



Creating Kick-Ass Account Plans

Key Benefits of Key Account Management



**Build
Engagement**



**Reduce
Risk**



**Standardize
Processes**



**Drive
Growth**

Introduction

Account management is a long-standing practice that exists in some form in most organizations. From non-profits to small businesses or Fortune 500 companies, retaining customers and creating loyalty is essential. Today's forward-thinking companies separate normal customer relationships from key account management to focus on getting the most value from top customers. Creating a strong link with key accounts can lead to exponential growth and mutual success through proper key account management. Developing strategic and actionable account plans representing both parties' best interests are the most important ways to drive alignment and improve business success for the customer.

Account Plans as the Critical Differentiator

What separates the average account manager from the great account manager? Their account plans. Account plans are the recipe for driving customer loyalty and account growth. Some of the most common mistakes I see Key Account Managers (KAMs) fall victim to when building out their account plans are:



A Lack of Customer Focus

More focused on making money rather than how you can drive customer success and, thus, expansion.

Lack of Education About the Customer's Business and Goals

Not enough time to understand how the customer defines success or how your product or service helps their business.

Started Building Their Account Plans Too Early

An account plan is only as good as the information informing it. Take the time to get the critical information from your customer.

Failure to Validate

Your customer should be validating your account plan frequently to ensure you are all on the same page. Things can change quickly, and you want to be in the loop.

Guesswork and Assumptions Instead of Hard-earned Facts

Record the language and exact verbiage your customers use when you can.

Set It and Forget It Account Plans

The account plan built in January that never leaves your desk drawer again is no good to anyone.



Why Create Account Plans?

Customers have never been harder to engage or easier to lose. The data on this shows that only 29% of B2B customers are engaged, and 47% believe their vendor delivers on its promises. The good news is that your customers want you to understand them and build a relationship with them.

Your account plan is what makes the difference between targeted, proactive key account management and short-sighted, reactive management. An account plan gives you a practical path to building good relationships with your customers. The goal of this plan is to gain the trust of your key accounts as an advisor and drive alignment within your accounts.

The job of an account plan isn't to run your key accounts' business for them but to align your goals with theirs to give you both an advantage. Sticking close to your top accounts puts you ahead of your competition by helping your company stay relevant to your customers.

What's the Formula for A Successful Account Plan?

Usually, at the beginning of the year, KAMs are asked to make an account plan for their biggest or most high-value accounts. Ironically while account planning is a critical skill, most account managers have never received formal training in this area. From a high level, a successful account plan should:



1. Follow a repeatable process.



2. Integrate core components and knowledge about the customer from strategic conversations.

(SWOT, VOC, customer goals, etc.)

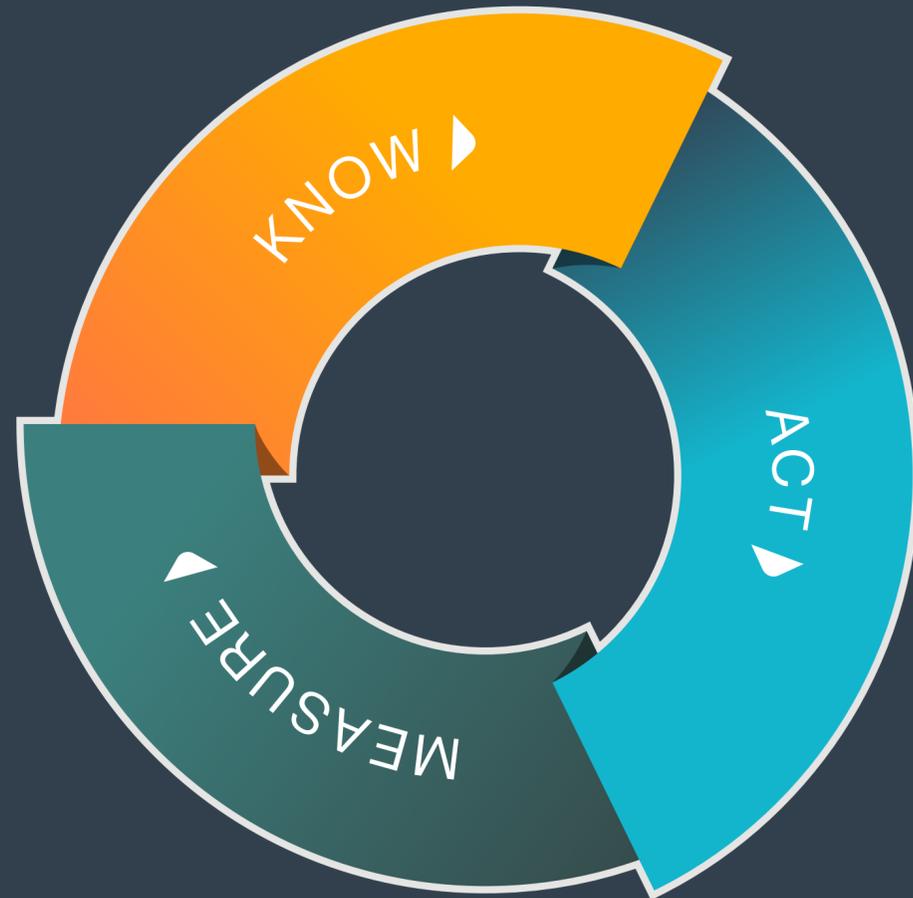


3. Be validated with the customer.



4. Be revisited and optimized with account reviews.

Our Proven KAM Process



1. Follow a Repeatable Process – Know, Act, Measure

Any account plan should be based on a repeatable process that will inform and iterate your account plan throughout the year. We recommend our proven KAM process.

