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AN INTRODUCTION TO
HIRING FOR THE MODERN SALES ENGINEER

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INTRODUCTION

The Sales Engineer is a role that's only become necessary since the technology boom, but the need for this position is increasing by the day. Companies are realizing that as the sales process changes, so does the need for specialized roles.

As SaaS products become more popular and increasingly complicated, companies are requiring more technically savvy brand ambassadors. As a company expands, the sales team requires more resources for communicating the benefits, processes, and updates to intangible products.

> **AS SAAS PRODUCTS BECOME MORE POPULAR AND INCREASINGLY COMPLICATED, COMPANIES ARE REQUIRING MORE TECHNICALLY SAVVY BRAND AMBASSADORS.**
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That's where the Sales Engineer comes in. A Sales Engineer communicates to your customers everything they need to understand to successfully implement and utilize your product.

Sales Engineers are a unique breed with a unique skill set. They need to have the right combination of technical ability and customer-facing experience in order to communicate a software's complex technical benefits in understandable terms.

Altogether, this creates a challenge for hiring organizations that are looking to hire a Sales Engineer — the competition is fierce among companies hoping to fill these positions, and not many people have the Sales Engineer job title or experience.

> **A SALES ENGINEER COMMUNICATES TO YOUR CUSTOMERS EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT AND UTILIZE YOUR PRODUCT.**
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In this eBook, we offer an in-depth look into the Sales Engineering role and provide insights you can use to build or scale your own Sales Engineering team.

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WHAT IS A SALES ENGINEER?

WHO ARE THEY

With the growth of SaaS companies, high tech sales engineers are able to communicate the business value of a non-physical product on a technical level. Understanding the landscape of different software and services is the ideal means to articulate why a product is truly groundbreaking. Software integrations are a challenging pitch without in-depth knowledge. A strong technical background allows a tech sales engineer to break down complex information into understandable aspects without compromising the functionality of the product. Skilled at customer facing interactions and communicating the benefits of software, sales engineers are prized for their ability to be brought in at any stage of the sales process to add strategic value and handle technical objections regular sales people can't. This engineering aspect requires a technical background most salespeople don't have. In fact, tech sales engineers serve as experts on the product for both external and internal questions.

> **SALES ENGINEER BREAKS DOWN COMPLEX INFORMATION INTO UNDERSTANDABLE ASPECTS WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE PRODUCT.**
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> **SALES ENGINEERS SERVE AS EXPERTS ON THE PRODUCT FOR BOTH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL QUESTIONS.**
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WHAT DO THEY DO

A Tech Sales Engineer is a moderately to extremely technical customer facing role tasked with delivering one unified vision of the engineering, strategic, and market value of a software product to the customer. They are keystone employees as tech companies expand and as pre-sales become increasingly more valuable to the bottom line. The tech industry has turned to tech sales engineers to take over educating potential customers. As a consumer, people are hard pressed to keep up with every new technical

improvement and platform in their market. A sales engineer's job consists of learning their tech market inside and out. This research is crucial to new companies looking to explain to potential clients why their product or service will benefit its users.

Lastly, a tech sales engineer can speak to a product or service's technical aspects. They are able to speak to the intricacies of the software to clients or customers looking to dive into the actual code. Sales Engineers can problem solve any consult on any issues that arise from the future integration to a client's existing infrastructure, whether it is internal or external. Furthermore, they are potentially first in line to ensure that any product updates are implemented smoothly without bugs, feature regressions, or dreaded product downtime.

> **A SALES ENGINEER'S JOB CONSISTS OF LEARNING THEIR TECH MARKET INSIDE AND OUT.**
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> **SALES ENGINEERS CAN PROBLEM SOLVE ANY CONSULT ON ANY ISSUES THAT ARISE FROM THE FUTURE INTEGRATION TO A CLIENT'S EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE.**
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WHEN DO YOU NEED THEM

Sales Engineers alleviate two major pain points of a company: lowering the amount of resources required from the engineering team and increasing the nimbleness of the sales team.

A company hires a tech sales engineer once their expansion has reached the point that either the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Technology Officer no longer has the bandwidth to pitch the products technical accolades to every customer in the sales pipeline. Sales Engineers serve as spokespeople for the technical aspects of their product.

