Salespulse
A Questback Company

CREATING A WINNING SALES TEAM

SALES DIRECTOR'S GUIDE TO CLOSE MORE DEALS

HELP YOUR SALES TEAM REACH THEIR GOALS BY MONITORING THE QUALITY OF SALES MEETINGS AND LEVERAGING THE RESULTS TO BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS.

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INTRODUCTION

John, the rising star on your sales team, has been working with a major client for the last several months. It's finally time to make an offer and close the deal. John has just returned to the office from a meeting with the client, you tentatively ask him how it went. With a big smile, John tells you it was a success. You ask some more detailed follow-up questions about the sales process, and John still seems confident of himself and his performance. Everything seems to be in order.

In the end, however, the client chooses to close the deal with a competitor. Closed lost.

Upon hearing the news, you're disappointed and want to know what happened. You contact the client and ask whether there is anything you could have done better during the sales process.

The client is frank with you and says that they really wanted to work with you but they expected John to be more active during the closing stage and more explicit on how to proceed. You're then informed the competitor won their business just before John was about to close the deal.

This kind of customer feedback is every sales director's nightmare. A huge deal within arm's reach falls into the hands of your biggest competitor.

What could have you done to avoid that? John thinks everything went great—but that's how all the sales reps would respond if you asked them.

We sales professionals are an optimistic group of people. Our glass is always half-full and we expect our closing ratio to be significantly higher than average. We fall so deeply in love with our own sales projects to the point that we have faith in them even when the case is obviously a lost cause.

Today's sales directors are faced with a major challenge: everything you know about each deal comes from one source and one source only—your sales rep. It's not that sales reps are trying to embellish the truth. They just genuinely believe that they are performing well even though certain clients might beg to differ.

But you can't blame your reps as they only know half the truth. Your clients know the other half—and it's up to you to find out what that other half is.

In the following pages, we'll shine a light on the importance of listening to your clients and lay out a blueprint for how it should be done.

HOW TO MEASURE THE QUALITY OF THE SALES PROCESS BY UTILIZING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

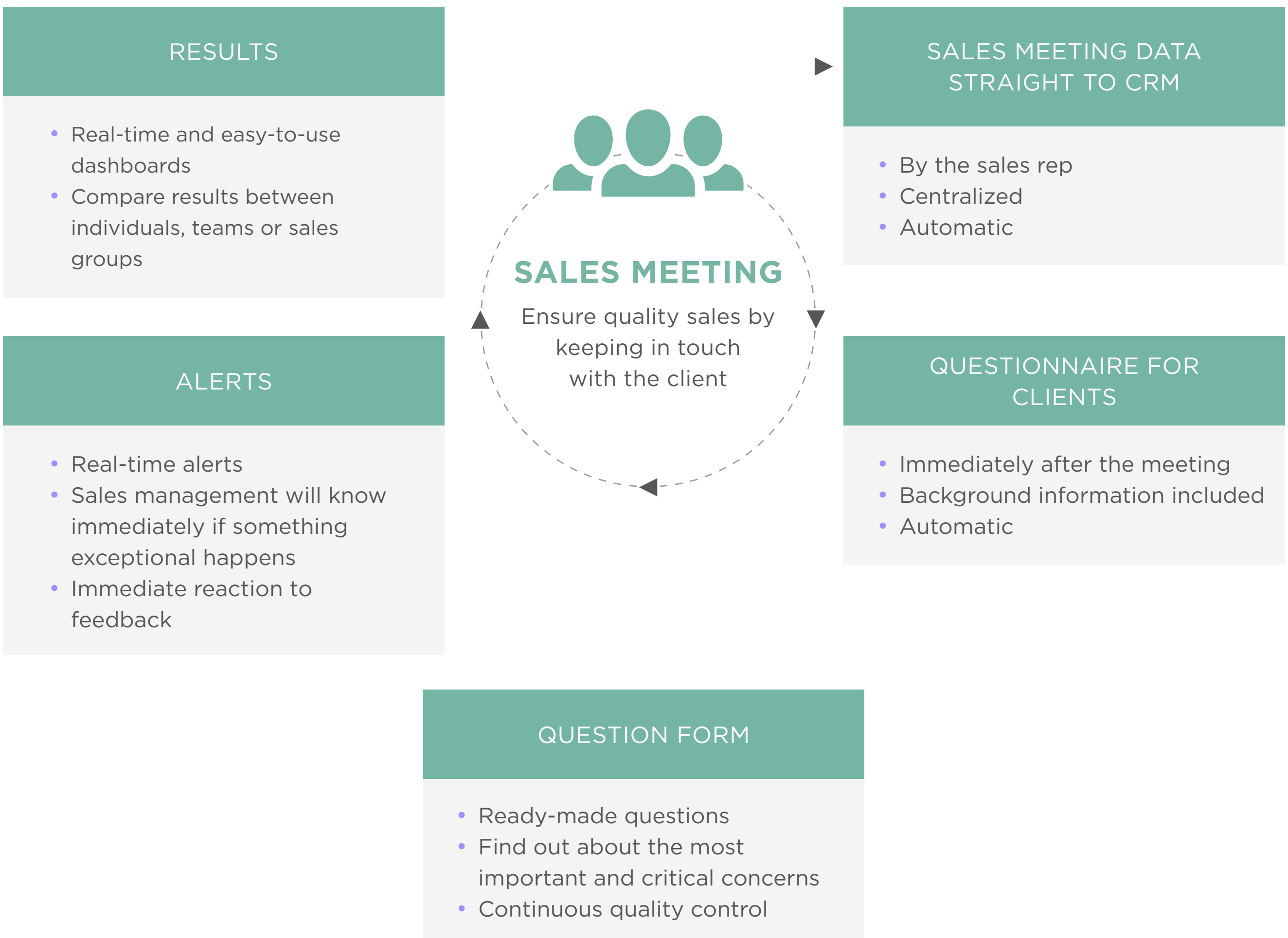
Most companies are familiar with the quantitative results of sales meetings. But the quality of those meetings remains a mystery. However, the best results are achieved when quality is measured alongside the more traditional metrics. It is essential to collect data from the most critical stages of the customer lifecycle, and use that data to improve customer interactions in order to serve them better—thereby increasing each customer's willingness to buy.