Know

Basic information, strategy, customer relationships, etc. Within your KAM activities, you should be focused on information gathering and validating.

Act

Actions to help the team succeed. Link activities to customers' needs and to activities that increase their likelihood of success and reduce the risk of churn. These should align with conversations that emerge during account reviews.

Measure

Set up a process for measuring success and validating with the customer.

The **Know, Act, Measure** process is a cycle that continually repeats. It's an excellent framework for you and your teams because it's easy to understand and is a powerful account planning approach.



2. Integrate core components and knowledge about the customer from strategic conversations.

Accurate Information Gathering

Many KAMs put the cart before the horse. They start their account plans without having the necessary and thorough conversations required to build an actionable account plan.

Additionally, we all have a tendency towards “happy ears,” hearing and assuming something positive from a customer conversation instead of drilling into it deeper. As a result of the happy ears bias, many account plans are built on assumptions and guesswork. To help you mitigate this bias and ensure your account plans are built on a solid foundation, try validating and proving out every piece of your account plan.

You can ask yourself, “what proof do I have that this is true,” or “how do I know that this is true?”

When it comes time for your executive team to review your account plan, you won’t have any trouble confidently answering their questions and providing proof. It’s also critical to use your customer’s exact words and jargon whenever possible. Utilizing their direct quotes will help you avoid misinterpreting what they say or mean.



How to Collect Critical Customer Information

While most KAMs know they need strategic information about their customers, most don't know how to get it from their customers. Instead of shying away from these important but sometimes tough conversations, lean in, and you will be surprised what you learn.

Before starting your account plan, you should conduct interviews with your clients to understand their objectives, strategy, and goals. During these interviews, you should pay careful attention to:



Customer Goals

How do they define success? How will they measure success? What does success mean for their business/personal goals?



Critical Relationships

Who are your champions, your decision-makers, etc.? What are the relationships between those critical points of contact? How do they feel about you and your product?



Business Strategy

How is your product or service helping their business? Where does it fit into the overall business? What direction is the company moving in, and why? What risks do they see in their own business?

By integrating interviews and exercises into your **Know, Act, Measure** process, you can be sure to get the answers to these questions that inform your account plan. Some helpful tools are:

Voice of Customer Survey/Interview (VOC):

A 20-minute high-level discussion with the most senior, impactful contacts at your customer site to talk about forward-looking and strategic decisions they will be making about your product/service and their business.

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
What should we continue doing from the customer's perspective?	What should we start doing, and what should we stop doing?
Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
How can we diminish or solve the customer's pains with our products or services?	What external pressures and threats is the customer experiencing?

Why do you buy from us?

Response	Author	Date	Sentiment
They like our AI strategy How this is going to impact their biz....	David S		Neutral
Love the account management Appreciate the security of working with an expert team.	Laura Michelson	11 Jul 2019	Positive
Really got a lot from training Superb support from the group.	Laura Michelson	11 Jul 2019	Positive
GlobeSTAR systems are the most accurate GPS/Nav systems available Accuracy is king when it comes to GPS/nav, and GlobeSTAR is consistently ranked as the top system in terms of accuracy.	David Smith	11 Jul 2019	Neutral
Your systems have the lowest defect/malfunction rate As a mission-critical system, it's imperative that the nav system have top tier dependability. Our clients require this from us.	David Smith	14 Jun 2018	Neutral

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis:

This should be a very thoughtful and objective look at the customer and their environment. Your SWOT analysis should help you identify blind spots and questions you still have.



See What Kapta Can Do

Click here to schedule your personalized demo.



3. Validate with the customer

After you write out your account plan, you should **take it to your customer** who can validate it. If this sounds like something that makes you gulp, you are not alone.

While this may feel uncomfortable at first, remember that the account plan should be a customer-first representation and highlight mutual alignment. It serves as a roadmap to customer success and expansion. With that in mind, it makes more sense that your most significant stakeholder - your customer - should consider your account plan. They need to buy into the idea that your company's products and services, plus mutual cooperation, will equal out to success for them.



4. Bring your account plans to life with regular account reviews

You work so hard in Q1 to develop a strategic customer account plan. You validate it with your executive, your team, and your customer - then what?

Account plans mean nothing if you cannot **ACT** on them by bringing them to life with regular account reviews. You need to evangelize your account plans within your organization as a champion for your customers. This ensures all team members are up to date and aware of any changes or outstanding actions so that you can deliver value to your customer.

