



Salesloft.

The future of sales forecasting

Take your forecasting approach from confusing to comprehensive

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Intro: Forecasting today

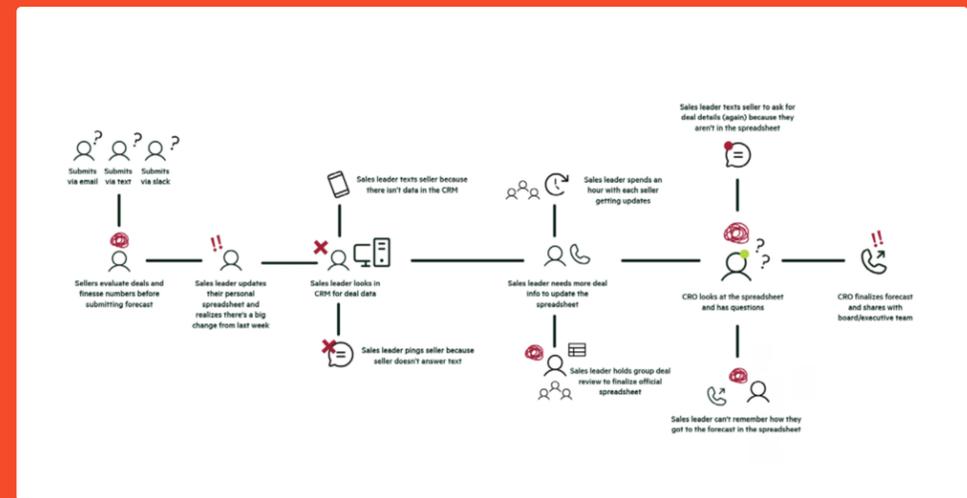
Before we get into the future of forecasting, let's talk about why it's so tricky in the present. For starters, you and your revenue team might have tried your hand at the forecasting game before. And in that process, it probably felt like you were throwing numbers into a confusing black hole, never to be heard of again. Is it supposed to take this many calls, meetings, and spreadsheets? Is it always this difficult to triangulate a number? Is this process ever complete?

There's a better way, friends. And it's simpler and more accurate than ever.

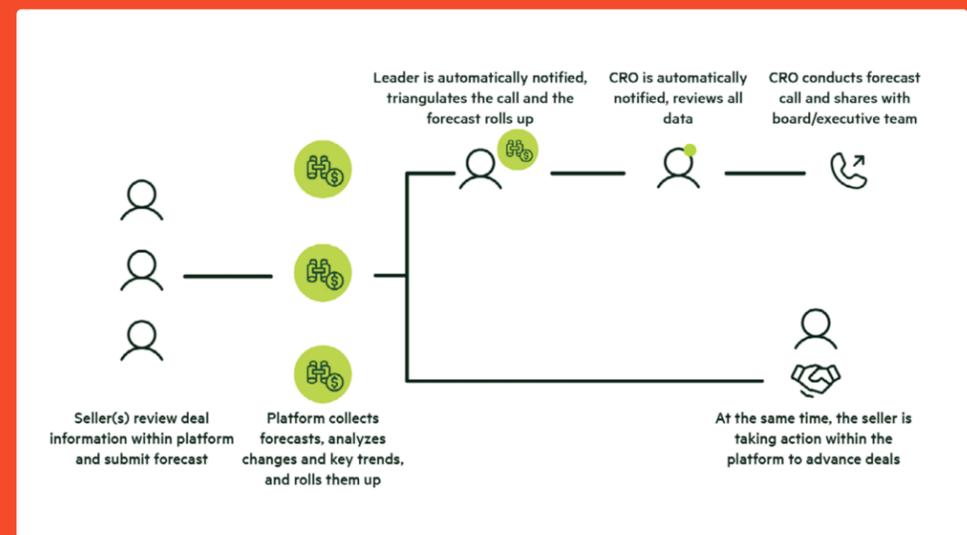
Dig into this 7-step guide for actionable ideas to fix a broken process and explore an exciting forecasting future for yourself. Imagine what you could do with true pipeline cleanliness across your whole team, the insight to coach through challenges, and the technology to take action right within your sales workflow. Forget coordinating a last-minute, mad dash of meetings. A healthy forecast is just over the horizon.

Read on to see what we mean.

The confusing forecast



The comprehensive forecast



1. Rethink your forecast

Your forecast isn't a number. It's a process.