By systematically measuring and monitoring the quality of the sales process, your organization will experience higher quality sales. Each sales meeting will have set goals that are targeted to the right people—which enables sales reps to be more prepared.

The first step towards this flexible and inexpensive way to measure the quality of sales meetings is to ask for customer feedback continuously and automatically.

Using customer feedback to measure the quality of your sales process will paint a clear picture of how each sales meetings progressed. The results will provide you with a distinct idea of how well the sales reps are performing as well as the effectiveness of their actions.

The image below demonstrates how automatic dialogue is used to measure the quality of the sales process:



THE ADVANTAGES OF CONTINUOUS QUALITY MONITORING

So what are the advantages of continuous sales process quality monitoring for each relevant stakeholder? Sales managers and sales reps are not the only ones who stand to benefit from continuous quality monitoring. Other parties will gain as well.

COMPANY EXECUTIVES

As more deals close, company executives will obviously benefit from stronger cash flow. But they will also find it useful to have a more transparent sales process—which makes it easier to identify problems. The sales reps' proficiency and how well they perform during the sales process is tied directly to the customer experience and the company's reputation. In the long run, this will have a positive effect on customer retention and the company's growth.

SALES DIRECTORS

Sales directors should help sales reps reach their goals. If they are unaware of how their subordinates perform during meetings, they are unable to help them to improve—it's that simple. However, with the right data, directors can leverage feedback to move an opportunity back on track. Every sales director should have the means to turn an at-risk deal into a win.

Monitoring sales process quality will help you to create accurate sales predictions. Customer feedback will help you visualize beyond your CRM's data and the sales reps account of the process.

When you know what's really going on throughout the sales process, you will have a better understanding of future sales forecasts.

Constant quality measuring enables sales directors to dive under the surface and see what's really going on. If you address a problem in time and unprompted, you may be able to solve it before it escalates into a conflict. When a customer reports that they aren't happy, it's often either too late to fix the problem or the remedial actions needed are radical and painful.

SALES REPS

For sales reps, real-time feedback of their performance is worth its weight in gold. Simply put, it helps them grow. Continuous and systematic monitoring enables sales reps to keep track of their progress and see how they compare to others.

