Closing Foundry.

Enterprise Sales: What Changes When You Move Upmarket

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Published 10 Apr 2026 Read time 9 min read

Key Points

- Enterprise deals are structurally different from mid-market: more stakeholders, formal procurement, legal review and internal consensus requirements that a mid-market motion isn't built to handle.
- Most teams that struggle moving upmarket are applying the same qualification criteria, value language and deal rhythm they used with smaller buyers.
- The economic buyer is rarely in the first meeting. Identifying that person and building a path to access them is a core part of enterprise qualification, not an optional extra.
- Multi-threading isn't optional. One champion isn't enough when the deal needs sign-off across multiple functions. Building the account map is part of how the deal is run, not a rescue operation when things go quiet.
- Value language has to shift from product capability to quantified business outcome, framed in terms the economic buyer cares about as well as the champion.
- The signals enterprise selling is working: economic buyers engaged earlier in deals, fewer late-stage surprises from procurement and legal, and a qualification standard that reflects how enterprise buyers actually buy.

What is enterprise sales?

Enterprise sales is the process of selling complex, high-value products or services to large organisations where multiple people across multiple functions must agree before a decision is made. It's distinct from mid-market selling in contract value and also in the structure of the buying group,

the nature of internal risk assessment, and the level of cross-functional alignment required before money moves.

In enterprise, a deal rarely succeeds on the merits of the product alone. Discovery quality, the ability to build consensus across functions, the strength of the business case, and preparation for procurement and legal review are all as important as what is being sold. Most B2B revenue teams understand this in principle. Fewer have built the motion that actually operates this way.

Enterprise sales is sometimes used loosely to mean any deal above a certain size. The more useful definition is structural: an enterprise deal requires multiple people across multiple functions to agree before a purchase is approved. That requirement changes how every part of the sale needs to run, from the first discovery call to the final commercial terms.

Why enterprise sales motions fail

The most common reason teams fail when moving upmarket is that they bring their mid-market motion with them. The same discovery questions, the same qualification criteria, the same single-champion relationship model. That approach works at £30k ACV. It falls apart at £150k.

For revenue leaders, the failure tends to show up in predictable ways. Deals that look strong at 90 days out go quiet after procurement gets involved. Champions become unresponsive. Legal takes four months. The board asks why the enterprise pipeline isn't converting, and the honest answer is that the process wasn't built for enterprise buyers.

The structural problem is that enterprise buying requires a different kind of engagement from the start. Mid-market buyers can often move on a single person's recommendation. Enterprise buyers need multiple functions to accept the risk, agree the budget category, confirm the legal and security review, and align on implementation planning. If the team isn't building towards all of those conversations in parallel, the deal isn't progressing, even when the CRM says it is.

For founders considering a move upmarket, the problem often starts with ICP definition. Enterprise accounts can look like large mid-market accounts from the outside. They have longer buying cycles for structural reasons that have nothing to do with how good the product is.

What it actually costs

The cost of applying a mid-market motion to enterprise buyers is missed deals and months of effort invested into opportunities that were never going to close in the quarter they were forecast. Every deal that dies in legal after three months of active selling represents three months of rep capacity, solutions engineering time, and leadership attention that was committed to the wrong thing.

The most common signal that a team has this problem is late-stage deal loss. Opportunities progress through the early stages and then stall or collapse when the real buying group becomes involved. A procurement gate appears that no one had mapped. A security review adds six weeks. A business case that was compelling to the champion doesn't survive review by the CFO's office.

Forecast accuracy suffers too. Teams that aren't multi-threading and not engaging economic buyers early tend to forecast based on champion confidence. That number gets revised, repeatedly, as the rest of the buying group becomes visible. Best case becomes commit and then at risk in the same quarter.

Good teams still miss the number. Usually for reasons that were visible earlier than they realised.

What good looks like

In a team that has built for enterprise, qualification happens at the start of a deal, not when late-stage risks emerge. A framework like MEDDPICC is used not as a box-ticking exercise but as a standard for what the team needs to know before committing a deal to forecast. If the economic buyer hasn't been identified and a clear path to access them confirmed, the deal doesn't go into the pipeline at full value.

Multi-threading is built into how the team sells, not added as a recovery move when a champion goes quiet. Every deal has an account map. Which functions are involved in the decision? Who has sign-off authority? Who has blocked similar initiatives before? Those questions are part of every deal review, not something surfaced at the point of escalation.

The value language is built around the economic buyer's priorities, not the champion's. That usually means moving from product capability to quantified business outcome. A claim that the product will improve revenue operations isn't a business case. A specific articulation of where the gap is, what it costs the business, and what changes when the problem is fixed, is a business case.

Preparation for legal and procurement starts early. The team knows which accounts typically have complex legal cycles and plans for them. Standard security questionnaires are ready before they are requested. Reference customers who have completed enterprise procurement are available and prepared for that role.

How to build an enterprise sales motion

Start with the right ICP. Not every large account is an enterprise account worth pursuing at your current stage. Define what a winnable enterprise deal looks like: the industry, the buying function, the indicators of internal readiness, and what the business case looks like when the fit is right. A clear enterprise ICP means the team isn't chasing revenue that won't close in a predictable way.

