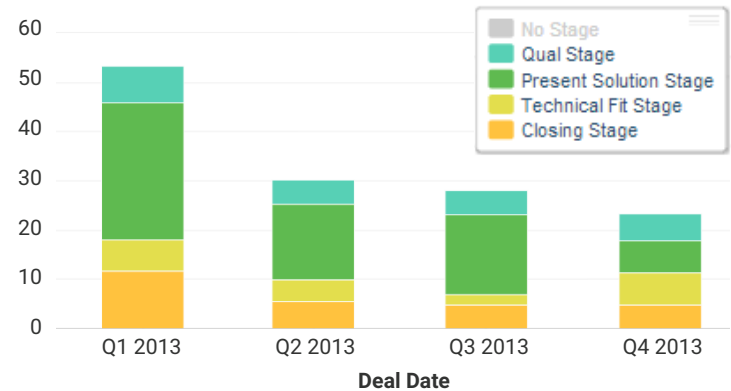# How To Shorten Your Sales Cycle

When you boil it down, there are really only 3 ways for a sales team to bring in more revenue: improve its win rate, close bigger deals, and win deals faster. The third of these is often considered the easiest and quickest to achieve, but it's also the most misunderstood. This guide gives sales leaders the **tools and research they need to shorten their sales cycle** and start bringing in more revenue.

The first step of shortening your sales cycle is truly *measuring* it.

1 Slice Up Your Sales Cycle by Stage

Your sales cycle is not a single number. Just as you can't simply say the average temperature in Boston is 55°, **you can't boil your sales cycle down to one number**. Instead, you should measure and analyze your sales cycle by several meaningful metrics, such as stage, lead source, and value.

Legend: No Stage, Qual Stage, Present Solution Stage, Technical Fit Stage, Closing Stage. X-axis: Deal Date (Q1 2013, Q2 2013, Q3 2013, Q4 2013)
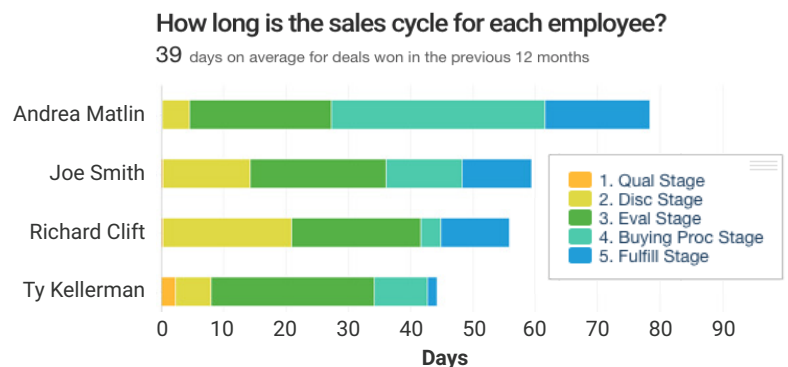
2 Identify the Bottlenecks

Once you've looked at your sales cycle from a variety of angles, you should start to **zero in on the areas that are contributing the most to your sales cycle length**. In the figure above, for example, you can see that the "Present Solution" (green) part of the sales process is by far the longest. If you want to reduce your team's sales cycle, this is the place to start.

How does this information help you shorten your sales cycle? Once you know which stage is soaking up the bulk of your sales team's time, you can start finding ways to reduce it. Maybe your reps can start scheduling demos earlier in the process, or improve the way they present those demos so that prospects are more inclined to hurry to the next stage.

Or maybe the holdup is **due to an internal inefficiency** that can be corrected. Is there a way to automate or batch the demos so they don't eat up as much of your reps' time? Perhaps there is a way to improve the technical aspect of product demos or trials so that reps do not have to wait to move opportunities forward.

3 Find Rep-Specific Problem Stages

Not all reps lose momentum at the same stage. Analyzing each rep's sales cycle by stage can help you identify where some reps struggle and others excel. That way, you can **coach each rep individually** to become more efficient at their specific problem points.

How long is the sales cycle for each employee?
39 days on average for deals won in the previous 12 months
Reps: Andrea Matlin, Joe Smith, Richard Clift, Ty Kellerman. Legend: 1. Qual Stage, 2. Disc Stage, 3. Eval Stage, 4. Buying Proc Stage, 5. Fulfill Stage. X-axis: Days (0–90)

Avoid Losing Deals Late in the Sales Process

Nothing stretches out your sales cycle like sinking a lot of time into opportunities only to lose them at the 11th hour. The good news is that these occurences are usually avoidable. By **analyzing your sales funnel and formalizing the way you qualify opportunities**, you can design a sales process that minimizes the number of deals you lose late in the game and shortens your sales cycle.

