

With holidays looming, get your sales pipeline ready for the new year

 By [Louise Robinson](#)

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The calendar had barely ticked over to October when the signs began appearing everywhere: Christmas was around the corner - and it seems to strike earlier every year - on the radio, television, in print ads, and in shops where retailers have already strung up the tinsel and the twinkling lights.

In South Africa, December also heralds the long, end of year summer vacation for universities and schools. Many businesses and industries close up shop in the time between Christmas and New Year, which means that many workers also take their annual leave during that time.

Steps in the sales process

But while employees' thoughts are probably already beginning to drift towards the sun-drenched lounging of beach getaways, this should be the time when you ought to be focusing on getting your company's sales pipelines ready for the new year.

A pipeline in sales basically represents the individual steps of the entire sales process, starting from the time that the initial contact is established with the potential customer (or prospect), to turning that prospect into a lead, and following the steps through all the different stages until the deal is closed and a sale is made.



alphaspirit via [123RF](#)

According to an article on Forbes.com, nearly every company in the world maintains a sales pipeline, and yet few think they are good at managing their pipelines. In fact, in research conducted in conjunction with the Sales Management Association, Forbes found that 63% of executives think that their organisations were ineffective at managing their sales pipelines.

January is traditionally known to be a slow month for sales, since most buyers are still squeezed from holiday spending and trying to pay off debt, so budgets are tight. This is why it is even more crucial that you need to plan ahead to ensure that you will hit the ground running in the new year.

If marketers were to spend just a fraction of the time they devote on planning their holidays and spending it on pipeline building activities such as appointment setting instead, it could help them to bypass the post-holiday sales doldrums altogether. You can begin now already by checking and monitoring your sales pipeline, and by setting up and booking appointments with qualified leads for early in the new year. Besides, that's the one advantage of selling B2B: just like you, they also have to run year-round, so the chances are they will need to buy something in January. And hopefully you might be able to offer that needed product or service to them.

Gather and clean data

Of course, just because you are focused and planning ahead does not mean that your prospects will be. So there will be those of your prospects who might give you the brush off during the appointment setting process and tell you to call them back after the holidays. In that instance, don't lose heart. But also don't just merely wait and give them that follow-up call early in the new year saying: you told me to call back; because chances are they will not remember and just put you off again. Instead, use the time to research them and find out what service or product you can offer them that can best solve a problem for them or serve them well and come at them with that pitch.

In addition, the holiday shutdown period is a perfect opportunity to gather and/or clean data. The quiet December period is ideal to clean existing data or gather new data, because even though most businesses only employ skeleton staff over this time, you can collect and collate the basic information.

There is good news for procrastinators too. Research conducted by Software Advice and which was released in a report called "B2B Buyer Behaviour Industry View Report", found that traffic (measured on the [Software Advice website](#)) was higher than average until two days before Christmas Eve, and that conversions that came in the week before Christmas qualified at the same rate as the average for business days in the month of December.

It might not be pleasant to work during the holiday season, but as those statistics show, it might just pay off.

ABOUT LOUISE ROBINSON

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