And now more than ever, that process should be guided by AI so that your team can focus on analyzing dozens of factors across hundreds of deals. Your forecast accuracy will improve in a way that helps you navigate an ever-changing economy and leads your team towards success.

Because the truth is, the future of forecasting doesn't include spreadsheets or deal data in a bunch of different places. It will, however, require taking the right actions — and tapping into the right technology — to achieve dependable results.

That said, it's hard to be confident when just about anyone could have accidentally deleted a cell or changed a formula in a spreadsheet. Or when there's no deal data in the CRM, so your team has to piece it together with frantic calls and texts. Or even when the forecasting call is more about understanding the spreadsheet than making business decisions.

But the important thing is that forecasting is on your mind in the first place. Now, let's change your mind about how you approach it.



2. Change your mindset

Forecasting is just as necessary as prospecting, negotiation, and objection handling. Plus, it helps your top sellers drive business growth. See if any of these original mindsets feel true to you about forecasting, and open yourself up to some new possibilities.

FROM: Forecasting is just a number

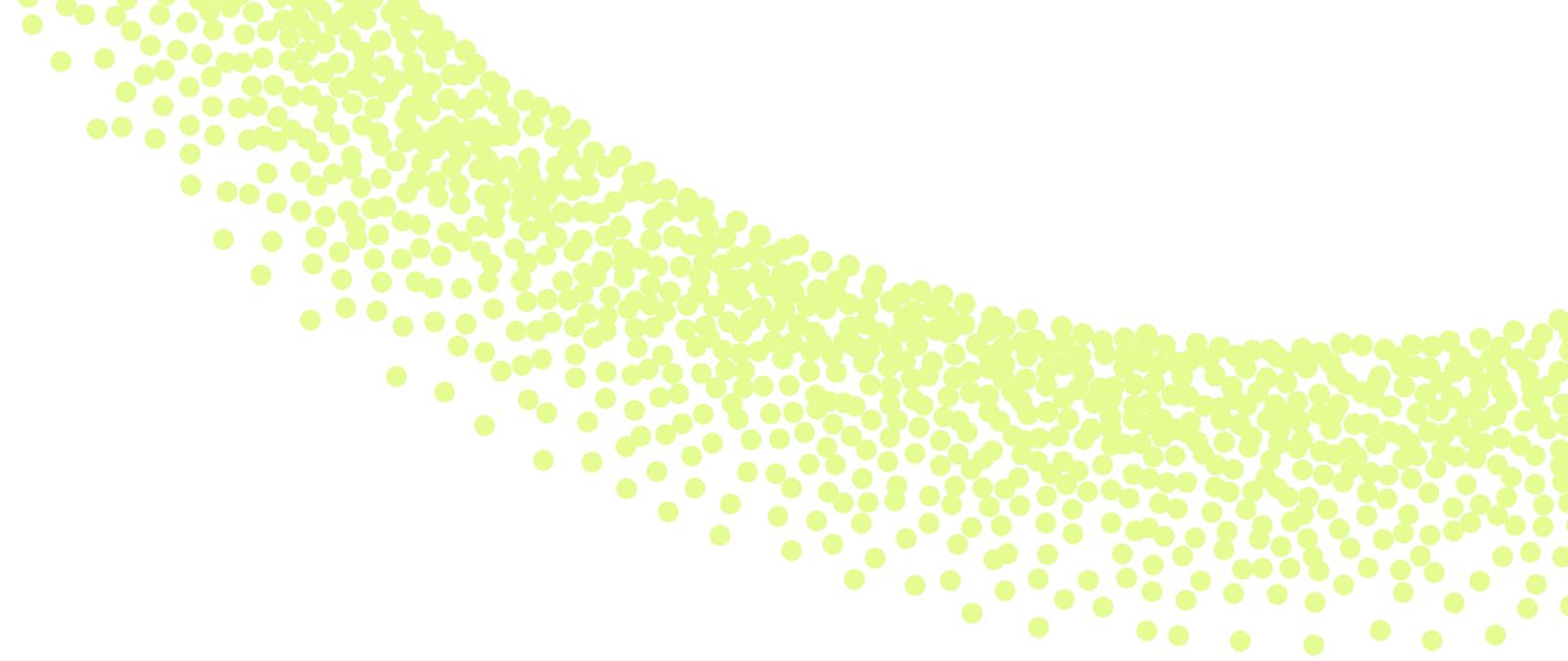
TO: Forecasting is a business strategy

The root of this tension is that many revenue teams approach forecasting as coming up with a stretch goal. But in reality, it's a forcing mechanism that helps your team drive deals and create org-level accountability among your different team roles. By forecasting at the right consistency — while including data, intuition, and AI — you can run a more efficient and effective sales org where repeatable successes are guaranteed.

