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BUILDING BATTLECARDS 101

Creating a Go-To Competitive Resource for Sales

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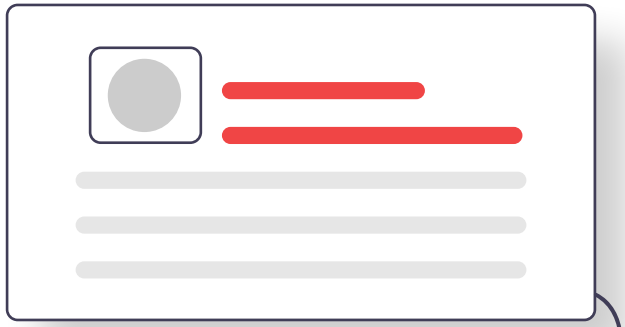


Introduction

When a warrior goes into battle, proper preparation is key to success. When a salesperson goes into a meeting with a prospect, the same holds true. The last thing a salesperson wants to face is a lead that has questions and concerns they failed to foresee.

In order to slay on that sales call, a sales rep not only needs to understand the product they're representing, they also need to have a clear picture of the other solutions a prospect is likely considering. Your leads aren't only thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of your product when they make a decision, they're pitting it against the other solutions they've researched or tried out. If a sales rep can't place the product into this larger context, they're likely to lose the battle.

And with most salespeople balancing a lot of work, they need a way to get and absorb information about competitors quickly and efficiently.

Why Building Battlecards is Important

Competitive battlecards are a valuable resource product marketers can create for sales enablement.

Sales reps need room to focus on the main part of their job: working with leads to make the sale. They don't have time to do a lot of competitive research themselves, and research skills aren't what they were hired for anyways.

Product marketers, on the other hand, excel at research. A big part of the job is learning as much as you can about the larger market your product fits into, which includes performing a competitive analysis. But understanding your competitors involves collecting and reviewing a lot of information—more than your sales team has time to comb through in between sales calls and meetings.

That's where having a competitive intelligence playbook comes in. You boil down the information you've gleaned to the most important points a salesperson needs to know in order to go into a sales meeting fully prepared. They'll empower your sales team to skillfully knock back objections and craft a persuasive comparison between your product and the other options. By doing so, they'll increase your close rate, and help the company achieve greater profits.

8 Steps for Building Useful Competitive Battlecards

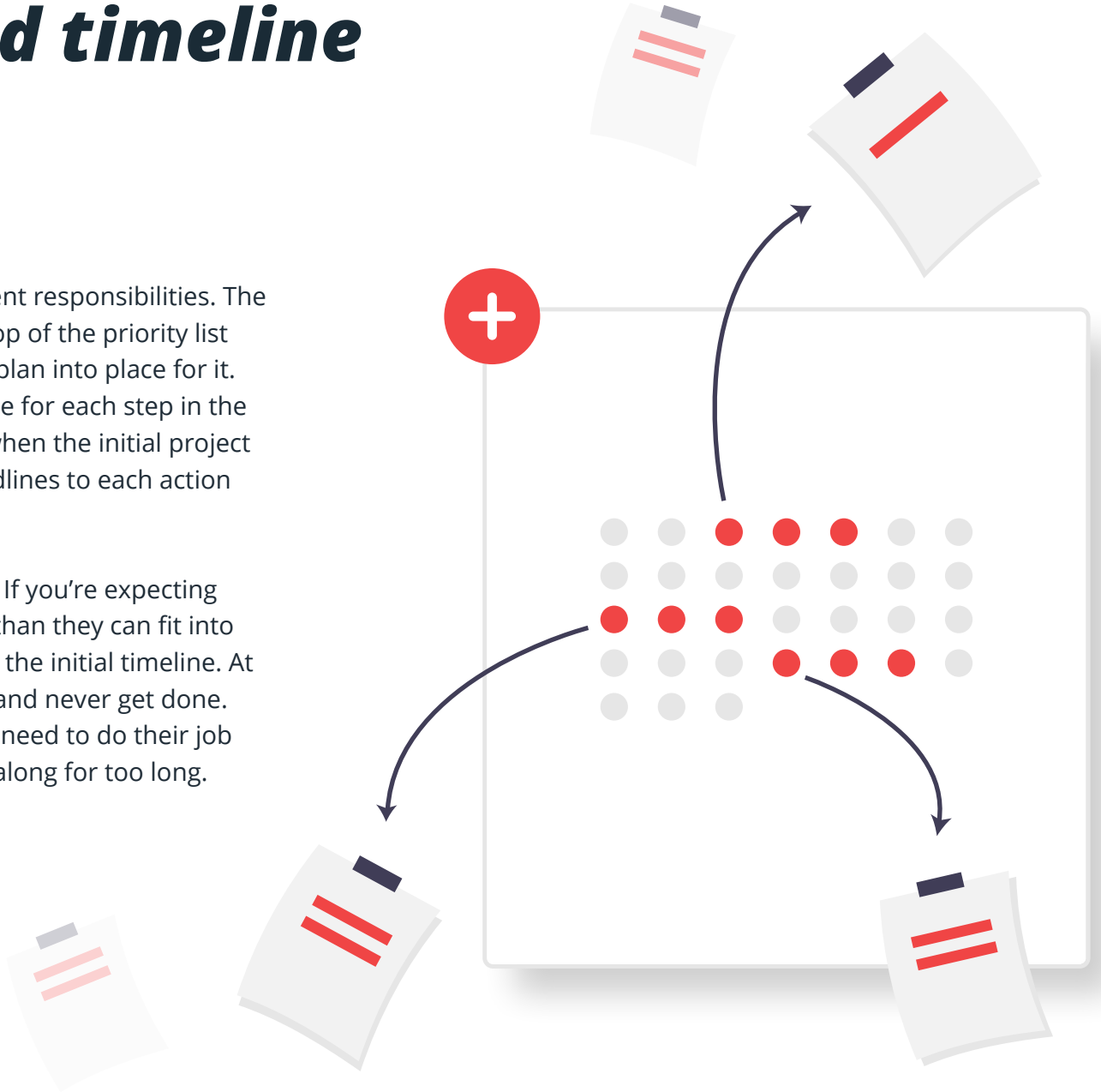
Competitive battlecards can be powerful when they do their job well. But you have to do the work of building battlecards that provide what your sales team needs. Product marketers can accomplish that in eight steps.