Rebuild qualification for enterprise buying groups. If you're using the same qualification criteria for £150k deals as for £30k deals, the criteria are wrong. Enterprise qualification needs to confirm: who the economic buyer is and whether you can get access to them, what the approval process looks like at this account, whether a budget category exists or needs to be created, and what the key risk questions are for procurement, legal and security review. MEDDPICC is a well-structured framework for working through this.

Build multi-threading into the deal process. Every enterprise deal should have an account map from an early stage. Who is in the buying group? Who has approval authority? Who are the likely blockers? The goal isn't to work around the champion. It's to make sure the champion isn't the only person in the account who understands the value of the investment and is prepared to defend it internally when the deal faces scrutiny.

Change the value language. Champions often care about product capability and ease of use. Economic buyers care about business outcomes, risk management and return on investment. Build the business case in the economic buyer's language: revenue impact, cost reduction, risk mitigation, strategic alignment. Make the case specific and quantified. Vague claims about efficiency gains don't survive internal scrutiny at enterprise accounts.

Plan for procurement and legal. Map the typical procurement process for your enterprise target accounts. Know what security review requirements exist. Have reference customers who have completed enterprise procurement available. Prepare standard commercial positions before they are raised, not in response to them. The goal isn't to speed up procurement. It's to stop being caught unprepared by it.

Run structured deal reviews. Enterprise deals should be reviewed against the qualification standard, not against rep narrative. The questions that matter are: what buyer evidence do we have that the economic buyer is engaged? What does the account map look like today? What are the open risks in legal, procurement or internal alignment? Where has the deal moved since the last review, and what is the evidence for that movement?

Common mistakes

Relying on one champion. A champion is the person who wants to buy. In enterprise, that isn't enough. When the champion can't build internal support for the investment, the deal stalls. When the champion leaves the business, the deal dies. Multi-threading isn't extra work on top of enterprise selling. It's what enterprise selling is.

Forecasting on champion confidence. The rep saying they are very keen isn't a forecast. Enterprise deals require buyer evidence: confirmed economic buyer engagement, a mapped approval process, a business case that has been tested inside the account. When forecast reviews run on rep optimism rather than what the buying group has actually committed to, the number can't be trusted.

Using mid-market discovery in enterprise accounts. Mid-market discovery is typically about finding the problem and confirming budget exists. Enterprise discovery needs to go further: map the buying group, understand the approval process, identify the economic buyer's priorities, and find out what has been tried before and why it didn't work. Treating an enthusiastic champion as a reason to skip this work is how deals reach late stage and then collapse.

Leaving legal and procurement to the end. In enterprise, legal isn't a formality that happens after the commercial decision is made. It's a process that can take months and surface issues that reshape or end the deal. Teams that don't engage legal early, or don't know their own standard positions on key

commercial terms, lose time and occasionally lose deals. Know your positions. Have your security questionnaire ready. Get legal involved earlier than feels necessary.

How to tell if it's working

The clearest signal is a change in where deals die. If late-stage losses to procurement gates, legal delays or internal misalignment fall, the motion is working. If the team is consistently identifying and engaging economic buyers earlier in deals and progressing those opportunities with that engagement confirmed, qualification has improved.

A properly multi-threaded deal review shows contacts across multiple functions in every active enterprise opportunity. When you ask which stakeholders the team has engaged, the answer shouldn't be the same champion's name across every deal in the pipeline.

Cycle length isn't the primary metric. Enterprise deals take as long as enterprise buying processes take. The goal isn't to shorten the cycle by skipping steps. It's to reduce time lost to late-stage surprises: procurement gates that nobody planned for, legal reviews that derail the quarter, champions who can't get the deal past the economic buyer. Those delays fall when qualification and multi-threading are working properly.

Win rate on enterprise opportunities is the most direct measure. If the team is qualifying properly, only opportunities with confirmed buyer access, a mapped approval process and an engaged economic buyer should be in the enterprise forecast. If those opportunities are converting at a higher rate, the motion is working.

Further reading

7 Steps to Win Buying Group Consensus and Cut Deal Slippage A practical guide to building consensus across enterprise buying groups and reducing the deal slippage that follows when alignment isn't there.

MEDDPICC Explained: A Practical Guide for Founders and Sales Leaders How to use MEDDPICC as a working qualification standard in enterprise deals instead of a checklist.

From Revenue Surprises to Early Intervention How to build the inspection rhythm that surfaces enterprise deal risks before they become forecast misses.

How to Turn CS into Consultative Sellers and Measure the Impact to Drive NRR How customer success can play a multi-threading role in enterprise accounts and contribute to expansion revenue.

Related terms

- ICP (Ideal Customer Profile): A detailed description of the company most likely to buy and retain your product.
- Revenue Operations: The function that aligns sales, marketing, and customer success around shared revenue goals.

- Forecast Accuracy: The degree to which predicted revenue matches actual closed revenue.
- Multi-Threading: Engaging multiple stakeholders at a prospect to reduce single-point-of-failure risk.
- Discovery Call: The structured conversation used to uncover prospect needs and fit.
- Buying Process: The steps a prospect organisation follows when evaluating and selecting a vendor.
- Economic Buyer: The person with budget authority and final sign-off power in a deal.
- Buyer Evidence: Proof points and documentation that validate a buyer's decision to purchase.

Related service: Strategic Sales Enablement
Source: https://www.closingfoundry.com/insights/enterprise-sales