

# The 8 Best Sales Methodologies for Closing Complex Deals

Sales methodologies are a dime a dozen these days, with each one promising unprecedented growth and revenue.

However, we all know that to **successfully close large and complex deals**, it's essential for sales teams to have a more structured approach and focus on the right steps to bring deals to closure.



That's why we've reviewed **8 of the best sales methodologies** for closing large deals. We looked at the content, the delivery and the offerings to effectively implement the methodology in the field. (And in case you're having trouble convincing your team to adopt a methodology, check out [How to Handle Your Reps' Objections to Your Sales Process](#))

They are (in no particular order):

1. **Miller-Heiman's Strategic Selling**
2. **Target Account Selling**
3. **SPIN Selling**
4. **The Challenger Sale**
5. **Value Selling Framework**
6. **Solution Selling**
7. **The Sandler Selling System**
8. **MEDDIC**



(note: we have no affiliation with any of the methodologies or training companies mentioned.)

**Free Bonus:** Use our free **3 Minute Deal Health Check** to find out the exact status of your deals. See what's missing and what steps to take to close as quickly as possible. **Try it free.**

## 1. Miller Heiman's Strategic Selling

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

Miller Heiman just might be the most well-known sales training company around. They've been training sales teams in their flagship methodology, **Strategic Selling**, for almost *forty years*. But don't let its age fool you – Strategic Selling is still as relevant as ever.

It does a great job of tackling complex selling environments with multiple decision makers and trains sales reps to look for "Red Flags" that indicate where a deal might be vulnerable. It also lays a solid groundwork for handling large accounts (via their famous "**Blue Sheet**").

Strategic Selling is *very well* respected in the sales world and considered a standard by **many Fortune 1000 companies**.

What's lacking in Strategic Selling is a reliable way to automate the methodology. Their CRM add-on, **Sales Access Manager**, feels a bit outdated. Also, their Blue Sheet is basically a spreadsheet, which means a lot of manual data entry and lots of time updating.

Strategic Selling has a high cost of training, which means that it might be out of reach for many start-ups and SMBs.

**Pros:** Very good sales methodology focusing on the fundamentals of a customer buying process. Solid groundwork for handling large accounts with multiple decision makers.

**Cons:** Expensive trainings. Poor automation. Their **Sales Access Manager** CRM add-on feels outdated. They recently announced SAM for the iPad, but only for salesforce.com.

**Companies who've used it:** Dow Chemical, Marriott, Experian

**Sample Testimonial:** *"This was the most effective sales training that I have*



*participated in my career. I have taken trainings from some of your competitors and this was by far the most effective and truly the most actionable process. I look forward to my team's full integration of this process into their business planning."* - Director of Sales and Marketing, Insurance

**Website:** [www.millerheiman.com](http://www.millerheiman.com)

## 2. Target Account Selling

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

**Target Account Selling** is another go-to standard that's been used by over 650,000 sales reps in its 25-year history.

TAS does a great job of breaking down large deals into their key components and establishing an opportunity plan that guides you through the entire sales cycle.

Where it really stands out is in its ability to factor in an account's political landscape (which, in many deals, is a make-or-break factor), and its emphasis on **on-the-job coaching**.

TAS is also popular with many sales reps because of its steps towards automating the methodology, making it even simpler to integrate it with existing workflows. However, their integration software, **Dealmaker**, is only available for Salesforce.com.

**Pros:** *Great* for managing the political landscape and decision criteria in large opportunities. Strong automation.

**Cons:** High cost of training. **Dealmaker** (their automation tool) is only available for salesforce.com.

**Companies who've used it:** Autodesk, Unisys, HP

**Sample Testimonial:** *"The percent of wins when we used TAS was twice what it was for the other deals."* - Rob Dudley, Director of Global Sales Operations, Unisys

**Website:** [www.thetasgroup.com](http://www.thetasgroup.com)

## 3. SPIN Selling



**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

More of a communication skill than an actual sales methodology, **SPIN Selling** has nevertheless established itself as a standard in sales trainings since first being released in 1989 (the book by Neil Rackham is a **must-read** for any sales professional).

SPIN selling trains reps to develop a question based, customer-centric approach that uncovers needs, establishes trust, and enables the customer to arrive at a solution that's aligned with your offering.

It's extremely practical, simple to implement and can help you discover what's really going on within an account through it's approach of **S**ituation, **P**roblem, **I**mplication, and **N**eed-Pay-off questions.