1. Get a plan and timeline into place.
2. Identify your top competitors.
3. Clarify what information you need to know.
4. Do thorough competitive.
5. Create a sales battlecard template.
6. Fill in the template for each competitor.
7. Distribute to your sales team.
8. Collect feedback, and update as needed.

1 Get a plan and timeline into place.

Product marketers balance a lot of different responsibilities. The only way any one project will rise to the top of the priority list and actually get done is if you get a clear plan into place for it. That means establishing who's responsible for each step in the process, creating an overall timeline for when the initial project will be complete, and attaching clear deadlines to each action item required to get to that point.

Make sure the plan you create is realistic. If you're expecting members of your team to do more work than they can fit into their schedules, at best they'll fail to meet the initial timeline. At worst, the project will fall by the wayside and never get done. Give each person involved the room they need to do their job effectively, without dragging the process along for too long.

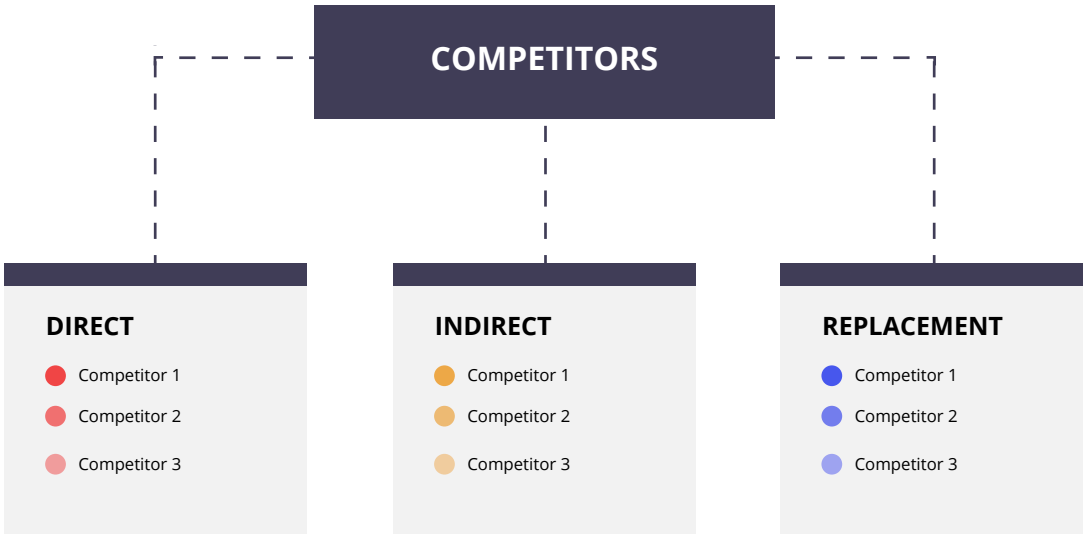


2 Identify your top competitors.

Your battlecards should address each of the main competitors your prospects are likely to encounter and consider. A natural starting place is determining who falls into that category.

