

What is an Account Manager in Sales? The Basics

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Today's business leaders know that success isn't just measured by the number of new [leads you can convert](#), but also by the percentage of happy customers you retain.

Particularly in today's world, where customer loyalty is diminishing, and economic hardships are affecting us all, building and preserving relationships with valuable accounts is crucial. That's where the role of 'account manager' comes into the sales landscape.

Account managers aren't salespeople, nor are they customer service reps, though they work closely with both teams. Instead, these professionals form the heart of a company's strategy to nurture and maintain relationships with critical customers. Here's your guide to the role of account management in the world of sales.

What is a Sales Account Manager?

A sales account manager is an employee responsible for developing, nurturing, and maintaining customer relationships. The role involves a mixture of customer service and sales duties, as well as the ability to manage a portfolio of clients, and create new business opportunities.

Account managers are particularly common in SaaS, technology, and B2B sales, where preserving relationships with clients is pivotal to continued growth. They oversee the entire customer lifecycle, working with clients to ensure they can leverage products and services effectively, as well as researching and presenting solutions to consumer problems.

Though account management might seem to focus primarily on customer service, these professionals are also valuable for unlocking new sales opportunities. They can help grow accounts through upsells, cross-sells, and strategies that lead to renewed, and expanded contracts.

The Responsibilities of an Account Manager

The role of an account manager can be comprehensive, and [requires many different skills](#). Primarily, these professionals oversee client accounts once a sales rep has 'closed a deal'. They act as the day-to-day point of contact for clients, ensure customer success, and handle account renewals and upsells.

Though the responsibilities of an account manager can vary, common tasks often include:

- Managing a diverse portfolio of existing client accounts, getting to know customer pain points, and addressing individual customer needs.
- Devising strategies to assist clients in getting the most out of their product or service, or helping them deal with challenges.
- Using industry contacts, as well as existing clients to find new business opportunities.
- Supporting and collaborating with a team of sales professionals and customer service agents or reps.
- Reviewing customer feedback to find opportunities for improvement.
- Presenting campaign updates, reports, and statistics to stakeholders.
- Lising with clients to manage expectations and nurture ongoing relationships.

The Skills Required for Sales Account Management

Just like sales and customer service, account management requires a variety of both hard and soft skills, often developed by professionals over time. Most of an account manager's skills will revolve around their ability to serve, support, and develop relationships with clients.

Common skills required in this role include:

- **Active listening:** Account managers need high degrees of [emotional intelligence](#), and need to be well-versed in active listening strategies. Active listening allows account managers to better understand the needs of their clients, and collaborate with sales teams.
- **Questioning skills:** Often tied in with relationship building and active listening, questioning skills are essential for account managers. They help these professionals learn more about client expectations, team member concerns, and campaign issues.
- **Time management:** Account managers often work across various areas of a business, and manage many clients at the same time. They need to be effective at making the most of their time, and adhering to tight deadlines. It's also important to be able to prioritize client communications and tasks based on the importance of an account.
- **Relationship building:** As mentioned above, one of the primary responsibilities of an account manager is to nurture relationships with existing customers. To ensure recurring business, account managers need to build rapport with each client. They need to learn as much as they can about their needs, goals, challenges, and preferences.
- **Communication:** Communication skills are often essential in any role. For an account manager, excellent communication skills help with presenting data to stakeholders, negotiating with clients, managing teams, and collaborating with colleagues. In today's digital world, account managers need to communicate effectively across a range of channels.
- **Organization:** Similar to time management, organizational skills are important to ensure account managers can support their teams and clients effectively. Being organized in an account management roles means putting strategies in place to track and deal with sales campaigns, team member duties, and client requests.

- **Flexibility:** The needs and goals of clients can change over time. Because of this, account managers need to be flexible enough to adapt to any situation. Competent account managers can help to reduce the risk of churn, by adapting the solutions offered to a client to suit their specific requirements.

Why are Account Managers Important to Business Growth?

In many industries, long-term business success depends on a company's ability to build exceptional solutions for customers, and deliver amazing experiences. Research constantly shows that loyal, repeat customers are more valuable to companies than new clients. Not only do they tend to buy more from the company over time, but they can even refer new clients to your company.

In the financial sector alone, a [5% increase](#) in customer retention can lead to a 25% increase (or more) in profits. However, business growth requires more than just an investment in a knowledgeable and proactive customer service team.

According to a [Gartner review](#), 88% of account managers that believe delivering amazing customer service is the best way to drive growth. However, the analyst found that while excellent levels of customer service increase the chances of retention, they rarely have a significant impact on growth.

Renewal, retention, and repurchase strategies simply focus on asking customers to commit to purchasing the same thing again. However, growth requires reps to convince customers to spend more, buy different products, and expand their investment.

This is where account managers step in. They don't just focus on solving problems and helping customers to unlock the benefits of their solution. They also proactively search for ways to encourage account growth, through upsells, and 'customer improvement.'

Account Managers and Customer Relationship Development

Account managers are essentially the linchpin of any company's strategy for developing lucrative and valuable relationships with customers. After a sales team wins a client, account managers become their main point of contact, resolving conflicts, and gathering useful information.

They can set expectations for consumers, providing insights into exactly what they can expect to get from a business, and its customer service team. They also help to prevent communication breakdowns, ensuring clients always have access to the information they need.

Account managers essentially act as the client's champion within your organization. They can guide companies to create new products and solutions based on feedback from existing customers, paving the way for additional revenue. They can also offer insights into client preferences and goals to sales teams, making it easier for them to find and convert leads.

Most importantly, account managers build the framework for customer account growth. They deliver excellent experiences, so customers are more likely to renew contracts and continue purchasing from your company. However, by listening to customer goals and pain points, they can also come up with strategic ways to upsell customers and increase lifetime value.

The Account Manager: Building and Maintaining Client Relationships

The role of sales account manager is one that's often misunderstood in the modern world. It's easy to view these professionals as champions of customer service, or strategic sales assistants. However, the reality is that an account manager is a unique professional, straddling both landscapes.

They empower and augment your customer services and sales teams, while also acting as a crucial champion for clients, ensuring they get the most value from every purchase. An effective account manager therefore paves the way for greater client retention and ongoing sales.

Learn more about the essential roles in the sales landscapes, and develop the skills you'll need to thrive in these positions, here at the [Hard Skill Exchange](#).

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