Quality monitoring can also help steer meetings towards a desired direction. When sales reps know what kind of questions will be asked by customers, they will plan meetings to meet these expectations, therefore providing more value to clients.

Feedback helps sales reps concentrate on opportunities that will most likely translate into sales. If a customer gives negative or indifferent feedback after an initial meeting, sales reps will know to direct their time and energy on a different client that's more likely to convert.

The opportunity to address problems proactively benefits both sales reps and sales directors.

MARKETING

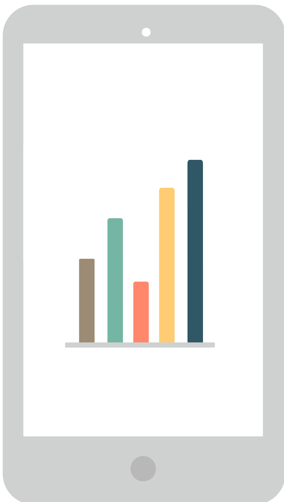
The feedback sales reps receive will also benefit the marketing team. It is often marketing's responsibility to create the materials sales reps use. Whatever feedback is given regarding the effectiveness of sales collateral can be relayed to the marketing team, which can then use those insights to create more impactful sales material.

The most important thing that should grab marketing's attention is when a customer communicates—openly or otherwise—that they need more information. Maybe the customer doesn't understand the matter thoroughly enough or perhaps they need more topical material to support the sales process. In such cases, cooperation between marketing and sales becomes even more crucial in driving conversions.

What kind of content should be produced to prompt the customer to buy while simultaneously making it easier for the sales rep to sell? Data makes it easy to figure that out.

CUSTOMERS

Customers want to feel important. They want to be heard, and they want their opinions to matter. In this light, monitoring the quality of the sales process may be the key to enhancing customer experience.



When feedback is collected properly, customers will not find the process obtrusive or oppressive. Instead, they'll appreciate that your company and your sales rep value them as customers.

Feedback is collected in order to serve customers better and to assist them in finding solutions to their problems. It helps the sales reps to adjust their actions accordingly, and propose solutions that are best suited for each customer's individual needs. Since meetings and other interactions will have clear structures and established goals, no one's valuable time will be wasted.

6 (BAD) REASONS NOT TO MONITOR SALES PROCESS QUALITY

Why do companies seldom measure the quality of the sales process even though the advantages are undeniable?

Here are the six most common reasons sales directors give:

1. "WE DO NOT WANT TO BOTHER OUR CUSTOMERS"

Customers appreciate it when their opinions are taken into consideration. Requesting feedback signals that each customer is not just one lead among many but is instead a potential partner whose challenges are their sales rep's first priority.

It's always advisable, however, to consider which situations best lend themselves to feedback and how often it should be requested. The last thing you want to do is request feedback at an inopportune time or overwhelm your clients with repeated requests.

2. "WE DO NOT WANT TO STALK OUR SALES REPS"

Asking for feedback doesn't indicate a lack of trust. Instead, it's a means to understand the sales process more thoroughly. If your sales team is comprised of professionals, they'll understand the importance of feedback in making their job easier and enhancing the quality of the sales process.

However, you need to be able to clearly explain why you're asking for feedback. Sales directors should handle the feedback the sales reps receive in a proper manner. If the sales reps are afraid to get feedback or they do not think much of it, the sales director has failed.

3. "I KNOW WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS THINK"

As mentioned above, sales reps can tell you one side of the story. The same holds true for your CRM's activity data.

Successful sales directors keep in touch with their most important customers even when they are no longer in contact with them on regular basis. Anecdotal feedback gained during lunches and other irregular social meetings does not necessarily paint a realistic picture of everyday work at the office—not to mention it's often unstructured, open to interpretation and received too late.

If you want to know what your customers think, the easiest way is to ask them directly. Simple, isn't it?

4. "NO-ONE HAS THE TIME OR INTEREST TO ANSWER QUESTIONS"

When a customer is looking for a solution to a problem, they expect the best possible service from the service provider. A thoughtfully composed questionnaire should take only a few minutes to answer.

