



Founder-Led Sales

A practical guide for founders who are too smart for their own good

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what do I know? my story

HBS 2018

- Raised >\$1M for a B2B startup, with a few big pilots on an actual product
- “How do we scale this?”

BDRs & AEs!

Build an email list

Facebook ads

Redo my homepage

Freemium

Cold calls!

Build a lead database

LinkedIn ads

Product-led growth! 🥰

Features vs. benefits

Cold emails!

Buy an email list

Instagram ads

Influencer marketing

Cold LinkedIn!

Use LinkedIn automations

TikTok ads

Trade shows

Messaging

Cold turkey! 🦃

Write an eBook

Give up 🦴 (Is Snapchat still around?)

API-first

Positioning

AI-driven outreach

“WHAT DO I DO?”

Growth loops

Slap “GPT” on it

Intent data

Start a podcast

Reddit posts

ProductHunt

Ask VCs for more 💰

Data science

Challenger sales

Build a personal brand

Quora

Category creation

Hire & pray

Founder sales

Build a brand brand

Inbound marketing?

Move to the Bahamas

NETWORK EFFECTS

Social selling

Dark social! Word of Mouth

Google ads

“Paul Graham says...”

Outreach sequences

Start an email newsletter

Bing ads?

“Google’s approach is...”

The “list of things I think I need to do”

what do I know? my story

2 years of pain

- Customer interviews -> validation! -> build MVP -> **can't sell it**
- Repeat ~7x over 2 years, watching others succeed

HERE'S A FUN RIDDLE:

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JAKE-CLARK.TUMBLR

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tl;dr.

What we all know:

- Sales is pretty important

What nobody taught me:

- How to sell, or even how to THINK about sales
- Sales is how you find product-market fit & build the right product!

PS –

- After this, we did pivot #8 and went from \$0-\$4M ARR in 2 years.
- I have since helped 6 companies get to their first \$1M ARR, and ~100+ more figure out the PMF/sales problem.
- At some point I am coming back to give a talk on PMF too.
- Book loosely titled “How to find PMF” coming out sometime this century (?)

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today's agenda: B2B sales 101

1 - How does the system work?

2 - Pipeline

3 - Sales Process

4 - Sales demo

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PMF mountain.

Minimum essential for PMF:

