

DOWNTURN EDITION

Exactly How The Top B2B Leaders Set Meetings

18 Sales Experts reveal the hidden strategies, tactics, and techniques to guarantee booked meetings even in a recession

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Everything's not lost

Prospecting in a downturn starts with redefining the demand types of customers, skewing toward cost-cutting, consolidation, and risk mitigation. You may even have to redefine your ICP and personas as we did at the start of the pandemic. The buying triggers change. Discretionary spending is limited, and CapEx moves to OpEx. “Need to have” trumps “nice to have.”

We’ve polled our GTM thought leader community and compiled some of the top mindsets, strategies, and tactics for penetrating markets enduring economic shocks where uncertainty and emotions run high so you can thrive in the face of a looming recession. From cold calling to social selling to trigger events to referrals, many innovative ways exist to open up a new business, even in a fear-based market when buyers pull back.

The tenet to remember is that there’s always a market. To quote Warren Buffett: “be fearful when others are greedy, greedy when others are fearful.” Can you seize your hidden competitive advantage? Your silver linings playbook? In our new book on Wiley in December, [Reinventing Virtual Events](#), we wrote that a downturn might give you an edge over a well-capitalized competitor to undercut a market. On the flip side, protect your six as you risk getting outsold. But you won’t be if you follow these practical tips from B2B’s top outbound minds.

You must innovate how you prospect
to break it down to brass tacks

Simply increasing volume fails. Everyone will flood the market with automated emails and robocalls. Quality vs. quantity holds true even if you attempt to scale it. Referrals are a powerful channel we need to re-learn. Reaching out through our VPs, C-Level, Board, and VCs.

Personalization at scale became very popular in 2017 and again during the pandemic. The new clarion call is hyper-personalization or “deep personalization.” Slowing down to speed up, write targeted, high-quality, highly relevant outreach to the exact targets you seek to meet, almost like ABM for outbound or what Lars Nilsson coined as “Account Based Sales Development.” Omnichannel will save you, as many leaders reference it. What is unexpected below is the role of social media evolution, monitoring for buying triggers, and creative research.

Happy hunting. Now let’s get into it!



Josh Braun

Founder, Josh Braun Sales

Everything zen

The fuel for anxiety in sales is the desire to control the outcome.

That a prospect will agree to a meeting.

That a sale will close.

That you will hit quota.

Trying to control things that are out of your control is a recipe for being anxious and unhappy.

You don’t control how people interpret your message or if they respond positively.

You don’t control when or if people buy.

You don’t control a guess (aka quota).

My point, to be clear, isn’t that you don’t believe in what you’re selling.

Belief isn’t the problem. The problem—the source of anxiety is assuming.

It's OK to have a hypothesis, of course, that your prospect has a problem you can potentially solve. But it's a recipe for stress and anxiety to assume they have a problem you can solve.

The antidote for sales anxiety?

Detach from the outcome. Let go of assumptions.

You can't know if a prospect is open to talking about their situation or if they have a problem until you speak with them.

Some prospects will be open to sharing and continuing the conversation. Others won't.

You're for some people, but you're not for everyone.

Outcomes seem absurd and easier to let go of when you realize you don't control them.

You don't need to get anything.

You can break the cycle.

You can shift from assuming to understanding.

Here's what understanding sounds like on a cold call:

"Not sure if you're experiencing this Lisa, but we're seeing that 51% of cold emails land in spam. How are you ensuring cold emails don't land in spam today?"

Adopt a mindset of equanimity.

Conversations just are.

When you adopt a mind of equanimity, you see your prospect's situation in an impartial, non-reactive, non-assumptive way, free of expectations.

You're indifferent to the outcome.

You're okay with whatever happens.

Ironically when you let go of assumptions, prospects open up because they don't feel pressure.

A shift from selling to understanding. From what you want to what is.



Rocco Savage

Head of Growth, Regie.ai

It's time to go to work

For the past 12 years, we've had the pleasure of selling to growing companies with expanding budgets. As markets change and we enter a bear market, layoffs are happening, budgets are tightening, and spending is being frozen (especially on new technology).