FROM: Forecasting doesn't close deals

TO: Forecasting reveals valuable insights

Stop thinking about forecasting only as a number, and use the process to uncover insights that help you deliver results. Your deal analysis shows missed opportunities, areas of softness, and gaps within a deal, but you lose that information when you boil it down to a number in a spreadsheet. The forecast as part of your sales workflow can offer AI-based insight and show changes in real-time, like a prospect's response to an email or insight from a conversation.



FROM: Forecasting is guesswork

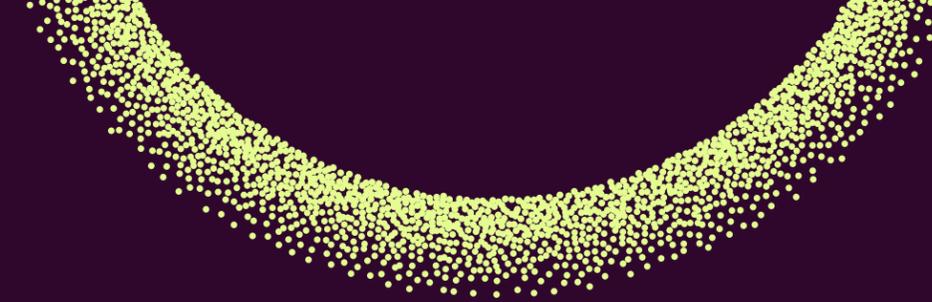
TO: Forecasting builds confidence

According to Korn Ferry, 40% of sales operations leaders identified seller subjectivity as their greatest challenge to forecast accuracy.¹ That probably hits close to home. When your sellers base their forecast on data, though, you can be confident in their end result. Providing your team with a powerful AI model alongside their weighted pipeline will give your team insights they can better forecast against.

FROM: Forecasting wastes time

TO: Forecasting saves time and adds value

Forecasting accuracy is important from your SDRs to the CRO – especially in a bottom-up model. Improve your team’s forecast accuracy by asking your best forecasters to share their secrets at team meetings or by offering tips for improvement. Plus, you’ll save time in the long run when you’re aligned on a forecast from the start instead of frantically piecing info together throughout the process.



3. Lay the groundwork for change

Changing your mindset will likely force a change in your process — for the better. To call confidently and deliver consistently, your entire team needs to follow the same processes and expectations from the beginning

But a new process and sales qualification framework take time. Your sellers need to be trained on how your forecasting approach will work. A platform that integrates that approach into its workflow makes it even easier for reps to adopt it — and succeed with it. Because when a forecasting capability already exists in the same technology where your sellers are working, they get the benefit of a familiar interface, less back and forth, and fewer logins. And shouldn't sellers focusing on selling be part of your forecasting goal, too? We think so!

Your reps have incredible talents: connecting with prospects, creating value for customers, managing multiple deals and opportunities, and so much more. That's where they should be spending time — not tabbing between app screens and inputting numbers into spreadsheets. While ditching repetitive tasks is probably a win in your sellers' book as much as it is in yours, you still have to figure out how to set up your forecasting process and workflow to make it possible for them.

This next section walks you through the steps you'll want to take with your team to fix how you forecast.

4. Fix your forecasting process

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The Salesloft Forecast module is going to reduce a lot of manual things that we are doing today, which I love. It's going to get us out of spreadsheets which will improve efficiency but also provide our leadership team with accurate real time data. Which is a pretty big deal!

Steve Houghland, Wowza Media Systems

- 1 Get rid of spreadsheets
- 2 Track all data in one place
- 3 Document your forecasting process
- 4 Align with your sales qualification framework
- 5 Use real-time information
- 6 Highlight deal changes
- 7 Make the roll-up automatic
- 8 Remove the guesswork
- 9 Simplify forecasting with AI

1 Get rid of spreadsheets

This one seems obvious when you think about all the potential spreadsheet variations a team can have as well as the possibility of accidental deletions, mistyped formulas, and outdated information. Not to mention the complete loss when a seller leaves the organization. Have you thought about security and who might be accessing and sharing your data?