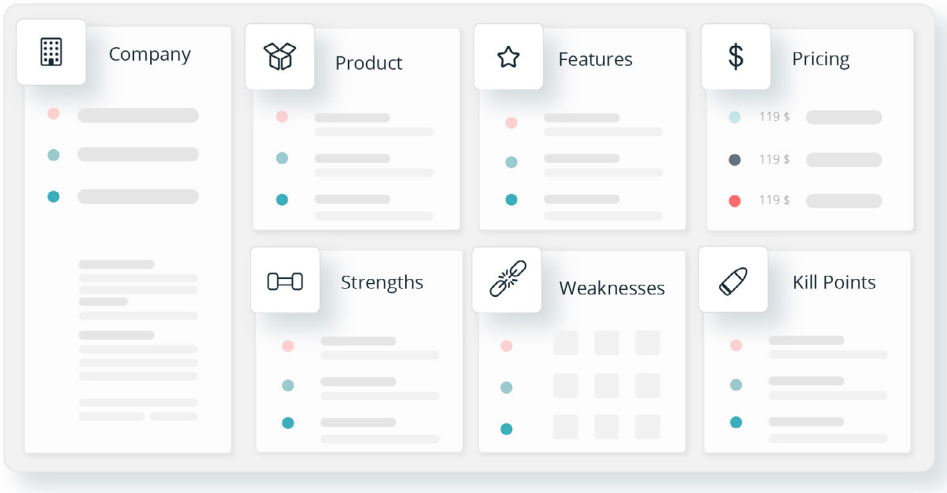
Your sales team can help with this. Ask them who prospects mention on sales calls. Then supplement the names they give with your own research. Think about the process someone in your audience is likely to go through when searching for a product like yours. Then replicate it and see what options come up. What you find will be the competitive landscape your product fits into.

Using a competitor analysis product, SEO (search engine optimization) tool, or simply some in depth Googling, find out what brands come up the most often when people search for relevant keywords. Check the main publications your audience reads and learn what companies they mention when talking about your industry. And do some social media searches to see what business accounts post updates relevant to your field.



3 Clarify what information you need to know.

Before you dive into researching each of the competitors you've added to your list, add some structure to your search by clarifying what you're looking for. What do you need to know about your competitor to understand how your company and product compare to theirs? What information about them is most valuable to your audience?



This list may include categories like:

Knowing what you're looking for will help you be more efficient in your research, and enable you to better organize what you learn as you go.

- **Company name and logo**
  So you know how to recognize them
- **Basic company information**
  Such as number of employees, when they were founded, and how they get their funding. Having some idea of their size and profitability helps you understand where your business stands in comparison.
- **Pricing information**
  Both what they charge, and what their pricing model looks like. Is it a subscription service, or a one-time cost? What different levels of pricing do they offer? Do they regularly promote discounts?
- **Positioning and messaging**
  How do they present themselves to your audience? What do they emphasize about themselves in their marketing?
- **Primary features**
  What specific features do they offer, and how do they compare to what your product includes?
- **Proprietary offerings**
  Is there anything about the company or product that they've originated, and only they offer?
- **Strengths**
  What do they do best? What do customers like about them? What drives most of the business they win?
- **Weaknesses**
  What areas are they weakest in? What complaints do customers have?

4 Do thorough competitive research.

Allow time for this stage in the process, you want to learn as much as possible. It will include:

- **Looking up** information on the competitor via third-party sources like industry publications
- **Digging** into each competitor's website
- **Reviewing** their social accounts and updates
- **Learning** what you can about their SEO and PPC (pay-per-click) strategies
- **Signing up** for their email lists to see what they send and how often (or finding a email marketing research tool that helps you do so)

To understand where you fit into the market, you need a comprehensive understanding of all the other brands you're up against and how they communicate with your audience. You can make this part of the process both more effective and efficient if you invest in a competitive analysis tool that brings all the relevant information you need into one place, so it's easier to compare, review, and analyze.