So how do you win?

The truth is, there will be winners in this market, and the ones who win will win big.

There just won't be many. And they will come from two buckets.

Bucket one: The ones who've built the muscle

The winners will be the folks who actually did the work in the upmarket—not just rode it. The reps that swam the extra mile can now handle the current. Reps with strong habits around their story, activity, and mindset.

These reps will pierce through the noise and resonate with their buyers better than ever before and are going to be disproportionately rewarded because they've been training for strong currents for years.

Bucket two: The ones who are willing to do the work

Let's face it; the ride was fun. It wasn't easy, but it wasn't hard. This

season will be different. But, this is the job, isn't it?

First and foremost, you must decide if being a sales pro is who you are.

And if you're up to the task, it's time to level up three key areas:

Your Story. What is the soul of your company? How can you transfer that energy to buyers through what you say and write? Rewatch film, perfect your writing, and master your craft.

Your Activity. Sorry hustle-culture haters, I have bad news. It's likely going to take more effort and action to get the results you want. Conversion rates may drop, and you've got to make up for it elsewhere. Track your progress and invest in tools that will help you get more output.

Your Mindset. Great results start with your beliefs about yourself, your potential, and your capabilities. Research ways to keep your mindset strong and build in renewal rituals to keep yourself tuned in. Selling is a transference of emotion, and your internal conviction will take you far in these times.



Scott Leese

CEO & Founder, Scott Leese Consulting

Be yourself, everyone else is taken

We all know prospecting is the fuel for your pipeline—it has to be done every day. But how do we make it a repeatable process, so it's a little easier and more successful?

Step one: Be relevant AND personal

The first thing I want to feel when someone reaches out to me is they know me. What's going to immediately pique my interest is if they've done their homework and the message is timely and their solution

can help me right now.

Have they checked out events I've put on or been a part of? Do they know my story? Do they understand my businesses and truly believe I'm in their ICP? Do they know my favorite tequila? Do they know I spend every November surfing in Costa Rica?

Prospecting in 2023 is all about leveraging meaningful connections and building trust with your network until the network seeks to become your prospect. So focus less on "personalization at scale" and more on truly getting to know the people you're reaching out to.

Step two: Find your authenticity

How do you connect with people the best? Maybe you love using video and can show off your personality better that way. Great, go for it. Why? The more you connect with the medium, the more people connect with you. Prospects will be able to feel that energy.

Stop trying to be somebody you are not. You don't need to be for everybody—you just need to be the right somebody for someone. Use your style, your creativity, your humor—not the one some influencer with 6 months of sales experience told you to try.

In the end, pipeline solves everything. It's one of the few things in your control in sales.



Shari Levitin

CEO, Levitin Group

Send a pizza!

If you were to travel on I-70 between Denver and Vail, Colorado, you might notice a packed parking lot in front of a restaurant with the sign:

BAD FOOD, WARM BEER

I hear the food is “meh,” but the message is so different people crowd the restaurant to see for themselves.

Your prospects are desensitized to emails and voice messages that contain the same boring language as your competitors:

To break through the noise today, try the following:

1. Leverage video

Asynchronous video is novel, a pattern interrupt that can double your open rate. Moreover, video is more personal and memorable and, therefore, more apt to result in a commitment to next steps.

2. Slow down to speed up

In real estate, value is dictated by location, location, location. In sales, you create prospecting value through personalization, personalization, personalization.

Research your customers on LinkedIn and other channels. What do your prospects value? What makes their life worth living?

When you make your initial outreach about them, they’re more likely to listen to you and ultimately buy from you.

3. Leverage an omnichannel approach

Increasingly buyers research solutions online on multiple channels. When prospecting, go where your customers are.

Leverage social media, video, and texting; you might even send a pizza!

Your product doesn’t have to be better, but your prospecting DOES need to be different.



Brandon Bornancin

CEO, Seamless.ai

Listomania

The ultimate key to successful prospecting is the list. You must have a fresh, accurate list of prospects who fit your target persona and would be ready to buy your product or service RIGHT NOW if you could connect with them. No matter what shape the economy is in and what the markets look like, you are always just one list away from the career you want, the success you want, and the life you want.

