



Qualifying Strategic Sales Opportunities Using A Scorecard

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, everything seems different, but sales fundamentals have not changed that much, if at all. Foundational selling and questioning skills are more critical now than in the past. Sales organizations that implement a formal lead qualification strategy will find themselves allocating their time more wisely, so they can get the highest return on their investment of resources. And the cornerstone of a formal lead qualification strategy is the strategic opportunity quality scorecard

Our scorecard for qualifying strategic opportunities has three key uses in sales organizations:

1. It measures the quality of an opportunity in two dimensions: *desirability and winnability*. By choosing deals that score high in both dimensions, your sellers can decide which deals deserve more of their time and which actions are the most likely to increase the desirability and winnability of a deal.
2. It feeds your sellers the questions that they should prioritize in sales calls, accelerating the pursuit of the deal and focusing the opportunity for the buyer.
3. It shows you, the business owners and/or CEO how to coach your sellers—especially in a virtual environment—on which opportunities to pursue and how best to pursue them.

The scorecard refers to the new universal qualifying categories, which we use to refer to as BANT but now the **QSQ (Quick Six Qualifiers)**”.

1. Solution alignment
2. Decision-making process
3. Timing
4. Other people
5. Competition
6. Budget

Sellers often resist the idea of preparing to get the information they need from buyers. They claim that writing down questions makes them feel too scripted; others say they are good conversationalists who prefer to go with the flow. But, when you are selling virtually, on camera, preparation makes a huge difference.

The idea here is not to create a laundry list of questions to fire off at your prospects; virtual sales calls should not feel like an interrogation. But a prepared list of questions—and reviewing these questions with your colleagues in advance—can facilitate your dialogue and help you share the right information, so your prospects are able to make good decisions.



The keys to getting information through effective questioning are:

- Less is more
- Prioritize based on key information
- Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions

Below, we'll take a closer look at all the categories of the *Quick Six Qualifiers*. Under each category, I have highlighted one question in bold and italics that I would submit is most important to ask.

1. Solution Alignment: Today, buyers are focused on how they can move forward in the new normal post-COVID. That means discussions about goals and solutions that you held earlier in the sales process may no longer be relevant or feasible, or they may no longer be within your buyer's budget. The goal is to ask questions about what your buyer wants to accomplish, fix or avoid in the future.

Here are questions that will give you insights into your buyer's current state and desired future state:

- ***What results will you look to celebrate six months from now?***
- What will success look like in the future?
- How will you measure success?
- What hurdles to accomplishing this project do you see for yourself or your team?
- What is triggering your need for action?

2. Decision-Making Process: An organization's decision-making process may feel hard to ask about, but it's necessary to probe for information because it's likely that this process has shifted because of COVID-19. Organizations are changing who makes decisions, what criteria they use to guide their choices and how they prioritize projects.

Ask buyers these questions to learn more about their decision-making process.

- ***Help me understand how the final decision will be made?***
- What will your next steps be after you validate this solution?
- Have you decided to decide? In other words, is there any scenario in which you and the team decide to take no action on this whatsoever?
- When you've made decisions like this in the past, what process did you follow?
- What are your top decision criteria?
- Who is your project sponsor?



3. Timing: The coronavirus pandemic is changing the timing of projects dramatically; what was planned at the start of 2020 is likely been delayed. Therefore, it is essential to find out when your buyer intends not just to make the decision to buy but also to discover the timing of all the elements along the critical path for implementing your solution.

Ask these questions to discern whether your buyer has established a new timeline under the pandemic.

- *When do you need to start seeing the impact of your decision?*
- Is the third quarter still a realistic timeframe for completion?
- Can you describe your critical path?
- What is the timing for the various steps that exist between now and your decision?

4. Buying Personas: On average, 6.4 buying influences are involved in complex deals. Given the changes afoot with Coronavirus, it is likely that there are new or different people involved in making decisions that you should speak with. It is important to understand what role each of these buying influences plays in the decision-making process, what information to share with them and how best to reach them.

Given the tenuousness of today's situation, speaking to buying influences requires a more empathic approach than before. For example, if you are already talking to one buying influence, you shouldn't diminish their role when you ask questions to determine who else is involved in the buying decision: it requires a more delicate approach. Here are some questions to try:

- *In addition to you, who else in the organization will be most affected by the success or failure of this initiative?*
- As you consider the various stakeholders, who do you anticipate will need additional information to help them approve the path forward?
- Who, in addition to you, will need to provide their approval for this project to become a reality?

5. Competition: Competition is a thorny subject for most sellers to ask about, because they don't want to remind buyers that other sellers exist, and they certainly don't want to spend their limited time with buyers discussing solutions other than their own. But now, with the shift in the market, your sales organization may face unanticipated types of competitors, and it's imperative for you to understand what you're up against.



One way to avoid addressing the competition head-on is to create a broader conversation that discusses alternatives to your solution. Here are some questions that may steer clear of naming competitors:

- *Help me understand some of the alternatives that you are considering... how do you feel about your options?*
- Of the options you are exploring, what are some of the things you are most excited about?
- What are the major gaps you see based on the alternatives you have seen to date?

6. Budget: Sellers often wait until late in the sales process to discuss their buyer's budget, because they think that money is a taboo topic. But, especially during the coronavirus crisis, it's essential to ask about budget: you want to make sure your buyer is in the best position to make the smartest decision, while you also want to provide a solution that matches their desired scope—and determine whether the company can still afford what it anticipated. If you ask questions with this mindset, then you'll have more confidence, and your questions will elicit the information you need to deliver the right solution at the right price point.

Use these questions to explore your client's budget.

- *What do you need from me to help you create your business case for this project?*
- What help can I provide to help you get budget or funding for this? (Or do you already have the funding you need?)
- Can you give me a sense of your investment tolerance for this project?

The way that sellers ask questions about the *Quick Six Qualifiers* can fundamentally change the nature of a sales conversation. A formal, thoughtful approach to planning for these conversations can not only improve your conversations, help customers make better decisions and drive customer engagement, but it can also position you as a consultant/business partner for your customers.

If you would like a copy of the *Scorecard for Qualifying Strategic Opportunities*, drop me an email at dan@suncoast-partners.com with "Scorecard" in the subject line and I will be happy to forward you the **Scorecard**.

Good Selling!