> **SALES ENGINEERS SERVE AS SPOKESPEOPLE FOR THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THEIR PRODUCT.**
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WHAT DO YOU PAY THEM

SAN FRANCISCO/NEW YORK:

0-2 years experience:

$65,000-90,000 ($90,000-110,000 OTE)

3-5 years experience:

$110,000-150,000 ($130,000-180,000 OTE)

AUSTIN, TX:

0-2 years experience:

$55,000-75,000 ($75,000-100,000 OTE)

3-5 years experience:

$70,000-90,000 ($80,000-120,000 OTE)

LONDON, UK:

0-2 years experience:

£25,000-40,000 (£45,000-60,000 OTE)

3-5 years experience:

£45,000-60,000 (£50,000-80,000 OTE)

HOW TO BUILD YOUR DREAM TEAM

INTRODUCTION

If you're starting to build out your Sales Engineering team, or trying to expand your current teams, one of the most important things to do is establish your hiring process.

Before looking for Sales Engineering candidates, clarify internally the amount of work that will be pre-sales and post sales for the position. A Sales Engineer handles at least 50% pre-sale duties, helping educate customers before making a purchasing decision. If you are looking for employees focused solely or primarily on post sales operations, you may need a Solutions Architect, Implementation Engineer, or Customer Support Engineer.

Once, you've outlined your needs, try to keep your hiring process simple, efficient, and timely to maintain your candidates' interests. A long hiring process not only means that your position goes unfilled, but it may also cause your best candidates to drop out of the process. The best candidates are in high demand with plenty of choices about where to work, so tighten up your hiring process so you don't lose them to a competitor.

Once your hiring process is determined, communicate it to your candidates so they have clear expectations about timing and next steps. The hiring process for Sales Engineers typically takes 3-6 weeks and consists of 6 parts: sourcing and screening, a phone interview, a technical skills test, an onsite interview, a product demonstration, and offer.

You should customize the hiring process to meet your organization's unique needs, but we have broken down each part to help you get started.

SOURCING AND SCREENING

Sourcing and Screening — **Phone Interview** — **Technical Skills Assessment** — **Onsite Interview** — **Presentation/Product Demonstration** — **Offer**

If you're beginning your search for your next strategic sales hire on your own, the best places to start are with internal referrals and LinkedIn searches.

As with any role, internal referrals can be a great source of candidates — particularly if they're from a current Sales Engineer who knows what it takes to succeed. However, you may also find great candidates within your other employees' networks, or even your own.

While you're waiting for those referrals to roll in, you should also take a more proactive approach to recruiting by running searches on LinkedIn for your ideal candidate profile. Because of the highly specialized nature of sales engineering, look at companies with similarly sized sales teams or sales cycles. Viewing the qualifications of the strategic team members at these other organizations can help identify what skills are necessary for a Sales Engineer at your company. Also looking for candidates with the job title of Business Strategist can aid your search. Strategic sales hires are new, and have dramatically grown in popularity with the tech scene. By focusing on what you need your strategic sales hire to accomplish, you can narrow down the candidate pool to those that can help you achieve success.

Finally, you can try job postings to find candidates — although, in most cases, you'll end up with too many applicants to sift through and may not find anyone that is truly qualified.

Many organizations use a recruitment firm like Betts Recruiting to both source and screen candidates. We provide higher quality candidates than other methods — and faster. When organizations need to hire strategic sales hires on an accelerated timeline, our pipeline of great candidates is already ready to go. Plus, we perform consultative searches and pre-screen all candidates to ensure that our clients will be satisfied with the results we provide.

It's for these reasons we get so much of our business through client referrals. We have a solid reputation for delivering great candidates, which in turn helps our clients reach their business goals.

PHONE INTERVIEW

Sourcing and Screening	Phone Interview	Technical Skills Assessment	Onsite Interview	Presentation/Product Demonstration	Offer

After the sourcing and screening phase, most companies will begin the interview process with a phone call.

During the phone interview, start off by explaining the role in detail, and try to determine if the candidate's technical and customer-facing experience is a good fit. Your goal is to make sure they fit the basic requirements of the job, and to try to identify any red flags.