- 1 kind of customer
- 1 thing they buy
- 1 way to sell, repeatedly

0 - 1

What matters:
Finding PMF

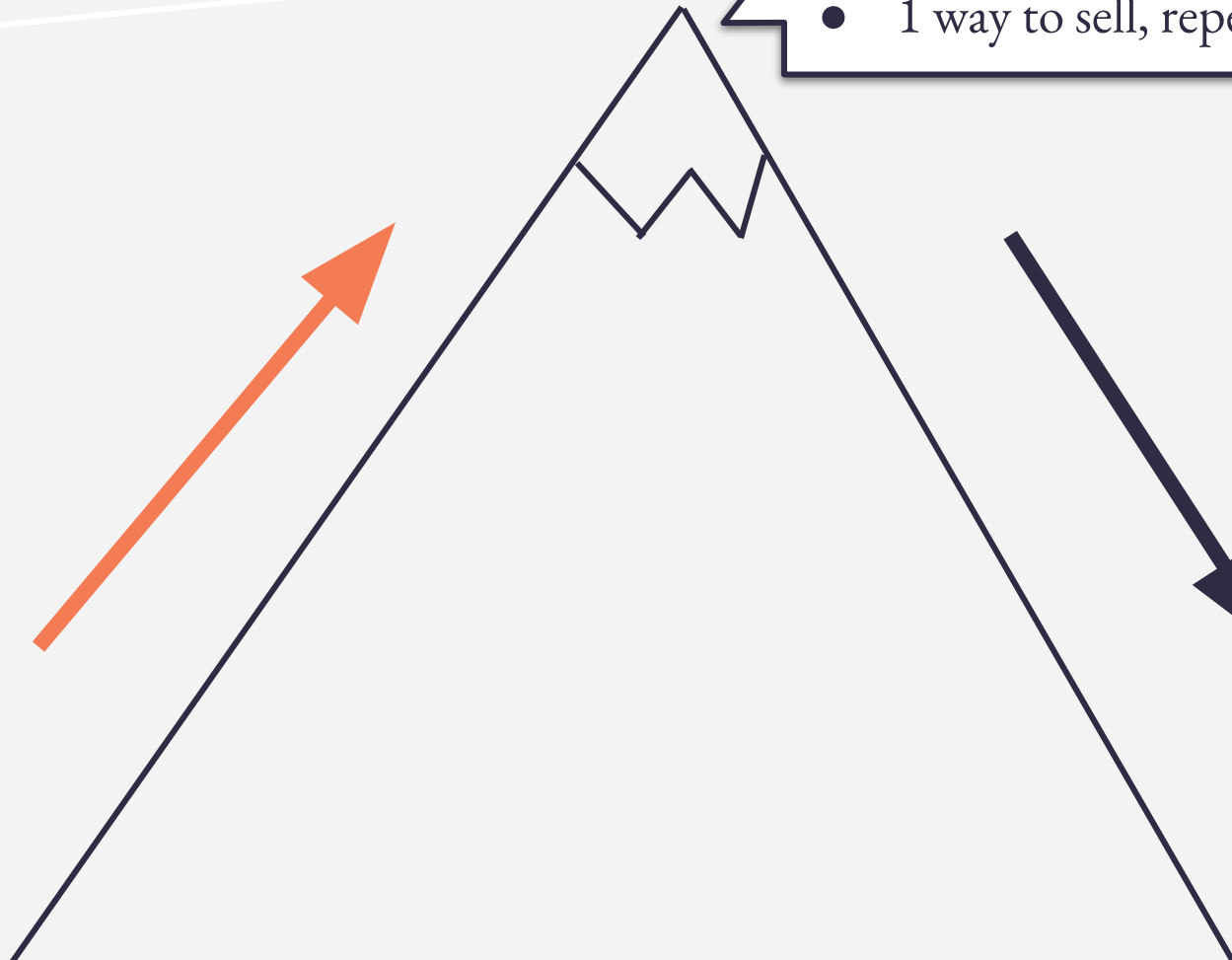


1 - 100

What matters:
Scaling,
being a real company



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the system:

1 - pipeline

ONE primary engine to generate conversations

2 - sales process

Process that turns sales meetings into customers

3 - delivery process

Simple process to turn contracts into raving customers & referrals

Rob's notes, before we jump into each of these:

- You have a hypothesis of WHO you're selling to & WHAT you're selling them (I hope)
- Debug both of these *by selling* (not theorizing)
- View it like a system:
 - If you don't have pipeline, nothing else downstream matters
 - Debug the system's bottleneck
- PS - "but our product isn't ready for this!" nobody's is, Hubspot had ~0 NPS for a decade

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step 1: pipeline

Goal: 5-10+ new conversations per week, every week.

How to do that early on? (Hint: Probably with cold or warm outreach)

- Goal of 3-5% targeted -> meeting (aka: message 25 people per day)
- Can use linkedin (e.g., dripify) or email (e.g., apollo)

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Most outreach is awful:

- I saw you went to Harvard too! Want to see our product? It has these features & benefits.
- Just bumping this.
- I'll assume you **DON'T** want to get our life-changing product, then!

Why? You're focused on what **YOU** want. They don't care.

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find your cheat code



I'm just getting back from filming **Sesame Street**, and would love to learn more about your company's marketing plan, plus share what I'm hearing from other brands...

Here's my calendar link: [link]



cheat codes:

what's the message only you can send to only them?

what's in it for them?

only you | only them

Only you can send...

- **Founder** out of **Harvard**
- Host of ABC **podcast / newsletter**
- Preparing a presentation for **XYZ Conference**
- Building our **advisory board**
- Invite you to our **community**
- Talking with **XYZ well-reputed person in industry**
- Recognized **brand** (eventually)

...to only them

- Based on your **alma mater / fmr employer / investor**
- We both know **XYZ mutual connection**
- Saw you on **XYZ podcast / saw you're a speaker at ABC event**
- Focused on **XYZ INTERESTING problem relevant to you**
- Saw your company just went through **XYZ event** (e.g., hiring, fundraising)
- We're both based in **New Hampshire**

what's in it for them?

