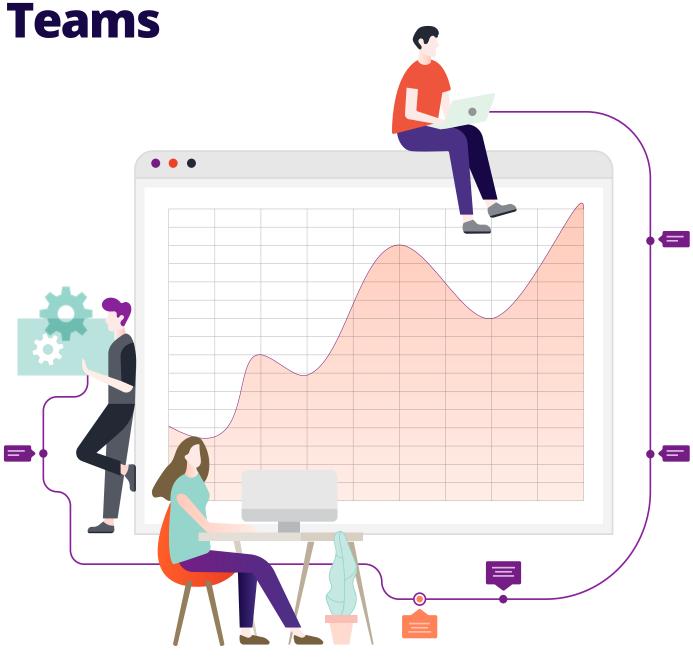# cloudshare

A Guide to Proving the True Value of Sales Engineering Teams

If you've been managing sales engineers for a while, or have been trying to get corporate buy-in to develop a sales engineering team, you might have seen it treated as a cost center meant to close some holes in the presales process, and then be cast aside.

> *Corporate leaders often view anyone on their sales engineering team as "someone you can parachute in on a short notice to give a demo, and then exit the opportunity," explained **Jon Michaels**, senior vice president of operations at Volta, a network of electric vehicle charging stations that partners with brands to sponsor free charging for all EV drivers, in an interview with CloudShare.*

And since that's the perception, there's no wonder corporations are quick to cut sales engineers when hiring and firing decisions are made.

Unveiling the Undervalued Work of Sales Engineers

As Training Industry's *Sales from the Buyer's Perspective* report reveals, the sales process as it is today is not effectively engaging buyers and influencers at prospect companies. Plus, buyers often question the integrity of salespeople.

Close.io also pointed out that salespeople who are eager to earn a commission might sometimes resort to overpromising things their companies are bound to under-deliver.

That's where sales engineers can step in for the benefit of the company, according to Michaels, who built a sales engineering organization from scratch in his previous position as head of global sales engineering at EnerNoc, a leading provider of cloud-based energy intelligence software serving thousands of enterprise customers and utilities around the globe.

> "Sales engineers don't just mimic sales reps. They're in a unique position to forge different kinds of relationships. SEs can help cultivate relationships with people who are technical champions in the buyer company, like the facilities engineer," Michaels explained to us.

That's especially important since Training Industry reports that B2B buying decisions are made across multiple touchpoints with multiple people. As Close.io explained, SEs ask different questions and offer different solutions than salespeople. For example, instead of simply promising to pass a feature suggestion to the engineering team, knowing that this request might not be prioritized in the foreseeable future, Close.io suggests that SEs can ask about the purpose of the requested feature and look for ways to show the prospect how they can achieve a similar result with the features the product already offers.

"Sales engineers have a unique position at the business table," explained **Babette N. Ten Haken**, a STEM-trained scientist, corporate strategist and speaker, and founder of Sales Aerobics for Engineers, on the *Salesforce blog*.

As sales engineers, "you serve as a liaison between sales and engineering. Your ability to combine your technical and non-technical perspectives can make you a relevant and valuable partner to both buyers and sellers," she wrote. It's not that sales engineers are better than salespeople. Rather, they bring different qualities that are essential to the sales process.