However, it doesn't lay out any kind of **concrete, actionable steps** for dealing with large deals with multiple decision makers, and most clients nowadays expect you to already know the answers to many of SPIN's questions before your first meeting.

**Pros:** Great approach for discovering customer's pain points and enabling them to arrive at a solution.

**Cons:** No concrete steps for handling large sales. No automation tool of any kind. Certain approaches no longer relevant when facing informed customers.

**Companies who've used it:** Motorola, Johnson & Johnson, AT&T

**Sample Testimonial:** *"[With SPIN] we have seen a 38% increase in closed revenue productivity and our pipeline has increased in size by more than 250%."*  
- John Jenkins, Inside Sales Director, Microsoft

**Website:** [www.huthwaite.com](http://www.huthwaite.com)

## 4. The Challenger Sale

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

**The Challenger Sale** is considered by many to be the successor to SPIN Selling (Neil Rackham himself, founder of SPIN Selling, said that TCS is *"the most important advance in selling for many years"*).

Released in 2011, it is a recent but worthy entry into the line-up of sales methodologies (see our summary, **The Challenger Sale – A New Way to Drive**



Growth).

Its concept is that in response to today's online, educated buyers, the most successful sales reps 'challenge' their clients rather than simply uncovering needs and offering a solution.

That is, they actively *teach* their clients on how to avoid pitfalls within their industry, *tailor* their message to each decision maker, and aren't afraid to *assert control* of each and every sales call.

It's backed by extensive research and provides a solid approach for differentiating yourself in today's competitive environment.

However, as with SPIN Selling, the Challenger Sale provides more of a method of communicating with clients rather than providing a **clear strategy** for handling large, complex deals, and has no automation tool that we are aware of.

**Pros:** Great approach for establishing trust and differentiation in a competitive environment. Backed by extensive research.

**Cons:** No real strategy for handling large sales. No automation tool of any kind.

**Companies who've used it:** No client list available

**Sample Testimonial:** *"We looked at the impact [The Challenger Sale] delivered... across multiple sales teams it was over 30% improvement. And, if you look at that across all sales teams—that translates into millions of dollars of revenue."* – Joann Halle, Vice President Learning and Development, Xerox Corporation

**Website:** [www.executiveboard.com](http://www.executiveboard.com)

## 5. Value Selling Framework

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

While not as well known, the **Value Selling Framework** is a solid choice for enterprise-type sales.

Founded in 1991, VSF focuses on leveraging the customer's buying process and creating a repeatable road map.

It nails the basics on:



- Qualifying an opportunity
- Mapping the opportunity to your capabilities
- Asking the right questions
- Developing a workable closing plan

They do have an automation tool ([eValuePrompter](#)), but we haven't gotten our hands on it and can't say anything about it one way or the other.

**Pros:** Strong focus on the basics of handling large deals and establishing a closing plan.

**Cons:** A lot of documentation is involved, which means it may get used only for main opportunities. (note: [eValuePrompter](#) may have improved this, but like I said, I don't have any experience with it yet!)

**Companies who've used it:** IBM, Xerox, Motorola, Siemens, Google

**Sample Testimonial:** *"This was by far the best sales seminar that I've ever attended."* – Sales Rep, Electric Lightwave

**Website:** [www.valueselling.com](http://www.valueselling.com)

## 6. Solution Selling

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

[Solution Selling](#) was first created by Mike Bosworth in 1988 (based on his experiences at Xerox). With over 1 million sales people trained in this methodology, it's definitely one that has left a mark on the industry.

Solution Selling has evolved over time, recently releasing a book ([The Collaborative Sale](#), March 2014) that stresses the need for a *dynamic* sales process can adapt today's constantly-shifting buying environment.

But wait a minute, isn't solution selling [supposed to be dead](#)?

While there's a lot of hype out there that claims that to be the case, it's misleading to say the least.

What's dead is any sales methodology that focuses *only* on uncovering and solving needs *without* providing additional insight. Solution Selling addresses this issue spot on with its deep understanding of today's informed and mature



buyer.

(Interestingly enough, the majority of articles that claim the death of Solution Selling were published shortly after [The Challenger Sale](#) was released, with many of these articles written by the Challenger authors themselves).

**Pros:** Well established network of trainers. Strongly adapted to today's complex buying environment.

**Cons:** We don't have enough information about their automation tools ([Solution Selling for CRM](#) and [EnablePRO](#)) to make a fair assessment.

