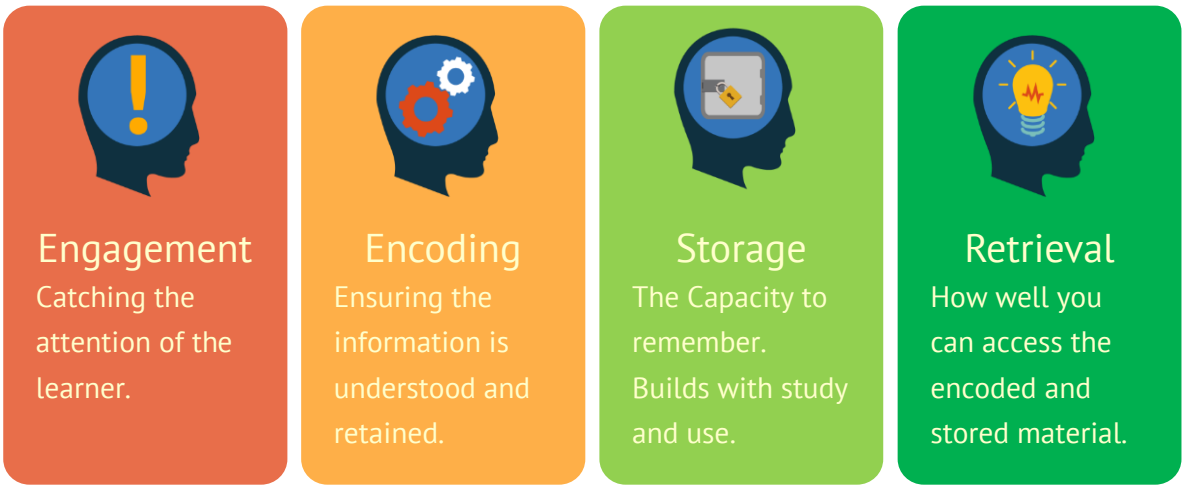
Despite these problems, many companies value playbooks enough that they spend anywhere from $25,000 to $50,000 to develop them, swallowing valuable time and resources from sales, marketing and training staff. These playbooks overwhelmingly focus on content and technical challenges, such as which procedures to document, or how the playbook will be distributed. But this approach ignores the other half of the equation: the human memory challenge.

Integrate Learning Science into Playbook Design

A playbook is not simply a reference tool to help sellers remember product or methodological details. It's an enablement asset—it helps sellers learn how to position and differentiate your products, identify customer challenges, and follow process.

Ensuring that sales reps are actually fluent in these processes requires more than rote memorization. Reps must also be able to pull up relevant information quickly from their memory banks, as well as react appropriately based on context-derived clues. In short, getting reps to remember content is only a small piece of the puzzle.

For a more complete picture of what it takes to get a rep to proficiency, take a look at the four main components of learning:



All four of these stages need to be addressed in order to build a truly effective playbook.

Pro Tip: Avoid the Fluency Illusion

What is it? We think we remember more than we really do.

What causes it? Reviewing the same piece of information again and again isn't good for encoding, but we convince ourselves that we know all of the information we've read and won't learn more.

Why should I care? Reading and re-reading static playbooks facilitates this illusion. Combine this brain glitch with hubris and sales ego, and you have a recipe for under-performing sales reps.

What can I do about it? On-the-job retrieval practice—lots of it. Build in retrieval practice into your playbook using tools such as knowledge checks, flashcard decks, and self-testing modules. Some solutions even allow you to automate retrieval practice by scheduling assigned content at pre-determined intervals.

What It Takes to Make a Great Playbook

To build a playbook that's truly tailored to the way people learn, retain and recall information, keep these important qualities in mind:

Modular Content

Keep your content in short, easily-digested portions so reps can encode the information instead of being overwhelmed.

Retrieval Strength

Build in opportunities for reps to self-test or practice what they've learned, preferably in context, cementing that information in long-term memory.

In Context, On-Demand

Integrate playbook modules into your sellers' daily workflow with guided selling, on-demand and/or real-time support tools.

Modular Content

The brain holds a limited amount of information in short-term memory. Breaking information into micro-content or modules makes it vastly easier for sellers to digest and integrate information into long-term memory.