But how do we prove to the leadership team that these qualities matter?

We prove it with data.

The Top 5 Metrics that Help Prove Your SE Department's Value to Corporate Leadership

Let's break down the five types of metrics that will help you get buy-in from your c-suite to grow your department and make sure your team is respected across the organization. It's easy to assume only the fifth one matters, but the first four are crucial to set you for success as well.

1 Activity Metrics

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> *The first thing to remember is that any activity worth doing is worth logging,"* ***Gregory Hanson****, director of global sales engineering at SmartBear Software, a company that creates software tools that developing, testing and operations teams use to deliver the highest quality and best performing software possible, told us in an interview.*

Hanson, who built and managed sales engineering teams on four continents and wrote a book about it (called *Modern Software Sales Engineering*), recommends you break activities down to sub-categories, including demos, webinars and online visits.

"In my department, I know exactly how many 'engagements per week' an SE can handle before they become overworked. I know when our department will peak in activity, and I can make my hiring plans knowing the average increase in SE engagements. It takes a while to find a good SE and ramp them up. Do your hiring and training during the lull, so that you don't have an overtaxed team and an unhappy sales force," he said.

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> *Plus, it is a lot easier to say to your boss, 'Each SE can handle X engagements per week. We are increasing 30% YOY; that means I need Y more SEs ramped up by this date,'" Hanson said, adding that "it's harder to argue with numbers than the traditional, 'We are overworked, we should hire more people.'"*

2 PoC Usage

"How often have we done PoCs with hardware and had the customer tell us, 'Oh yeah, we are testing and it is going great,' and then months later we find out they only had one person tinker with it occasionally," asked **Bill Lapp** in his blog, _SE Thoughts_. Lapp is the former leader of sales engineering and architecture, Americas, and now global leader of customer success at Zscaler, a Security as a Service platform that's used by thousands of companies, including 50 of the Fortune 500.

"Instead of having to ask the customer or SE how the PoC is going, we made it so we could view usage statistics right in the SFDC opportunity," Lapp added.

While the Training Industry report found that buyers want to engage with vendors throughout the selling process, CloudShare's very own solutions engineer, _Scott Petri_, emphasized in an interview with us that, "every prospect is not the same and cannot be easily fit into the same box. Not all prospects have sufficient time for a thorough test, so open communications and agreeing ahead of time to a set schedule can help keep it on the rails."

The Training Industry report also revealed that prospects prefer to interact with vendors virtually over face to face. According to Petri, _virtual PoC environments_ can lead to higher usage rates as well.

CloudShare, for example, "lets you have a set, repeatable testing scenario for your prospects. You always know what they will be working on because you built it for them. You can even take it a step further and customize the environment's look and feel to match the prospect's own environment in seconds," Petri stated.

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> _As you can set the lifetime of that environment, you control how long it can be accessible for. You'll often find that giving the prospect a limited time window accelerates their pace. That runtime control also equates directly to cost control," Petri added._

So make sure you measure stats like **number of POCs per SE, amount of traffic per POC**, as well as keeping track of **when the POC was accessed, by whom and the length of time it takes to complete.**

3 Sales Engineers' Technical Forecasts

In his SE Thoughts blog post, Lapp suggested that, "just as a sales rep forecasts when his deal will close, the SE should forecast when they will achieve a Technical Win. All the rules that apply to a rep setting/changing a Sales Close Date apply to this one as well."

"Key aspects of a sales forecast are **close date, stage, next step and linearity**. So why not do the exact same thing for tracking the Technical Win progress? After all, the best predictor of a sale and sales linearity is whether we have the technical win in place," he wrote.

Sales linearity shows the average deals that have been closed over a measurable time period. Careful analysis of this data can show your company where it needs to invest more time and training, and adjust and optimize resources to match demand.

It also enables you to measure how accurate your SEs are, analyze why some of their predictions fail, and gradually work toward improving their ability to identify obstacles and indicators of success.