Account Reviews Basics:



- Your customer success team (sales engineer, professional services, executive sponsor, support, etc.) should be involved so that you can discuss unanswered account questions, drive alignment, and strategize which actions will increase the likelihood of customer success.
- Regularly **scheduled** account reviews should be conducted once a month with any significant deep dives and adjustments to your most valuable account plans conducted quarterly.
- Use the **Know, Act, Measure** process as your agenda to update any account information such as:
 - **Know:** Important critical relationship changes or major milestones met.
 - **Act:** What actions can individual team members coordinate or conduct to increase the likelihood of success?
 - **Measure:** Be honest with the value your team is bringing and the success the customer is having.
- Try to keep a customer-focused lens so that you can productively conduct win/win scenarios.

Now that we've talked about the process, strategy, and key information, how do you go about gathering all the information you need for your account plan?

Although it may seem daunting at first, the more you practice the **Know, Act, Measure** process, the easier it becomes. You will quickly be surprised to see how much information you have naturally collected about your customer because your customer conversations are more productive.

We have provided a sample account plan on the next page. This sample format will help you organize your account plan while you gather information and determine which information to include.

Sample Account Plan



1. The Customer Details

The customer details should include the customer's name and information about their business such as:

- What and/or why they bought from you.

2. An Org Chart

This should highlight all of your critical relationships and their temperature towards your products. It's not a complete, exhaustive list. That may be helpful to a marketer, but not to an account manager, especially a strategic account manager who needs to build strong personal relationships with specific people. Focus on the top 5-10 and map them out in an easy-to-view chart.

3. A SWOT Analysis

This should be a very thoughtful and objective look at the customer and their environment. Your SWOT analysis should help you identify blind spots and questions you still have.

- Strengths and weaknesses are about you and your company in relation to the customer. Evaluate what the customer likes about what you're doing and what key milestones you've hit or risks you need to mitigate.
- Opportunities and threats should be focused on the customer within their environment (including regulatory environment if applicable). Evaluate how these may impact the customer.

4. Voice of Customer Survey (VOC)

This isn't the NPS or customer satisfaction survey that your support team may utilize. This is where you speak to your most senior, impactful contacts at your customer site and ask for 20-minutes to discuss what's going on with them.

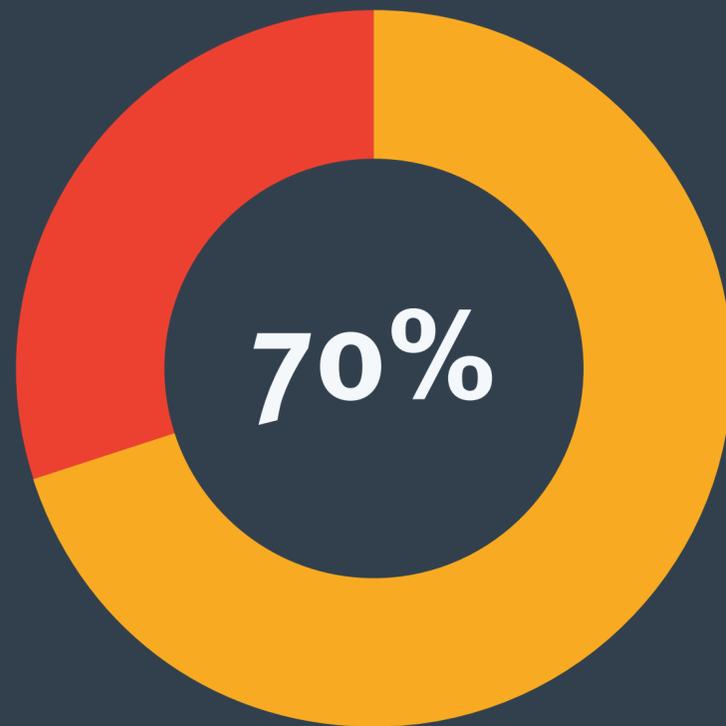
- Questions should stay high level, forward-thinking, and strategic.

5. An Action Plan

Take all of your knowledge about your customer (what would make them stay with you, what they value, what their goals are) and determine which goals are in your wheelhouse and how you can help them reach them. You are now ready to prepare specific plans consisting of objectives, actions, and smaller tasks to be completed daily, weekly or monthly.

- Action plans should be communicated to everyone involved on the account at your company. This plan will need to be updated and referred back to often.

Put KAM to Work for You



70% of business owners using KAM say it helps them outperform their competitors.

Conclusion

Knowing is only half the battle for key account management. You have to get started and put this knowledge into practice in your own business. Start by segmenting customer accounts, then create account plans for each key account. Software like Kapta can help you stay organized throughout the process.

Kapta allows you to create and maintain interactive engagement plans for key accounts. You and your team will be able to access and view the information at any time and create a collaborative account plan. In addition, you'll be able to avoid surprises by getting accurate forecasts, accessing real-time account risks, and keeping track of which accounts need attention at any time. This is the formula to help you and your company succeed in key account management.



Additional Kapta Resources

Keep learning, keep growing.

Find additional resources and insights at [Kapta.com](https://www.kapta.com).

Click [here](#) to schedule a Kapta product demo. Click [here](#) to follow our blog.



Start today.

Contact Kapta to learn more about Key Account Management, and how it can transform your organization.