Build the list, and embrace rejection when you start going after opportunity. You read that right—embrace rejection. Everyone talks about focusing on your wins and speaking your wins into existence. But it's more empowering to embrace rejection. Expect rejection every time you pick up the phone because prospects will come up with every reason, excuse, and objection for why they can't do business with you. "The prices of everything are too high right now." "The economy is pretty bad right now." "I can't afford it."

The top 1% of salespeople expect rejection. They study playbooks and strategies and write and memorize the best scripts for every sales objection. They come prepared to overcome the "No's" in advance. So build the list, expect rejection, study your a\$% off, and never forget that your next call is your best call.



Jake Dunlap

CEO, Skaled

Video killed the email star

Two ways to book more meetings that will move the needle quickly:

One: stop giving up so early.

Most are doing 3-4 email touchpoints and then giving up. Just add in a few LinkedIn touches and a call or two touchpoints, and you will be in the top 5% of reps.

Two: Video DM on LinkedIn.

Once you connect—you can send a personalized video on the LinkedIn mobile app. It can't be automated, and very few are doing it. The key to winning in the downturn is being just a little different. The bar is lower than ever.



Justin Michael

Coach at Nimchinski/Michael

Polar Bear Shift

The secret to opening & closing deals on the phone in bear markets is to master polarity shifting, a concept I developed for opening calls. I've made over 20,000 hours of them. If I had listened to Malcolm Gladwell, I only needed 10,000 hours to reach that Mozart level. I've recently analyzed more calls than I remember on Gong/Chorus.

The flaw I've noticed in nearly all the prevailing call scripts is that the perceived polarity never shifts. The rep limits their success as long as they focus the spotlight on themselves, not the prospect.

99% of the systems start calls this way (Beta vs. Alpha):

“You don't know me but...” = Beta (focus on me—not you!)

“The reason for my call is...” = focus on the seller/remind them you're soliciting (Beta)

Never "guilt" a prospect, apologize, or remind them of negative associations.

You know my stance on PBOs (permission-based openers) lowering the status frame. The first impression governs everything far later from inception when teeing up 7-figure deals.

You never get another chance to leave a first impression, the psychological anchor (high status-alpha). We had a VC on the games yesterday who explained you're "gone in 60 seconds" on a gut-read.

What is polarity? If you smother them with compliments and bow down to sycophantically supplicate, they'll lose respect and repel you.

But it's a listen-talk ratio-based mechanic too:

The polarity needs to be: Prospect first! Listen first!

I've found that executives initially pay little attention to long-form content or beating around the bush. Get the prospect talking about themselves and "what they control" at the beginning of a call.

Identify their immediate sphere of influence and get them to open up. They don't know their pain; it's hidden – latent. Hence the power of RUIN in RRM. Converts apathy and disinterest into pain by "time-tracking." Going back to when they had the pain before selecting the current vendor.

And in a nutshell, this makes The Justin Michael Method the most revolutionary call opener progression in 100 years as it's 80% prospect talking vis-a-vis rep listening vs. traditional interrupting, firehosing, and handling recoil, brush-offs, and objections.

It's also a massive pattern interrupt. Listen, validate, agree, onion...

In every other method for 10 seconds, the rep is talking 7-9. Test it.

Leading with provocative questions + active listening allows the Polarity to Shift.



Brynne Tillman

CEO, Social Sales Link

6 degrees of Brynne

Any successful salesperson will tell you that referrals from happy clients are the best prospects. They take your call, you start the relationship with high credibility, and they rarely shop for other vendors.

Most sales professionals ask for referrals but typically get the response, “I’d be happy to refer you, but I can’t think of anyone right now.”

With the power of LinkedIn, we can change that conversation. Search your client’s connections and make a list of 20-25 targeted leads, run the names by them, and you will typically end up with 3-5 referrals every single time.