4 Human-to-Human Relationships

In response to one of Hanson's articles on *LinkedIn* about sales engineers, *Eric Chaves*, a sales engineering manager of cloud security at Cisco, brought up the possibility of measuring relationship building.

"People buy from people. While the product needs to be of value and meet some sort of needs the prospect has, the relationship an SE has with counterparts on the other side of the table is also key," he wrote in the comments.

While you might not be able to easily quantify a prospect's feelings about you or your SEs, according to Contactually, a CRM and contact management software, you can measure activity metrics that could indicate deepening the relationship with your contact.

For example, the *Contactually blog* suggests to **track how many times you've followed up with a contact** (meaning, how many times you reached out – say, with a link to an article they might like or with some commentary on the latest sports game you know they care about), **then measure the response rate.**

They also recommend keeping track of **how much your network grows and how many people you've fallen out of touch with in the past 6-12 months.**

5 Sales Engineers' Impact on Bottom Line Results

As Michaels explained in his interview with us, when he built a sales engineering organization from the ground up at EnerNOC, "metrics evolved as our SE and sales organization got more mature."

At first, since many of his salespeople never worked with SEs before, Michaels measured activity metrics. Gradually, though, after gaining some traction, "we paired SEs with sales reps, and measured the success of the SEs based on the success of the sales reps," he said.

Hanson agrees that hitting the sales numbers is what will ultimately matter to your company's leadership team.

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> *Any activity an SE does should be attached to the potential revenues being influenced. When you are already logging all your presales activity and then correlate it to the opportunity data, you have a treasure trove of value to pitch," Hanson said in his interview with us.*
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> *"I can run a quick report and tell you how long after a demo an opportunity will progress to the next step. I know that when an SE engages with a prospect within a week of downloading a trial, they have a significantly higher chance of purchasing. I can show how much revenue specific SEs were responsible for assisting with, and a value of how much each demo is worth to the company," he added.*

As we explored in our white paper, *6 Valuable Metrics to Determine Sales Engineer ROI* you can also measure how much time SEs reduce from your sales cycle and how many SE engagements are usually required to close a deal.

"On the flip side," Hanson told us, "I can see which salespeople are not using the SEs, who are over-using them, or are using them ineffectively. Just because a deal is twice as likely to close when we do a demo and a technical review, doesn't mean that unqualified leads will become qualified after talking to my department. We work magic, but we aren't wizards."

Reporting the Right Metrics Pays Off

While you certainly need to make sure your sales engineers are trained and managed well, our experts attribute the ability to grow their SE teams to measuring and reporting key metrics. While there are many activities and ratios that can be tracked, the key is to show the most value.

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> *The results came down to winning large deals. When we won our first seven-figure deal, it was a very big deal," Michaels said.*
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> *"There are lots of metrics we can measure; like how many meetings we went to. These are not the right metrics. We want results. We got in front of a large RFP (request for proposal), helped shape it, and won it. Those are the metrics we need to measure," Michaels added.*
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> *"When we started, we had a team of five SEs and we were supporting 40 sales reps; but over time, we grew and ended up with 18 SEs. And, as we saw success, corporate leadership saw the value, and we hired more; but we provisioned the new resources in a different way," he stated.*
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> *"We started having specialists in verticals, generalists, and specialists from other organizations that have been SEs for 20 years. We also brought in younger SEs for associate SE roles. When we're preparing a demo or a PoC, we need to do preparation work, so younger SEs learn the process, and the art and science of being an SE by doing this preparation work," he said.*
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> *"The reason we were able to grow like that that was that corporate leadership saw the value that we were bringing to the company," Michaels concluded.*

About CloudShare

CloudShare is a specialty cloud provider that helps software companies replicate complex on-premise IT environments in the cloud for training, PoCs, and sandboxing for support and testing. CloudShare's specialized solutions help vendors of on-premise and SaaS applications grow revenues, increase efficiency and improve customer success.

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