5. "OUR WAY OF SELLING IS SO UNIQUE THAT IT'S UNMEASURABLE"

If your sales reps are doing whatever they please during sales meetings and there is no clear structure, agenda or goal, you definitely have bigger issues to worry about than collecting feedback. While not all sales organizations operate identically—the details are always company-specific—the basic principles remain the same.

6. "WE DO NOT HAVE SUITABLE TOOLS OR PROCEDURES"

This explanation is acceptable, but also easy to fix with Questback's Salespulse solution.

WHAT SHOULD WE ASK?

So what kind of feedback should we seek?
Questions are roughly categorized into four groups:

1. SALES REPS ACTIONS DURING THE MEETING

Did the meeting have a set agenda and specific goals?
Did the sales rep listen to clients and understand their challenges?
Did you discuss follow-ups, responsibilities and timetables?

2. SALES REPS ACTIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE MEETING

Did the meeting have a set agenda and specific goals?
Did the sales rep provide you a summary of the discussion?
Did you discuss follow-ups, responsibilities and timetables?

3. WILLINGNESS TO RECOMMEND

NPS (Net Promoter Score) or some other general rating that is used to express the overall quality of the sales process.

4. OPEN FEEDBACK

Open feedback is the most valued form. A customer who gives open feedback is often committed to the company and wants to build something new together.

STAGES OF THE SALES PROCESS DURING WHICH SHOULD YOU ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Should you ask customers to fill a questionnaire after every meeting? Of course not, especially if you meet with them on a regular basis. However, you should not only monitor the quality of new customer acquisition, but also pay attention to certain checkpoints throughout the customer lifecycle.

Tip: Choose at least one important checkpoint and monitor it systematically. That's how you can keep track of progress and make reliable comparisons between all sales reps.

Which checkpoints should monitor? That depends on your organization's goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).

If your first priority is to gain new customers, you should monitor the results of every initial customer meeting. If, however, you wish to increase the percentage of accepted offers, you should concentrate on collecting feedback during the offering stage. And if you wish to control churn or increase the value of current customers, your checkpoints should be much further down the road in the customer lifecycle.

Here are a couple of critical checkpoints you should consider monitoring.

AFTER THE INITIAL MEETING WITH THE CUSTOMER

Every first meeting with a customer prospect is crucial. More often than not, both parties know from the beginning whether the relationship is going to continue.

Feedback helps sales reps interpret and confirm their overall feeling: should I invest my precious time on this new prospect or not?

OFFERING STAGE

Feedback is extremely valuable during the offering stage. It ensures that the sales rep's offer fills the customer's need. If the solution is not what the customer is searching for, it's best to recognize this sooner rather than later.

Receiving valuable, timely feedback enables you to implement remedial actions and, ideally, increase the likelihood of closing the deal.

AFTER CLOSING A DEAL

When a deal is closed, a critical stage begins: vendor delivery. At this point it's critical to pay attention to the customer's actions and behaviors. Ask yourself, are we *really* answering the customer's needs? If not, what can you do about it? Does the customer have unrealistic expectations or are you not performing as promised?

WHEN THE CONTRACT IS ABOUT TO EXPIRE

The end stage of a contract period is often a delicate time for customer retention. The feedback gained from meetings between the sales rep and the customer are very revealing: are we losing this customer? Why? What can we do about it?

WHEN THE ACCOUNT MANAGER IS REPLACED

When a long-term account manager is replaced, the risk of losing a customer grows momentarily. Thus, sales process quality monitoring should be increased. This is even more important when a customer has had a long relationship with the previous account manager.

It might be the little things, like shared procedures and familiar routines. If the tacit knowledge gained doesn't transfer to the new account manager, the risk of disappointing the customer grows significantly.

Remember to ask for feedback right away—regardless of the stage—and act on it as quickly as you can.

No matter which stage of the client's lifecycle you choose to monitor, ask for feedback shortly after a meeting concludes. The questionnaire should reach the customer within one or two hours after the meeting wraps up. At that point, the meeting is still fresh in the customer's memory—making it easier for them to give detailed feedback.

If you ask for feedback a week or two later, you might as well tell the customer how little you value their opinion. It is also very difficult for the client to remember specific details after a long period of time, so the feedback they provide is less valuable the longer you take to ask for it.