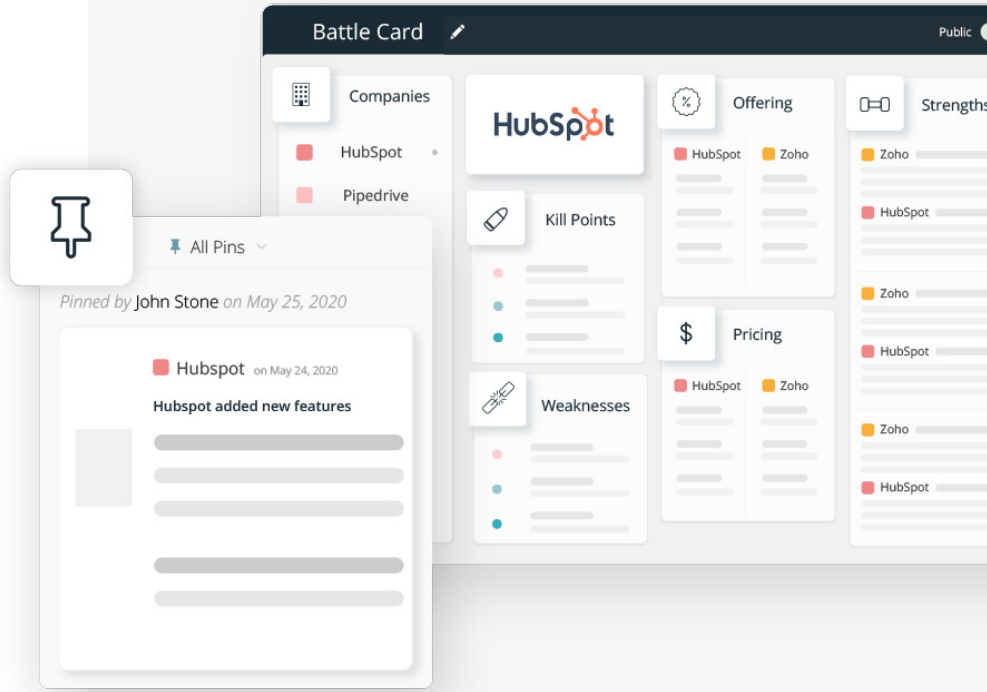
5 Create a sales battlecard template.

Once you have all the information you need to start building competitive battlecards, make your job a lot easier by creating a template. With a template, you don't start from scratch with each new competitor. You get a basic structure into place you then drop all the relevant information into.

This speeds the overall process up, while producing uniform results that are easier for salespeople to absorb. Figure out what pieces of information your sales team needs about each competitor and include a section within the battlecard template with space for them all.

This may line up pretty closely with the categories you created in step three. Or it may include categories focused on useful takeaways, like Kill Points—brief responses sales can use to shoot down competitor benefits if a prospect brings them up.

Keep the space limited to help you keep your answers in each category short. This is one of the hardest parts of creating effective battlecards—after learning large quantities of information, you need to distill what you've learned down to short bullet points. Too much information and your sales team will see a time commitment they can't afford and skip the battlecards completely. To be useful, they have to be concise.



