# Value Actualization Tools: Best Practices

Value actualization (VA) tools can be utilized throughout the sales process and customer lifecycle

Sales enablement leaders should ensure that reps have the required skills to effectively use VA tools with buyers

When internal use of a VA tool reveals areas where an offering does not provide a value advantage, prepare reps to handle objections and redirect the conversation

Sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) has been commercially available since the late 1800s when two New England bakers, John Dwight and Austin Church, built the first factory to manufacture it. As its name implies, baking soda was initially used primarily in baking. However, its uses have expanded to include medicine (to alleviate heartburn and indigestion), personal hygiene (it's a common toothpaste ingredient), household chores (as a cleaner and deodorizer) and even swimming pools (to balance the water's pH).

Similarly, b-to-b marketing and sales organizations may initially purchase and implement value actualization (VA) tools with the intent of using them in one specific process area, but they often find that these tools have many other useful applications. In this brief, we share best practices and tips on how reps can use VA tools effectively with buyers throughout the customer lifecycle.

## Implementation Best Practices

In the brief "Value Actualization Tools: A Sirius Introduction," we introduced value actualization as a category of sales enablement tools designed to allow reps to translate a solution's benefits into different types of value delivered to different buyers – a subtle but impactful advance beyond return on investment/total cost of ownership (ROI/TCO) calculations. When sales and marketing teams begin using VA tools, we recommend leveraging the following resources to foster high adoption rates:

- **Vendor services.** VA vendors offer consulting services to aid in the development and implementation of their tools, including assistance in identifying value units to be used (e.g. revenue, resources, time) based on buying personas in specific target markets. Developing VA calculators requires input from multiple sources (e.g. product marketing, pricing, sales operations); use the providers to facilitate initial workshops to understand the calculators should be optimized. Vendors then design the interface, create the required algorithms and build the reporting structure.

- **Product marketing.** Sales enablement should enlist product marketing expertise to guide and lead the initial development of VA tools and their ongoing maintenance. As with other sales enablement tools (e.g. battlecards, playbooks, case studies), product marketing should include VA tools in the reps' arsenal to help accelerate and win deals. While sales enablement may coordinate the delivery/training of these tools to the field, product marketing's deep domain expertise will be essential in their development.
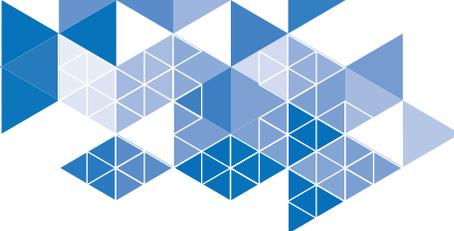
- **Training and certification.** VA tools are not a shortcut to competency. Reps need extensive training on how to use these tools effectively, including how to create a compelling, buyer-specific value message using the calculations. Certify reps on the use of these tools to ensure that they know what information should go into the calculators, how to tell the value story, and how to manage the possibility of buyer skepticism that the numbers are somehow rigged. Reps should have a clear understanding of differentiated value (value that only the product or solution they are selling can provide) vs. shared value (value that competitors also provide) and know how to position each appropriately. In particular, reps should be cautious in positioning shared value; they should avoid strengthening the case for a competitor as a preferred vendor.

- **First-line managers.** First-line managers are the agents of enablement; don't overlook their training needs when introducing VA tools. Keep in mind that these tools will also be new to them. It's often best to train managers first (and separately) to ensure they are comfortable and proficient when training their reps. Managers' training should include leveraging the tools with specific deals and customers. Managers should also participate in the certification process for their reps.

## Identifying Value Across the Customer Lifecycle

Marketing and sales need to analyze the customer's buying process to determine where VA tools can be most effective in providing insights that accelerate purchasing decisions. As with our earlier baking soda analogy, some of these applications may not be obvious:

- **Create demand with self-serve buyers.** Our research confirms that many b-to-b buyers educate themselves via the Internet before engaging with a rep. Marketing can post VA tools on corporate Web sites to allow buyers to enter their own numbers, select relevant units of value (e.g. dollars, euros, hours, square footage) and understand the projected value they may receive from an offering. Links to VA tools can also be added to outbound emails. Teleprospectors and reps who engage with buyers early in their buying journey can use VA tools collaboratively to accelerate the transition into an active buying process.

- **Accelerate deals in pipeline.** VA tools can translate the same benefit of a product or solution into different units of value that are relevant to different buying personas (e.g. technical vs. end-user buyers) to encourage them to accept and select the offering. For example, the benefit of a solution might be that it's more efficient to operate than a competitor's offering. To an end user, the benefit could be translated into hours of effort saved – but to an IT leader, the same benefit could be translated into a quantity of resources that would be freed up to focus on other goals.

- **Justify buyer decisions.** The most common use of VA tools is to help create a compelling business case for decisionmakers. Often, this part of the buying

SiriusDecisions
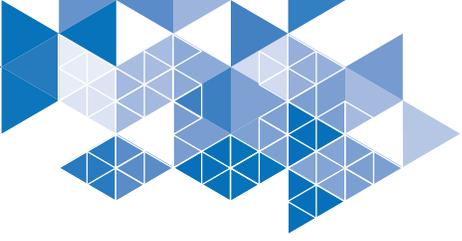
process is done without a rep having direct access to the decisionmaker. In these cases, the rep needs to train and coach the buyer champion on how to use the VA tool and incorporate the results into the business case for the buying decision.

- **Quantify value delivered.** After making a purchase, customers should receive periodic, structured presentations to quantify the specific value that products or solutions are delivering. VA tools can be used to help articulate the value in units important to each customer. This is especially important for renewal-based business models where a solution's value must be continually communicated (see the Core Strategy Report "Value Review Toolkit").

### The Sirius Decision

As the old saying goes, "math doesn't lie." During VA tool implementation, it might become clear that an organization's offerings do not offer a clear advantage vs. the competition – or, worse, that the organization is at a disadvantage in terms of quantifiable value. VA tools can provide an important reality check on the assumed value proposition of a product or solution. If one type of value cannot be quantified using the tool, marketing and sales must shift their strategies to focus on areas where an advantage does exist.