



THE FRICTIONLESS PIPELINE

“The game is no longer about sales productivity; it’s about orchestration.

Productivity is the outcome of doing the right thing at the right time with the right stakeholders.”

PASCAL PERSYN

1. The Challenge: Complexity, Timing & Wrong Focus

Sales performance is under pressure not because teams lack effort, but because they are **doing the right things at the wrong time**. The world of buying has changed radically. Yet, most organizations still operate on outdated, linear sales processes designed for predictable, single-stakeholder deals.

- **Buying cycles are diverse and unpredictable.** Each deal differs in complexity: buying group size, deal size, market maturity, product complexity, pricing logic, and channel setup. Together, these variables create *fuzzy logic*. Meaning every deal follows a unique path.
- **Traditional sales processes no longer apply.** Linear steps of sales, static CRM stages, and percentage-based forecasting ignore *buying cycle variability*. These systems assume predictability where none exists.
- **Two core sources of friction:**
 - **Wrong timing** → Sales actions occur too late or too early.
 - **Missing actions** → Key moments in the buying process go unaddressed because they don't fit the rigid process.

The game is no longer about sales productivity; it's about *orchestration*. Productivity is the *outcome* of doing the right thing at the right time with the right stakeholders.

2. Root Causes of Pipeline Friction

From analyzing over **15,000 opportunities**, nine recurring mistakes stand out:

1. Late entry in the buying cycle → influencing too late, after decisions are largely made.
2. Lack of buying center coverage → selling through one sponsor instead of a group of 6 to 20 influencers.
3. No diagnosis of context → unclear on the customer's trigger, pain, or why-change rationale.
4. Discovery focused on what we can sell, not on *why the customer should change*.

5. Too-early proposals → issued before criteria are defined, leading to discount pressure.
6. Missing insight into buying process milestones and decision criteria.
7. No quantification of value or impact.
8. Lack of visibility on balance of power and negotiation leverage.
9. Pipeline measurement via deal stage percentages → a flawed model for unpredictable cycles.

Diagnosis: Sales teams act as *proposal factories* instead of *value facilitators*. Management measures activity volume and forecast coverage rather than buying readiness and conversion potential.

3. The Shift: From Sales Process to Buying Process Facilitation

3.1. Replacing Linear Funnels with Buying-Cycle-Driven Orchestration

- Linear models (sales steps, marketing funnels) create friction because they measure digital touchpoints (interest) instead of *readiness to buy*.
- Digital engagement (content downloads, lead scores, Sales Navigator intent) signals *topic interest*, not buying intent.
- The new model requires **orchestration around buying readiness**, combining digital and human touchpoints.

Each opportunity enters the sales pipeline *somewhere* in the buying cycle. The job of sales is to **detect where** and act accordingly. Marketing, sales, and product must share the same process, methodology, and CRM structure.

Updated motion: from individual leads to account-qualified opportunities (INQ → MQA → AQO → SQO).

3.2. Forecasting & Measurement

- Abandon probability-based forecasts. Replace with **scenario-based forecasting** using *customer verifiable outcomes (CVOs)*.
- Measure what can be observed:
 - Entry point in the buying cycle
 - Number of stakeholders engaged

- Sales velocity = how efficiently opportunities move through the pipeline
- Win/loss classification (real vs. disqualified)
- Focus on **sales velocity** to see where friction sits in your pipeline:
 - $\# \text{ of deals} \times \text{avg deal value} \times \text{hit rate} \div \text{sales cycle length}$

3.3. Orchestration over Productivity

- The name of the game is **Commercial Orchestration**, not sales productivity.
- Build a **balanced pipeline**:
 - Deals are distributed across different stages and maturity levels.
 - You maintain visibility and predictability because you have early-, mid-, and late-stage opportunities constantly progressing.
 - Sales managers coach timing and quality of actions rather than pushing for speed.
 - Result: no end-of-quarter gap-closing
- Reframe the goal: not “closing deals” but **facilitating decision cycles**.

4. From Value Extraction to Value Creation

Most companies still train and measure sales behavior around *why buy from us*. True impact comes from mastering *why change* and *why stay* messaging.

Tactical recommendations:

- Add “why change” messaging early in the journey to dislodge status quo thinking.
- Quantify impact and balance of power to reduce unnecessary discounting.
- Coach teams to identify buying readiness at the start of every conversation.
- Equip sales with context-based messaging tied to Product-Market Combinations.
- Combine human and digital engagement to warm up multiple relationships in parallel.

The best salespeople are no longer closers; they are orchestrators and decision facilitators.

5. Operationalizing the Frictionless Pipeline

5.1. Dynamic Account Portfolio Development

- Use CRM as a **growth compass**, not an admin tool.
- Profile accounts by *current importance* and *achievable potential*.
- Continuously reallocate resources to reduce complexity and increase focus.
- Integrate buying readiness data, relationship temperature, and brand engagement metrics directly into CRM.

5.2. AI as a Supportive Engine

- Proven use cases: churn prediction, cross-sell prediction (when based on clean, structured data).
- Limited ROI so far in predictive deal scoring or opportunity forecasting due to poor data quality.
- To leverage AI effectively, structure CRM data around buying cycle context, not sales admin fields.

5.3. Behavioral Design in CRM & Coaching

- Design CRM workflows around buyer journey milestones and verifiable outcomes.
- Use CRM dashboards as **coaching engines** to guide sales behavior, not as reporting tools.
- Embed *orchestration logic* (right time, right action, right stakeholder) into daily routines.

6. What to Stop Doing / Start Doing

Stop Doing

Treating sales steps as universal

Sending proposals on request

Measuring activity volume

Start Doing

Tailor approach to buying complexity

Use proposals as confirmation of alignment

Measure customer verifiable outcomes

Selling through one sponsor	Build buying group relationships in parallel
Confusing interest with intent	Detect readiness through human touchpoints
Separate sales & marketing processes	Integrate under one orchestrated model
Chasing quarterly quotas	Build balanced, predictable pipelines

7. The Big Picture: From Pipeline Management to Growth Orchestration

The commercial engine of the future is **account-based, scenario-driven, and orchestrated**. Organizations that succeed will:

- Treat sales, marketing, and product as *one growth team*.
- Use the buying cycle as the backbone of the CRM and commercial architecture.
- Replace sales productivity targets with orchestration metrics.
- Enable their teams with the context, tools, and confidence to act at the right time.

Questions? Or want us to challenge you on any of the above topics? Feel free to reach out to inquiry@perpetos.com.