- Join a startup advisory board
- Give feedback?
- Explore something REALLY INTERESTING TO THEM
- See how their peers are doing approaching XYZ problem
- Getting interviewed for a podcast / newsletter / article / LinkedIn post
- See some cool new software?
- Solve a problem
- Meet someone interesting

Messaging: Make the point, they're distracted

I'm a Stanford PhD building AI for coaching platforms. Saw [company name] and thought you might be a good fit for our advisory board - my product may also be able to help you find additional ways to monetize users.

Open to connect? We've got a few advisors in tennis, but you'd be our first in pickleball.

Love,
Matt

I noticed [company] and thought it was interesting. Your new feature, XYZ, seems extremely useful to users!

Would you be interested in exploring additional monetization options? Many people in your exact position have found this to be a value-additive part of their product portfolio. In fact, Tennis Co increased revenue by 10% per user.

If relevant, we may also want to discuss joining our advisory board.

Matt
Stanford PhD

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5 mins: Write me a cold email trying to schedule a meeting with me, as if I'm still a HBS alum, but actually in the role + company you want to sell to.

Talk through it with your neighbor before pressing send. (rob@reframeb2b.com)

today's agenda: B2B sales 101

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step 2: sales process

Goal: 20-30% conversion from meeting to customer (eventually 50% for perfect-fit customers)

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your sales process is a product. here's the MVP

Meeting 1: Demo

purpose:

identify what they need to accomplish & how they think about their options & timeline

Use the “case study” demo... even if you don't have case studies yet

Meeting 2: Deep-Dive

purpose:

help them understand what implementation would look like, & make the case

Usually:

- Recap + why this, why now?
- How it actually works / key workflows
- Implementation plan
- Process to get this done internally (e.g., schedule other demos)

Meeting 3: Decision

purpose:

get it done!

Usually:

- Recap
- Remaining questions / objections?
- Review contract / order form
- Schedule onboarding, use as forcing function

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Quiz: How is a sales demo supposed to go?

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My experience: how it usually feels for everyone



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Most sales demos:

- Let me interrogate you for 3-5 minutes
- Then, I'm going to walk through exactly how to use my product
- Finally, I'm going to pressure you to schedule another meeting with me, for some reason

how to think about demos

The demo isn't you showing your product to a prospect to persuade them to buy it.

The demo is you sitting on the same side of the table as your prospect, exploring ***another, similar customer's case study*** and letting that story persuade your prospect to buy.

When you understand this, you'll sell without feeling salesy.

QUIZ: What if you don't HAVE an actual case study?

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**the demo is where you test PMF & everything about
your business comes together.**

(why I'm obsessed with it, and you should be too!)

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how it feels to your prospect:

“What caused you to take the meeting? What’s going on in your world?”

“Usually I hear from people in your situation they have this one MASSIVE challenge / goal... sound familiar? How are you thinking about it?”

“This is how John (in your exact situation) thought about his options... sound familiar? How are you thinking about YOUR options?”

“John chose X option, and here’s what he accomplished... sound valuable?”

“Here’s how we can help you, just like we helped John... want to explore working together?”

QUIZ: Where do you show them the product?

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wait, what are we selling?

Our Early Adopter Program:

- 1:1 work to nail the project plan for a phased rollout that's digestible for your team
- Implement together with 3x team trainings and biweekly check-ins
- Access to **the only inventory management software for food & bev subscription businesses** for up to 10 users for a year

How people tend to think about price:

- 2-3 hires + 6-months consulting (\$x)
- Value -> \$XM opportunity

What you pay:

- \$500/month

NOTE: Limited spots for onboarding - decision by XYZ.

Packaging: What you get (justifies price)

Positioning: What it is & why uniquely suited to you

Pricing: What you pay

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for your first ~5-10 customers...

Demo: Just slides, use my templates (online)

Packaging: Start with one option, keep it simple.

Positioning: Start with something they understand with a slight tweak. (“New applicant source” vs. “recruitment retargeting software”)

Pricing: Does not matter very much, make them feel like they’re getting a good deal, pricing science comes later.

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Rob's reading list (for nerds)

- Demand-Side Sales 101 (Bob Moesta)
- Obviously Awesome (April Dunford)
- Hypergrowth (David Cancel)
- The End of Command & Control (John Seddon)
- Also, maybe my newsletter:
howtogrow.substack.com