2 Track all data in one place

When your forecast is part of a unified platform, all deal details are right there to help you understand deal health and how you're engaging buyers. Ultimately you have more holistic data to inform your forecast call. In addition to improving forecast accuracy, the consistency makes for a smooth transition when a team member moves to a new role or leaves the company.

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3 Document your forecasting process

It's important to document your forecast, because new reps who come into your organization will access this work during their ramp up period. By documenting it, you're aligning all current members of your revenue organization to your forecasting process, training new members on it so they build on the proper foundation, and making it a reliable part of your sales best practices by setting it in stone.

Information to include in a documented forecasting process:

- Details on the sales process and cycle, especially cycle length
- Forecast methodology
- Forecast deadlines
- Required deal information
- Definitions of stages/categories, if used
- Who can move a deal in and out of the forecast (or categories/stages)
- Requirements for moving a deal in and out of the forecast
- Expectations, information required, and timing for the forecast call

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4 Align with your sales qualification framework

A sales qualification framework helps maintain an accurate sales pipeline. And an accurate pipeline leads to an accurate forecast. Sellers use a sales qualification framework to qualify opportunities and gauge the influence of decision-makers and overall deal strength.

Consider a policy that allows only certain levels of leadership to move deals in and out of the forecast. That way when one of your sellers says a deal is slipping, you can rally the team around the deal to figure out how to re-engage or replace it. You'd be amazed at just how many deals can be saved.

A sales qualification framework improves your forecast by:

✓ Revealing deal gaps or weaknesses

Leaders use the framework as a “checklist” to pressure test deals. If the deal meets enough of the qualification criteria, it can then be forecast.

✓ Reducing surprises

Each level in the forecast roll-up has more visibility when the entire revenue team is using the same criteria and language to make forecasting decisions.

✓ Increasing confidence

A sales qualification framework offers evidence of deal strength. This strength will allow teams to close more deals and bigger deals.

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Pro tip: Choosing a sales qualification framework

There's no shortage of sales qualification frameworks. However, the one known for increasing forecasting accuracy that we happen to use at Salesloft is MEDDPICCC, which breaks down like this:

- **Metrics:** data points proving the value of your solution
- **Economic buyer:** makes the final decision
- **Decision criteria:** standards to evaluate your solution
- **Decision process:** actions and players involved in decision-making
- **Paper process:** a buyer's required paperwork and timelines
- **Identifying pain:** the problem your solution solves
- **Champion:** person who persuades other stakeholders in favor of your solution
- **Competition:** other solutions a buyer might be considering

This framework focuses on the prospect's purchase process, helping the seller to better understand the major buying criteria so they can tailor their approach.

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5 Use real-time information

A dynamic platform offers your sellers real-time pipeline visibility and the most up-to-date data. No more frantic messages or scrambling for the latest updates right before the forecast call.

6 Highlight deal changes

Deals are constantly changing size and velocity. You need to be able to see your forecast's deal-level changes at-a-glance because they hold a tremendous amount of information. They are very difficult to track down, especially in a spreadsheet or CRM — that's because spreadsheets and CRM tools are notoriously bad at telling you what changed. They only tell you what today's snapshot looks like.

7 Make the roll-up automatic

When sales leaders are not spending time compiling forecasts in multiple formats, they can spend time coaching, strategizing, and minimizing risk. Plus, imagine the power of seeing all roll-ups in one place and one format.