When you receive exceptional feedback, react immediately. Nothing is worse than asking for feedback and not acting on it.

HOW TO UTILIZE THE KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM MONITORING THE SALES PROCESS

Obviously you shouldn't measure the sales process quality just for the fun of it. Your aim should be to advance the sales process and each sales rep's proficiency, increase sales and enhance the customer experience.

SET GOALS AND MONITOR THE PROGRESS

First, you need to set an initial benchmark to find out whether or not progress occurs. What level are you on now? Where do you hope to get in the future?

Then you need to set goals. Ask yourself what it is you want to accomplish. The key performance indicators are, of course, related to sales and its growth; indicators related to customer feedback should reinforce them. One goal could be, for example, to boost the average of a certain KPI 10% during the next six months.

IDENTIFY EXCEPTIONS

The initial benchmark helps tell the difference between exceptional feedback and normal feedback. Exceptions are always interesting from the sales rep's perspective. Positive feedback validates the chosen approach, whereas negative feedback signals that something should be done differently.

It's always the sales director's responsibility to review exceptional feedback with their reps. Directors should also discuss it with the customer—either face-to-face or by phone.

TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION

Always take immediate action: If exceptional feedback is undesirable and requires a sales director to contact the customer, that outreach should occur within 24 hours. If a sales rep constantly receives negative feedback concerning the same issues, it is the sales director's responsibility to go through the feedback with them to make sure things improve. If necessary, the situation could be fixed by giving the sales rep one-on-one training.

OPENNESS IS CHALLENGING AND MOTIVATING

Usually, in our experience, sales reps respect customer feedback and take it seriously. They embrace the challenge and the opportunity to develop themselves further. Direct feedback is sometimes ruthless. But at the same time, it's very rewarding.

Openness is an important part of the concept of monitoring sales process quality. Everyone should be able to see all of the feedback that's received. This transparency encourages sales reps to aim for even better results. Every self-respecting B2B sales rep appreciates healthy competition!

HOW SHOULD THE SALES DIRECTOR REACT TO EXCEPTIONAL FEEDBACK?

It's always great to receive positive feedback. On the other hand, negative feedback that follows a pleasant meeting feels like a slap in the face. What if the feedback is indifferent? Or there's no feedback at all?

It is the sales director's and the sales management's responsibility to go through the feedback (or the lack of it) and leverage it as much as they can. But how exactly should you react to different types of feedback?

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Every sales organization faces situations where customers feel that a meeting with a sales rep didn't meet their expectations. Constructive criticism should always be handled immediately—and preferably on the phone. Each organization should develop an escalation process which defines who makes those calls and what is discussed during them. The sales rep who attended the meeting in the first place is not the right person to contact the client; those responsibilities should be handle by sales team leaders and sales directors. These individuals should listen to the client and be genuinely apologetic. Clients will almost always appreciate these gestures and be open to remedying the situation.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

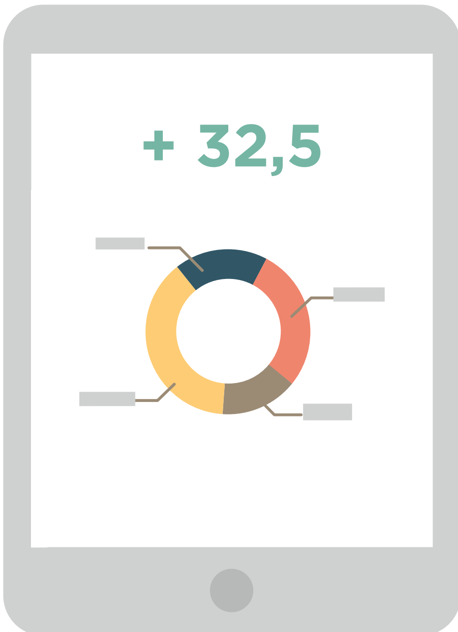
Sales directors should always share positive feedback with the sales rep who earned it. But keep in mind that positive feedback can also serve as a great learning experience for the rest of the team. Make accomplishments visible at your organization—doing so will lead to more success! And don't forget to thank the customer individually for giving positive feedback. They'll appreciate the gesture, too.