Viveka von Rosen

Co-Founder & Chief Evangelist, Vengreso

K to the L to the T

It’s probably not much of a secret that my biggest prospecting secret is to use LinkedIn! The real secret, of course, is using it the right way! As a big supporter of the KLT Factor (know like and trust), it’s crucial that sellers create a brand that is sympathetic and approachable to their buyers and prospects and engage in a way that educates instead of sells. No one likes to be pitched to. But if you can:

- Develop a strong brand that cultivates trust by creating a buyer-centric profile.

- Become a resource to your audience by providing value-filled content on your profile, in your feed, and messaging.

...then you have a real chance of connecting to and creating conversations with quality and qualified audience on LinkedIn.

What does this mean? Write your profile with your buyer's pain, needs, wants, and desires in mind. From your banner image to your headline, to your about section to your experience, ensure you address who your audience is, what they struggle with, and how you solve that struggle. And then add value-filled resources (blogs, podcasts, white papers, case studies, etc.) to your profile and in your engagements. This will go a long way to building the kind of KLT Factor that results in meetings.



Steve Richard

SVP Sales Excellence, Mediafly

I'm down with OTQ

Across the dozens of SDR/BDR teams, I work with regularly, I'm seeing ~35% of initial appointments no show. Some are rescheduled. Historically this was more like 15-20%. It's exacerbated even more by recession. What can you do?

Answer:

1. Go for the time on the calendar strong
2. Stick the landing on your scheduling logistics
3. Ask OVERTIME QUESTIONS once you have the meeting on the calendar and before you hang up the phone. You can also ask OTQs over email after scheduling and before the appointment.

First, let's define what OTQs are:

A type of question asked after you have the meeting on the calendar, which is designed to further qualify the meeting and increase the show rate with no risk of jeopardizing its outcome.

Overtime Questions—4 types:

1. Who is interested in this topic who would feel left out if they weren't included? OR Besides you, who else is involved in the decision? (Other Decision Makers).
2. What's your biggest challenge with X right now? What are you looking to accomplish with Y? If you had a magic wand? Anything top of mind? (Pain/Gain).
3. How many xxx do you have? What system are you using for xxx? (Qualification).
4. Many people prefer I send a text message on the day of our call to confirm. Can I have your mobile number in case we have trouble connecting day of? (Cell Phone).



Alice Heiman

Founder & Chief Sales Energizer, Alice Heiman LLC

Referrals as a team sport

My top prospecting secrets shouldn't be a secret, but I am fairly certain that most sales leaders are not focused on them. It's too bad because they both work better than cold outreach.

My very best prospecting secret is referral selling. Yes, getting an introduction. Many salespeople tell me they get referrals, but when I ask how many per day, they look at me funny. They are lucky to get one a month. Why? Because they wait until someone gives them one rather than be proactive about asking for them. When you have loyal customers, they are happy to make introductions. You just need to

learn how and when to ask. Sales leaders—work with your teams to develop a proactive referral selling plan. You can send 1000 emails and get two responses, or you can invite three times a day for a referral and get 2 out of 3. Everyone in your company can help. They are all people who know people who could introduce you. Referral selling, like all selling, is a team sport.

The next best, if you can't get a referral, is Contact Marketing. There are tons of companies out there now that will send something special to those you are prospecting but wait! Before you send, try to find someone who can make an introduction. Sending something intriguing can be done at any point in the relationship with your buyer, but it can be very effective in landing a meeting. Read *How to Get a Meeting with Anyone* by Stu Heinecke for details on exactly how to do Contact Marketing. It's not cold outreach. You must do your homework and send something highly personalized in great wrapping. It doesn't have to be expensive; just meaningful to the person receiving it.

Bonus: Your CEO and senior leaders can be the chief lead generators. Don't try this at home but if you are serious about breaking into big companies to land big deals, consider using your senior leaders up front. Remember *Founders Lead Growth*. It doesn't matter how old your company is. Your CEO and senior leaders should continue building and leveraging their networks to land sales team meetings.