4 Analyze Your Sales Funnel

There are two main ways to shorten your sales cycle: **win deals faster, and lose deals faster**. High drop-off rates late in your sales funnel mean that you are not doing a good job at the latter. Coach your reps (and alter your sales process) so that only the best opportunities make it to the last few stages of your sales funnel.
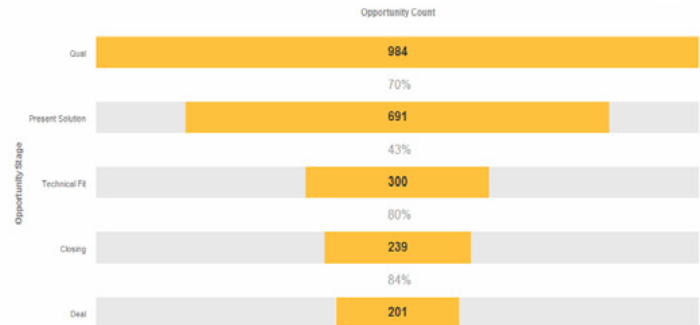
5 Aim For a Martini Glass Sales Funnel

The most efficient funnels aren't really funnel-shaped at all: they look more like martini glasses. [When we studied more than 100 sales teams,](#) we found that the fastest-growing teams had **significantly fewer drop-offs in the last two stages of the sales process**. They were ruthless about qualifying out bad opps early.

	Green funnel		Red funnel
Leads/Rep	136.8		100
Opps/Rep	4.4		10.2
Deals/Rep	1.6		3.5

6 Create Strict Exit Criteria to Avoid Losing Opportunities Late

Time your team invests in working losing opportunities is time it can't spend pushing winning deals to the finish line. Ultimately, this leads to a longer sales cycle and fewer deals closed in a given period. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to tell early in the sales process exactly which opportunities will come through. That's why it's so important for sales leaders to create a sales process with **strict, uniform exit criteria for moving opportunities** to the next stage. This way, red-flag opportunities don't make it to the bottom of the funnel.

There are many reasons you can lose a deal — timing, competition and price, just to name a few — but there are only a few reasons to lose a deal at the very end. For example, you should **never lose a late-stage opportunity because your buyer doesn't have authority or budget**. These are loss reasons that should be addressed *early* in the sales process. If you lose a deal for one of these reasons very late, it means you should have overcome those objections much earlier in the process or qualified the opp out of your pipeline long ago.

Compare Your Won and Lost Sales Cycles

Making your sales funnel look more like a martini glass is an important part of shortening your sales cycle, but you can't stop there. If you want an efficient sales process, it's not enough to qualify out opps early — you must also **help your reps understand the difference between buyers and non-buyers**. One of the most important ways to do this is by getting to know your "Loss Cycle."

7 What is Your Loss Cycle?

Analyzing your sales funnel can help you implement the right exit criteria to avoid losing deals late in the sales cycle — but what can you do to actually *spot* the opportunities that aren't likely to pan out?

That's where your Loss Cycle comes in. Your Loss Cycle shows you **how long it takes you to lose a deal**. Comparing it to your sales cycle for won deals helps you see the difference between how long buyers and non-buyers spend in each stage on average.

Average Days — Won / Lost — Qualifying, Demo, Tech Fit, Closing
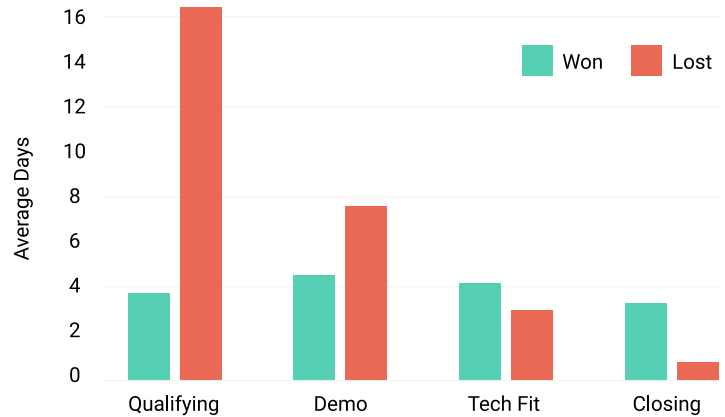
8 Benchmarking the Loss Cycle

As you might imagine, non-buyers tend to spend longer in your sales funnel than buyers, especially toward the top where they often drag their heels and string along over-optimistic sales reps. In fact, our analysis of more than 100 sales teams showed that the average sales team's **Loss Cycle is 2.7x as long as its Won Cycle**.

1.0 — Closed-Won

2.7 — Closed-Lost

If your sales team has a similar trend, you can use your Loss Cycle to help you weed out lingering opps.

Key Takeaway: Shorten Your Sales Cycle By Analyzing It From Many Angles

In order to shorten your sales cycle, you must truly understand it — and this means going beyond measuring it with a single number. **Slice your sales cycle up by stage and rep** to pinpoint the specific parts adding the most to your sales cycle. Once you've addressed these problem areas, **tweak your sales process to improve the way you weed out non-buyers** early in the game. Use your **sales funnel** to make sure you're not losing too many deals at the 11th hour. If you are, use your **Loss Cycle** to help your reps idenitify non-buyers early in the sales process so they can qualify out bad opps and focus on hustling the good ones to the finish line.