AMBIGUOUS FEEDBACK

Sometimes feedback is so vague or illogical that it is almost impossible to interpret. If the customer's feedback raises questions, follow up to explore what they meant. There is usually solid reasoning behind ambiguousness. If, for example, a customer doesn't bother to give you proper feedback, they probably don't consider the sales reps attempts very convincing. However, it might also signal that the customer did not understand what the sales rep was saying and therefore tries to hide their uncertainties in a cloak of ambiguity.

NO FEEDBACK AT ALL

What if you don't receive feedback at all? First, you should go through the entire monitoring process. Figure out what was asked, when and whether the client was the right person to answer those questions. Find out if the client even received the questionnaire in the first place. If none of the above is the reason for nonexistent feedback, you really should dig into the matter further. Was the meeting meaningful to the client? Check the procedure first. But if nothing comes out of it, you can always ask the customer directly.



HOW TO BEGIN: 3 STEPS TO SUCCESS

At this point, you understand that monitoring sales process quality and leveraging the results is just as important as measuring the more traditional metrics.

But how exactly can you begin?
Start by following these three simple steps:

1. ESTABLISH A BENCHMARK

You do not need automated processes to find out what your current situation is. You can always send your questionnaires manually to measure the quality of your sales process. Use the results from these initial surveys to set your benchmarks and reveal the possible stumbling blocks.

2. SET GOALS

When you know what your company's current situation is and have set initial benchmarks, it's time to start thinking about goals. Be as concrete as possible: In what area do you wish to improve, in what time frame and by how much? Your goals could be directly related to sales or the key indicators of sales quality. It's often most profitable to combine the two.

3. UPDATE YOUR TOOLS AND PROCESSES

Monitoring the quality of your sales processes—and using it as a tool for continuous development—starts with having clear process and the right tools in place. That way, you can produce continuous and timely questionnaires and analyze the results properly.

For the best results, you need simple procedures and seamless cooperation between your feedback solution and CRM system.

After you've accomplished these three steps, you're that much closer to a higher-quality, more productive sales team!

CONCLUSION

As a sales director, you often face challenging situations. Everything you know about each deal comes from one source and one source alone: your sales reps. It is not that your sales reps are trying to embellish the truth; they just genuinely believe that they are performing well—even though clients might beg to differ.

Most companies are familiar with the quantitative results of sales meetings. But the quality of those meetings remains a mystery. Enjoying the best results from your sales team starts with measuring quality alongside the more traditional metrics. That being the case, it is therefore essential for organizations to collect data during each of the most critical stages of the customer lifecycle. Once collected, that data should be leveraged to improve customer interactions in order to serve them better—and thus further advance their willingness to buy.

By systematically measuring and monitoring the quality of your sales process, your organization will benefit from more high-quality sales because each sales meeting will be led by more prepared sales reps who have specific goals that are targeted to the right people. As a result, your team will benefit from:

- Increased productivity. Enhance the quality of your sales processes by understanding your customers better and holding more successful and meaningful customer meetings.
- Better sales process monitoring. Automatic processes guarantee that data is collected flawlessly and timely without manual interventions.
- Improved sales processes. Monitoring sales processes ensures that you will always have access to the most recent and relevant data to support your decision-making. It becomes easier to increase every customer's willingness to buy and to make corrective actions when necessary.

Keep in mind that you should not only monitor the quality of new customer acquisition but also pay attention to certain checkpoints during the customer lifecycle. The checkpoints you should monitor will depend on your set goals and key performance indicators.

No matter which stage of the client's lifecycle you choose to monitor, remember to ask for feedback immediately after the meeting.

If you ask for feedback long after the meeting, you might as well tell the customer how little you value their opinion. It is also very difficult to remember specific details after a long period of time, so the feedback they may give would be a lot less valuable for you.

If you receive exceptional feedback, be sure to respond immediately. Nothing is worse than asking for feedback and not acting on it.

You're not measuring your sales process quality just for the fun of it. Your aim should be to advance the sales process and your sales reps' proficiency while increasing sales and enhancing the customer experience.

THE SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTION TO MONITORING THE QUALITY OF THE SALES PROCESS

Questback helps you integrate sales process quality monitoring into your sales process in order to better understand your customers and their experiences. When you know exactly what your customers need, it becomes that much easier to serve them.