

10 Signs You Need an SFA Solution

The exact moment an organization needs SFA is hard to nail down, but far too many realize they need SFA only after they lose a revenue opportunity. Instead of waiting for a missed sale as an indicator, look for these 10 signs to know whether it's time for you to invest in SFA.

1. Leads fall through the cracks. These days, the last thing you can afford is to let the leads your marketing department generates — or that your sales reps gather through prospecting — lay fallow. But that's exactly what happens at many companies because lead management and assignment is not properly automated. An SFA system can allow you to route leads to the right rep — and make sure that the rep follows through with them.

2. Customer contacts change, and you don't know it. In this economy, the people with buying authority may change frequently. When they leave one company, they may turn up at another. SFA helps you keep track of these changes, and should a contact pop up at another firm, it can help reps who may have responsibility for that company establish an instant contact.

3. Sales expectations grow. With fewer sales reps and more demands, the old ways of keeping track of contacts, appointments and sales notes just won't scale. Not automating some of the basic tasks of sales scheduling, contact management and activity tracking will leave sales reps drowning in a sea of paper — and at a disadvantage to their competition.

4. Sales managers can't organize sales data. Without a way of quickly aggregating sales reps' data, managers spend most of their time compiling reports rather than taking action. SFA allows them to assemble their reports faster and makes it possible for them to examine data in ways they haven't been able to in the past. This insight can make managers more agile in reacting to sales challenges.

5. Team selling results in confusion. Team selling is a good idea, but keeping team members from stepping on each other's toes or dropping the ball requires constant communication. SFA provides that communication: at a glance, a rep can see what his or her teammates have done and can get an understanding of exactly where a customer is during the buying process.

6. Re-allocating sales assets becomes difficult. When sales managers make changes and reassign reps to new accounts, there tends to be limited or no time for those reps to transition. This makes some managers reluctant to make changes at all, even if they're necessary. SFA allows reps to understand the intricacies of each customer quickly, eliminating that obstacle to responsive management.

7. Disputes arise over compensation and territory. Sales reps are motivated by money, so it's no surprise that compensation issues can arise. SFA can organize all compensation plans and policies in one place, and the system can automatically tally cumulative compensation for specific periods based on results. Similarly, territory-management tools can help keep clear what geographic region belongs to which rep. These tools also allow managers to make changes to territory data quickly.

8. Meetings dominate sales reps' time. Reps should be out selling, not sitting in a room with a sales manager taking notes. By gathering important data in one place — including internal sales department information — the need for meetings is cut down and reps have more time for their core responsibilities.

9. Customers know their sales histories better than you do. Sales reps have to keep track of many customer relationships; customers have to keep track of just one. SFA prevents reps from walking into a situation where a customer has a standing concern that the rep is unaware of and prevents embarrassing situations before they happen.

10. Customer data goes into a sales black hole. Other parts of a company — marketing, product development and finance, to name a few — are eager to use customer information, but often it never gets into their hands. SFA provides a bridge for that data and allows organizations to multiply the power of the information their reps collect on a daily basis.