**Companies who've used it:** Nike, Microsoft, MasterCard, and Dell

**Sample Testimonial:** *"Most of our partners showed a clear improvement in their sales techniques and sales results already 3-6 months after going through the Solution Selling training. Solution Selling will be one of our most important priorities in the years to come."*

– Dagfinn Ringås, Director, Microsoft Business Solutions

**Website:** [www.spisales.com/](http://www.spisales.com/)

## 7. The Sandler Selling System

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

[The Sandler Selling System](#) is, in our opinion and experience, one of *the* most effective out there. Their concept is just as solid today as it was thirty years ago, when it was developed by David H. Sandler.

The Sandler System is based entirely on *people*, with a focus on understanding human dynamics and buying behavior rather than standard sales processes and formulas.

Their biggest strength is their emphasis on continuous on-the-job coaching that constantly reinforces and supports lasting behavioral changes. (See [How On-the-Job Coaching Can Improve Your Sales Performance](#).)

They also have great discovery guidelines and sales hygiene procedures that strongly support every deal.

While there is no sales automation app that supports the Sandler System, it is possible to embed the methodology within certain CRMs.



Sales reps that come out of their trainings rave about this system and the on-going support that comes with it.

**Pros:** Strong foundation for sales based on understanding *people*. Great concept for on-going coaching. Great training network via franchise partners.

**Cons:** No Sales Automation App, but can embed methodology into CRMs

**Companies who've used it:** AT&T, Baxter, AG Edwards

**Sample Testimonial:** *"Sandler Training has also helped our new hires become productive far more rapidly than what is considered the industry norm. Sandler's emphasis on questioning skills and setting up-front contracts has helped our entire sales team be more focused, resulting in increased productivity. Most importantly, the Sandler Selling System has made the salespeople better advisors to our clients."* – Stephen Shawler, Vice President, Essilor Lenses ECP Group

**Website:** [www.sandler.com](http://www.sandler.com)

## 8. MEDDIC

**Our Rating:** ★★★★★

When it comes to having a structured sales process that leads you through the entire sales cycle, **MEDDIC** is a strong contender.

**MEDDIC** was developed in the early '90s by Jack Napoli of PTC, where the sales team used it to grow their revenue from \$300 million to \$1 billion and exceeded every quarter revenue target for **more than 20 quarters in a row**.

The concept may be simple, but it really enables sales teams to qualify their deals more effectively than many other methodologies out there.

MEDDIC stands for:

- **M**etrics
- **E**conomic Buyer
- **D**ecision Criteria
- **D**ecision Process
- **I**dentify Pain
- **C**hampion





It's a very strong qualification process that gives you a clear understanding of the health of your deals and how to create a detailed closing plan.

It really shines in helping you find the right people that will drive your sales (see [How to Identify a Champion](#)), and it enables sales teams to speak a common language and have common messaging. The concept of training the first line managers in advance of the sales reps helps companies to adopt the methodology more consistently.

However, without proper automation, keeping track of MEDDIC with all of your deals ends up involving a lot of Word docs and Excel spreadsheets, but it really gives you an overview of your deals that few methodologies can.

The good news is there is now a [MEDDIC app for Salesforce.com](#) let's you manage all the MEDDIC qualifiers and milestones right within the SF interface.

**Pros:** Very strong qualifiers. Great for creating a detailed closing plan. Incorporates both messaging and sales process that enables the sales teams to speak one language and have a common messaging. Coach the coaches sessions in advance. Native Salesforce.com app.

**Cons:** Without an automated tool, tracking can be cumbersome with documentation based on word files and spreadsheets.

**Companies who've used it:** RSA, BMC, Dynamic Ops

**Sample Testimonial:** *"The first year we worked with it, our productivity per sales rep went up by 31%. Last year, we increased productivity another 22%."* – Senior VP of Worldwide Sales and Services, BMC Software

**Website:** [www.salesmeddic.com](http://www.salesmeddic.com)

## Summary

All of the above are solid sales methodologies that approach the fundamentals of large deals each in their own way.

In our opinion, only **The Sandler Selling System** has really nailed the concept of [coaching after training](#), which is crucial for sales people who need to change their selling behavior. We got great feedback from the attendees, which especially mentioned the after training support.

The most solid client reference lists come from Miller Heiman's **Strategic Selling** and Sales Performance International's **Solution Selling**.



**MEDDIC** attracts with its simplicity and focus on the fundamentals of decision making.

In terms of automating the methodology, **TAS** is leading the pack. None of the other sales methodologies we reviewed offer a modern, “state-of-the-art” automation tool that sales can use to incorporate the methodology into their daily life.

So there you have it. The 8 best sales methodologies for closing complex deals.

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