Jed Mahrle

Head of Outbound Sales, Mailshake

Trigger happy

Economic downturns create tons of buying triggers. Because people are changing jobs at a much higher rate. Reach out to new job

changers right away while their inbox is still light, then do a light touch sequence on them for the next 3 months. These are the easiest people to book meetings with because they're the ones looking to implement change and new software.

Example:

Hey [name], most [insert title]'s are looking at [insert problem] in their first 30 days at a new role.

Thought you might find [relevant resource helpful] for that.

Happy to chat further re: [insert problem] if/when it makes sense.

Thanks,
Jed



Carole Mahoney

Founder, UnboundGrowth

Deep insight

First, do your research beyond the industry and role they are in. Check their LinkedIn profile and learn how they got into this role. Dig deeper to see who they report to.

Google what metrics people in their role and industry are measured by and what trends are happening.

Check the company profiles to learn who they help and how they make money. What is their business and revenue model?

Craft a message to them that shares a data point and relate it to an insight they might not know or fully realize. These could be insights from what your customers are saying, doing, and learning or a piece of data or insight you learned in your research.

Then ask them an open-ended question about how they think or handle this issue/opportunity and if they like to learn how others like them are achieving quantifiable results.

It might sound something like this:

"Did you know that sales emails increased by 37% since the pandemic started, but response rates dropped 23%? That means your cost of sales and customer acquisition is going up. For technology companies that already have the highest CAC costs, some decide to invest in technology and automation or use freemium models for demand generation.

They don't realize that they are creating the problems they seek to solve when most of us ignore impersonal and automated messages. It is challenging to upsell on value with a customer whose price point has been zero, making customer retention even more critical.

Our research shows that a better approach to customer acquisition is a combination of technology, data, and development of people. In fact, after implementing our science-based sales programs to hire and scale their team, ABC company achieved 130% of their targets with a 98% retention rate while reducing their discount rate and increasing their margins.

How are you handling rising CAC and lower retention rates? Would you be open-minded to learning more about how ABC company did it?



Eric Quanstrom

CMO, CIENCE

Em-path

The top prospecting secret during any downturn isn't a secret at all... But it's very rare and uncommon: EMPATHY. Many SDRs still rely far

too much on pitching. There's no empathy in a pitch.

Only the smartest of SDRs recognize their true unfair advantage: They get to interact with very similar titles each day. As a CMO who gets plenty of cold outreach, daily, it never ceases to amaze me how few SDRs look to trade on this unfair advantage.

As a rule, in recessions (downturns), everyone is looking to do more with less. I'm genuinely curious how my CMO peers accomplish similar goals (with fewer resources). An enterprising SDR who talks to CMOs all the time in the course of their daily work can easily share these dialogues and bridge this gap—including as it relates to his/her product or service. The funny part is this erases the pitch part. Stories of how other CMO's are doing more with less, in the areas of promise of the SDR's company, are as empathetic as prospecting gets and generally lead to appointments.



Leslie Venetz

Founder, Sales Team Builder LLC

Proactive Action

My top prospecting technique is to not wait until I'm staring down the possibility of missing the quota to take action.

Even if you feel like 2022 is a lost cause because of the downturn, it's essential that you take action now to build your 2023 pipeline.

During tough times I combine an increase in outputs with a focus on creative approaches that will break through the noise.

Everybody's favorite talk track on social media is a black-and-white vote for quality over quantity. During economic downturns, the reality is that you may have to put up higher numbers to get the same results. Few folks are in the position to buy, so no matter how amazing

your research or outreach is, it's important to acknowledge it might also take a bit of extra work.

I am also a huge fan of creative approaches in the form of personal touches. Recently I've been using personalized video. Before the pandemic, when folks were in the office, I sent many handwritten notes as part of my prospecting process, during the sales cycle, and as a thank you during the handover process.



Roni Green

VP of Marketing, Rightbound

Top Gun: NAverrick

Last year's sales tactics, catered to companies looking to grow at all costs, might not work in today's climate where budgets are tight, and some companies are scrutinizing every dollar spent. Here are three tips that can help SDRs and GTM Pros nail quality prospects during the downturn.