Don't overload the working memory with irrelevant content. Distill your playbook modules down to the most relevant, applicable messages, and bundle unrelated facts with proof points and associated information to boost retention and make your playbook easier to use.

Retrieval Strength

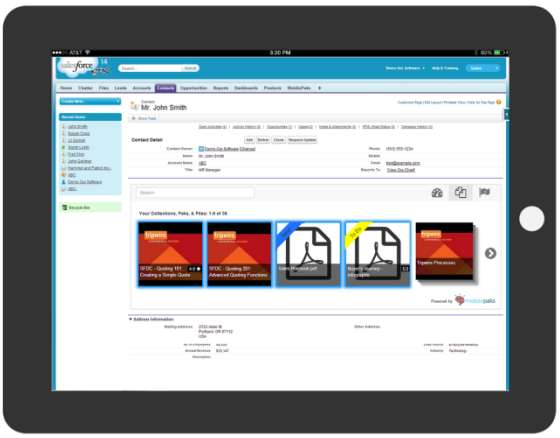
Studies show that making aids short, relevant and easy to digest increases retention to 30%. When sellers can quickly find relevant support and apply it on-the-job, they will not only drive better conversations with prospects and customers, but also increase retention to nearly 90%. Periodic on-the-job reinforcement of knowledge, otherwise known as spacing, improves retention even further, cementing the knowledge in long-term memory.

In Context, On-Demand

According to IDC research, 33% of all unsuccessful client deals could have been won if the salesperson had been better informed and had acted more client-oriented. Even experienced salespeople with mastery of their subject occasionally need support, especially with new products, or opportunities to upsell.

To best enable your sellers in situations like these, ensure your playbook can serve up the most relevant and up-to-date information during crucial, time-sensitive moments.

By incorporating your playbook into a guided selling tool, you'll instantly make it more accessible and relevant to your sales force. Guided selling uses information based on sales stage, prospect information and sales role attributes to



Guided selling systems automatically recommend relevant support based on context-relevant information such as industry, job title and sales stage.

intelligently recommend short bursts of knowledge, job aids and marketing collateral at just the right time.

For example, when an opportunity is assigned to a seller, a guided selling platform will automatically suggest relevant support such as product information, discovery questions, sample success stories or proof points—each item a quick reference that helps the seller hold deeper, more valuable conversations with the prospect.

Adding your playbook modules to a system like this, in addition to a full reference tool, transforms it into something truly interactive. It is no longer a static work, but an efficient system that actively helps sellers have better selling conversations and win more customers.

Track and Measure Usage for Ongoing Improvement and Calculating Content ROI

The modern sales playbook is not a stagnant work; it responds to different needs and circumstances. How it changes and responds is best driven by data and feedback from the users. Modern playbooks should have user behavior tracking built in to monitor which modules are used, as well as a rating system that enables the sales team to provide meaningful feedback. Combining two-way feedback with analytics allows you to identify what works and what's needed so you can fine-tune your playbook and ensure it meets your sales team's needs.

Analytics also allow you to track content ROI. Tracking *who* as well as *what* gives you insight into what top performers use as well as allowing you to correlate content usage to close rates and sales effectiveness. Furthermore, discovering what materials top sellers are actually using can help Product Marketing, Sales Enablement and Training departments so that teams better align and focus their efforts on creating resources that result in increased sales.

Summary

Playbooks perform an indispensable role in training and supporting sales professionals, especially when they're built to accommodate human learning challenges. Building your playbook so it provides a user-centric experience that speeds up learning and maximizes information retention is an investment, but the payoff is enormous. Experienced sellers benefit from real-time reference that helps them engage with customers and prospects more effectively, while new reps can access on-demand information that is relevant to their situation. Your playbook becomes a dynamic resource that helps your salespeople communicate value, differentiate offers and ultimately improve sales effectiveness.

About Veelo

Veelo improves sales effectiveness and productivity with scalable products that help companies develop and deliver the most effective sales enablement content. Based on proven retention science, Veelo solutions are available as stand-alone web applications and can also be integrated with partner portals and CRM systems such as Salesforce, Oracle CRM and Microsoft Dynamics, as well as Marketing Automation Systems such as Marketo and Eloqua. For more information, contact Veelo at 1-855-414-8760 or visit www.veeloinc.com.