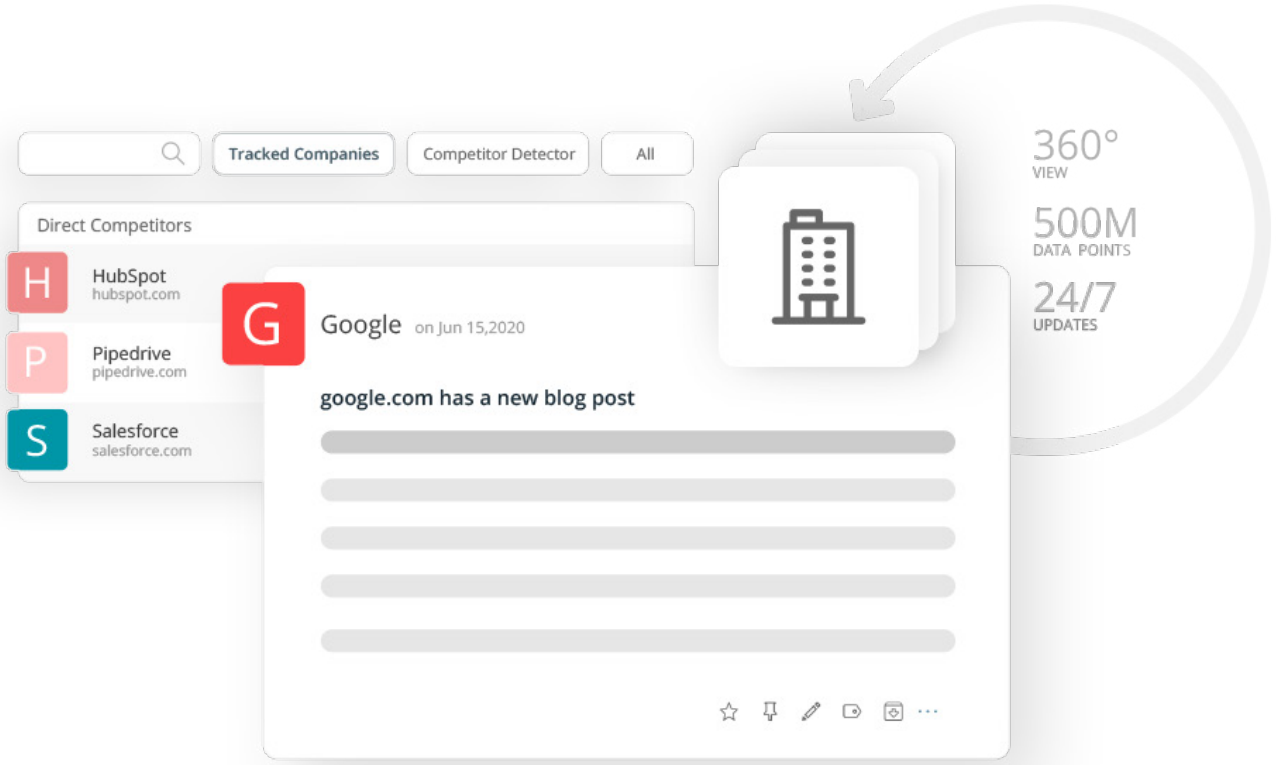
Want a headstart on creating useful battlecard templates?

Use the ones included in our battlecard kit.

BATTLECARD KIT TEMPLATE

6 *Fill in the template for each competitor.*

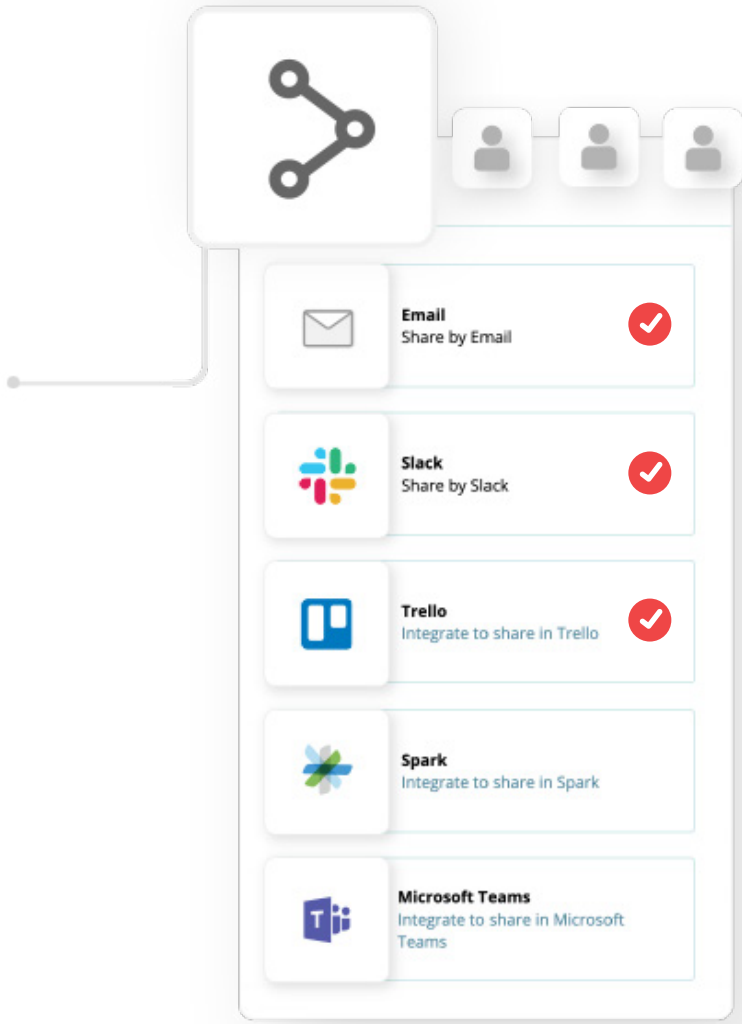
Analyze what you've learned to pull out the most important pieces of information your sales team needs. Figure out how to summarize useful points and takeaways. And fill in each section of the template you created for each competitor. This part won't be easy, but the time you spent on research and template creation will make it go smoother.