1. Become a LinkedIn Sales Navigator ninja

The downturn has created lots of movement and turnover at your target companies. LinkedIn Sales Navigator includes features that can help SDRs turn this turmoil into prospecting gold. You can track companies on your ABM list and get an alert every time a change occurs – e.g., someone leaves the company, a new decision maker joins, or an organizational change that could lead to a prospect's promotion. Any "event" can be leveraged, for example, following & connecting personally with a prospect that got laid off will make it easier to reconnect when they land their next gig.

Beyond tracking ABM lists, you can also use the Account Lists feature to monitor developments (e.g., funding, merger) at existing customers

to identify upsell, cross-sell, and renewal opportunities. I recommend setting one hour each week for a Sales Navigator deep-dive to find real-time opportunities to connect with people based on what's happening in their company.

2. Put yourself in your prospect's shoes

Being empathetic is always good sales advice and even more during downturn times. Before approaching a prospect, you must consider how the downturn affects their particular role. For example, if you're selling HR Tech, you know that they're currently laying off people and hiring less, and you can deduce that their focus has shifted to finding ways to retain their core employees.

Or, if you're selling Sales Tech, you know that sales leaders want to lower spend and increase performance, and reps are more stressed now about meeting quotas and KPIs. Once you've analyzed and understood the downturn's impact on your prospects, adapt your messaging, tone, and language (across all channels) to the prospect's new pain points.

3. Reprioritize sales activities based on efficiency

In times of budget cuts and buyer reluctance, efficiency in your sales operations becomes more important than ever. To me, efficiency doesn't mean cutting each line item in your budget by X%—it means reprioritizing. Focus your efforts and resources on activities likely to bring you a better return, and “dump” activities with high spend or low ROI. As a GTM leader, I prefer to focus on five projects and do them just right rather than being spread thin on a dozen projects and getting mediocre results.

Equally important, don't be afraid to halt a project you already started if you need the resources for a new initiative that's more likely to bring results.



Steve Schmidt

CRO, Selix

LinkedIn Karma

Today you have to be in front of people constantly, and the easiest way to do this is to make connections within your ICP on LinkedIn. 100 invites per week, claw back all non-accepted invites within the past 10 days to allow for more invites and not tip off LinkedIn's Bot Police, as they may see too many pending invites as a reason to suspend your account. DO NOT PITCH! No need.

Now, this exercise ONLY works if you are writing VALUE-based content for your ICP on a daily basis. Why? You have the opportunity to get on the front page of their newspaper every day. 1-3-6-9 months later, they will keep coming inbound with questions, and you are now seen as an expert in your field. That question may come to your DM's if you are like me, as I get 15-20 of these per week, with 2 or so being qualified real opportunities weekly.

The other benefits are CONSIDERABLY shorter sales cycles as trust is already built and larger deals stick around longer.



Mario Martinez Jr.

CEO and Founder, Vengreso

Omni-ball

In October 2021, out of 1,295 professional B2B sellers worldwide we surveyed, 69% reported that prospecting is the hardest part of the sales cycle. Thus, successful prospecting in the modern sales cycle. Thus, successful [prospecting](#) in the modern sales environment is about much more than finding contacts and using cold calling scripts

to make calls. Effective prospecting in the digital era from a sales engagement standpoint must always include at least four, but for best results, all of these prospecting strategies:

1. Phone
2. Email
3. Text Messaging
4. Social Selling
5. Video for Sales
6. Digital Referral
7. Direct Mail
8. Gift Marketing

We call this the omnichannel approach to sales prospecting. Even if you're old school and LOVE the telephone and cold calling, your team still needs a digital presence. As [sales managers](#), it's our job to ensure our sellers learn how to prospect like a boss with the least friction.

Whether they're communicating with their connections online or not, customers search for information online (ever heard of Google?), ask their peers in social forums, engage on social media, and consume videos at least weekly.

Teaching these sales prospecting techniques to your team will improve their ability to connect and communicate with potential buyers, creating more successful sellers.

Go-To-Market Games Season II: Revenue Methodologies Cross-Training

Build your business acumen by drilling with the best in B2B and VCs.

GTM Games

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