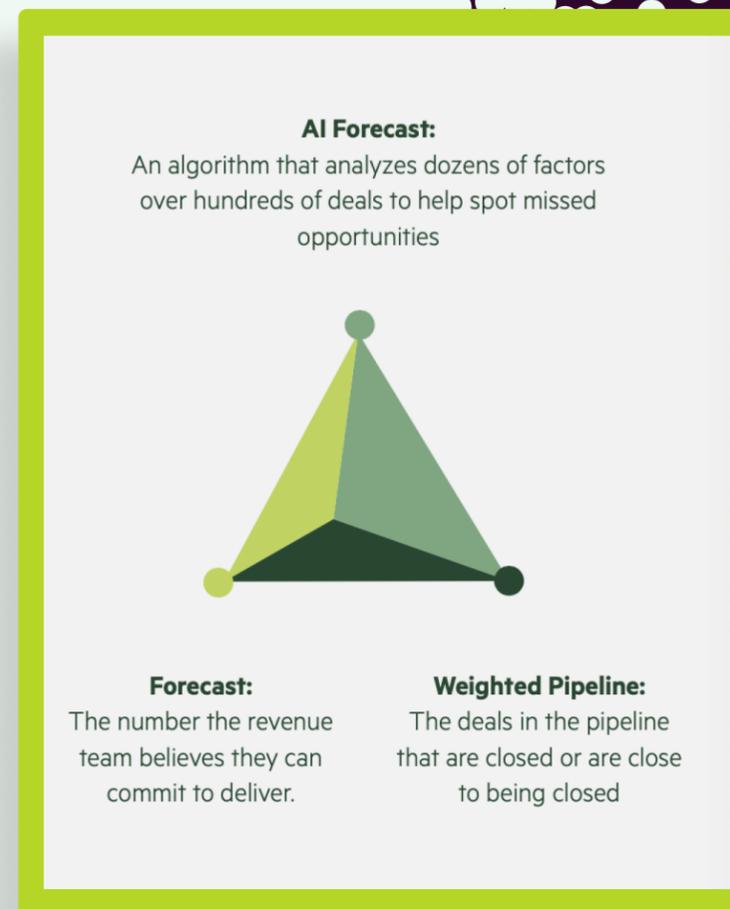
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8 Remove some of the guesswork

Human instinct is vital to forecasting, but an AI model can be an essential partner in helping you understand your business. Combining your team's forecast, weighted pipeline, and the AI forecast can give you a more likely picture than instinct alone.

9 Simplify forecasting with AI

The AI forecast helps you spot missed opportunities to close more deals. But, the secret sauce is your interpretation of the triangulation — your rep's forecast, the weighted forecast, and the AI forecast. Combining your sellers' instinct with the data, you can count on a more accurate forecast.



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How AI can help you forecast

✓ Rank sellers by forecast accuracy

Track the monthly or quarterly ranking of forecast accuracy for each seller and leader with AI. When you're not relying solely on instinct, you can manage and coach against the data. Plus, think of the value for a new leader. You're no longer flying blind – you immediately know which sellers you can trust.

✓ Use trends to predict when a deal might fall out

Noting the details of a deal when it falls out of the forecast will offer insight into the problem. Is there a trend around a certain rep, a part of the sales process, or a time of the year? With AI-driven data, a leader can step in to coach or alter a process.

✓ Identify deals to pull forward

Use seller activity to find personas or accounts that have an open opportunity but low rep activity levels. AI can suggest top-performing cadences to re-engage the deal and build pipeline.

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6. Balance intuition and data

There really is a perfect balance to sales forecasting. The best forecasts are created from sales team intuition and experience combined with current and historical data. In these three types of forecasts, the more data considered, the stronger the confidence level.

1 Opinion-based

A typical forecasting method used by B2B organizations. It's mostly based on the rep's experience and gut instinct, making it the least efficient and accurate, but often the most commonly implemented.

2 Augmented

Augmented forecasts take advantage of machine learning and automation trained on historical structured data, like spreadsheets, to build predictive models that enhance your sellers' and managers' intuition and opinions.

3 Prescriptive

This forecast uses deep learning on both structured data, like spreadsheets and customer history, and unstructured data, like voice and text, to derive a more accurate forecast. With a prescriptive forecast, your reps' forecast opinions improve the prediction. And then buying signals from client engagement data can be leveraged by your team to beat their number.²

7. Make it happen

When you think differently about forecasting, you'll be able to call confidently and deliver consistently.

This means evaluating your current forecasting process and platform. Does it offer you true pipeline visibility? Are your sellers able to own their calls and take action within the workflow? If not, it may be time to switch your process to a technology like Salesloft, a revenue workflow platform with a comprehensive solution called Forecast built in.

Better forecasting has never been easier. By combining AI with real-time human insight, Salesloft Forecast gives revenue teams like yours the confidence to call their number and the seamless workflow to deliver on it consistently.

[Learn more about forecasting with Salesloft.](#)

“

Forecast has proven to be very easy to use and our team sees it as a very helpful feature.”

Danielle Hokanson, Director of Business Development and Sales Enablement, OneCause

Sources

- 1 [The top four challenges in sales forecasting; Korn Ferry](#)
- 2 [Careful With That Axe, Sales Team: AI And The Future of Forecasting; Forrester](#)

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