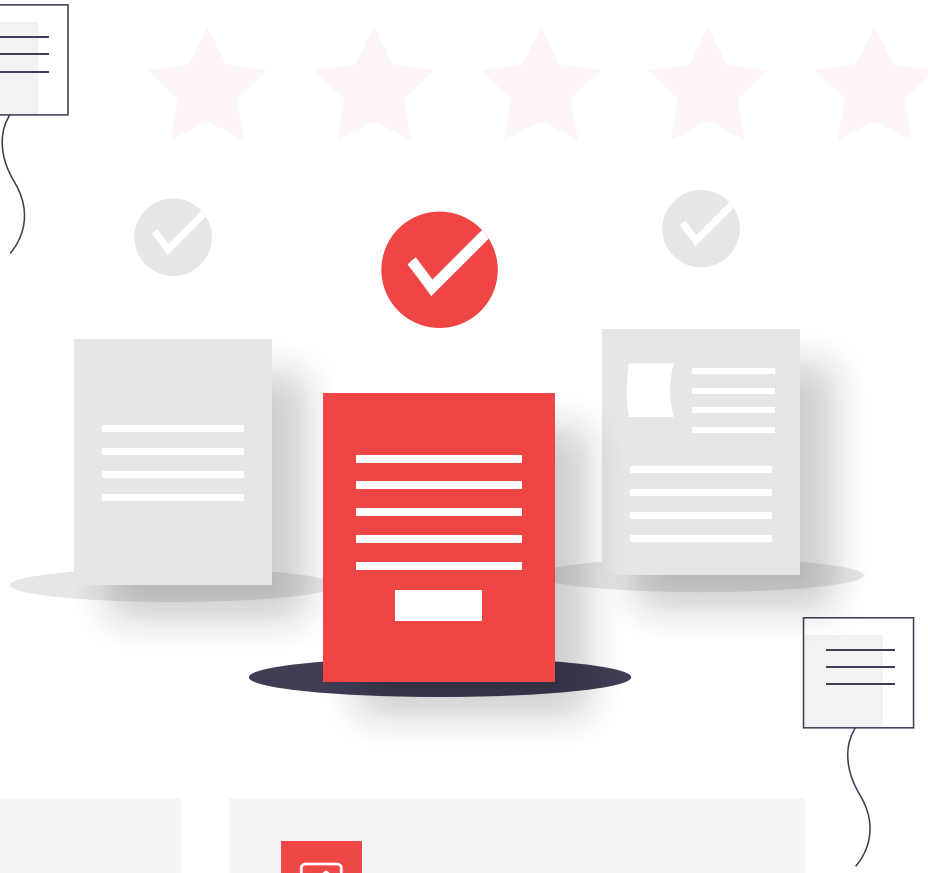
7 Distribute to your sales team.

This step seems straightforward, but how you distribute battlecards makes a big difference in whether they'll ever be used. If you simply email them, the sales team may glance at the email and move on without doing anything with it. Even worse, the version of the battlecard attached to the email will become outdated, and they may go searching for it past the point where it provides any real value.

For your battlecards to do their job, you need to get them to sales reps in a context where they'll actually think to use them, and where they'll know they're always accessing the most up to date version. Talk to them about what works best for them. Find out what tools they use every day. Then figure out how to fit the battlecards into the way they work.



8 Collect feedback, and update as needed.



The competitive landscape your product is a part of changes all the time. If your sales reps go into a meeting with outdated information, it makes them—and your brand by extension—look bad. To keep your battlecards genuinely useful, you need to make a habit out of doing three things:

Actively solicit feedback from your sales team

Find out if they're using the battlecards, and if they're getting what they need from them. Ask if they would be more valuable with different information, in a new format, or distributed in a different way.

Continually do competitive research

Make it a regular part of your process to do competitive research so you learn right away when a new product enters the market, a competitor changes their positioning, or a similar product gets discounted or switches to a new pricing model.

Update your battlecards regularly

Every time you gain useful feedback or learn new information your sales team can benefit from, update your battlecard. And make sure the updates are reflected in the version that lives where your sales team goes to access them.

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Building Battlecards is Worth the Work

This isn't an easy or fast process. Building useful competitive battlecards requires research and work. But the result is a powerful tool that equips your sales team with the knowledge they need to do their jobs better and close more sales.

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