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SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR A PHONE INTERVIEW:

1 How proficient are you with (insert applicable technology)?

2 Are there any technologies you have learned on your own?

3 Can you expand on your technical background?

4 What is a recent tech trend you're interested in?

5 What's your favorite product or software solution?

6 What percentage of your responsibilities are pre-sales? Do you work on post-sales implementations as well?

7 What's your average deal size?

8 How many sales reps have you been supporting?

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TECHNICAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Sourcing and Screening — **Phone Interview** — **Technical Skills Assessment** — **Onsite Interview** — **Presentation/Product Demonstration** — **Offer**

After the initial phone screen, companies often use a technical skills assessment to establish the aptitude of a candidate's technical background. These assignments can include a take-home coding problem or a hypothetical issue asking for a solution. Each skills test is directly related to the coded infrastructure of the product of the company a candidate is interviewing with. Examples of these tests include coding language aptitudes (e.g. Python), operating systems (eg. Linux), application platforms (e.g. CRMs), and Application Program Interfaces (APIs).

Alternatively, a technical skills test can also be done as an in-depth conversation with an engineer. The engineer will dive into technical background and capabilities with situational questions. Much like the take-home assignments, the call will focus on situation discussions, processes the candidate goes through, and what level of skill they have in the aforementioned difference systems, platforms, and interfaces.

With both of these types of technical skills assessments, the goal is to understand a candidate's thought process. Companies should encourage candidates to think out loud, and walk through how they approach a problem, communicate how they reach a solution, and then discuss why their solution should be best practice. Unlike an aptitude test for an engineer, coding or solution testing for Sales Engineers isn't meant to be graded; companies look for general proficiency and competency to ensure their candidate will have success when speaking about these issues with a client.

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ONSITE INTERVIEWS

Sourcing and Screening · Phone Interview · Technical Skills Assessment · **Onsite Interview** · Presentation/Product Demonstration · Offer

The onsite interview is your opportunity to ask more in-depth interview questions and look for a culture fit. Bring to the onsite interview any common questions your sales teams are currently fielding from consumers. Also, follow-up on the questions you asked during the phone interview. Understanding more about the technology a candidate is familiar with is integral in vetting a potential Sales Engineer.

The candidate should meet with a few people from your company to determine culture fit. Be careful not to go overboard: 10-15 minute interviews with between 3-5 people from your company should suffice, and we recommend that you include one person who's not on your direct team or in your department.

Remind the interviewers to keep the conversation open, and to give the candidate the opportunity to ask questions that give them a better sense of the company culture. Remember that Sales Engineering candidates are in high demand, so your goal should be to connect with the candidate on a personal level — you want them to feel the culture fit as much as you do.

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SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CULTURE FIT

1   What excites you about waking up to go to work everyday?

2   How do you want to feel when you leave at the end of the day?

3   What shows that you're a good fit for a company like ours?

4   What do you like to do in your spare time?

5   Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?

6   What excites you about technology?

7   What's your ideal work environment: one in which you can work on several dynamic projects simultaneously, or one in which you can work on one task at a time through completion?

8   What do think makes a good team player? Would you describe yourself this way? How do you deal with those who are not?

PRESENTATION/PRODUCT DEMONSTRATION

Sourcing and Screening — **Phone Interview** — **Technical Skills Assessment** — **Onsite Interview** — **Presentation/Product Demonstration** — **Offer**

During an on-site interview, companies often ask for a presentation from a candidate. Generally, these demonstrations can include a 30/60/90 day outline. In these presentations, candidates discuss how they plan to approach the position they are interviewing for. They discuss strategies for team collaboration and set goals they plan to reach. Learning how a candidate plans to make an impact in a company during their first 90 days as an employ can demonstrate their drive, skillset, and objectives.

Many companies also include a product demonstration during an on-site interview. Using your team as the audience, have your candidate demo the product they are currently working on or present a product they are interested in. Hearing how a candidate handles questions and simplifies the complex processing of their current product can help you determine how they will be able to do the same for your product or service.

After this point, you should have a clear idea about whether or not you'd like to extend an offer to your candidate. However, be sure to provide feedback to each of your candidates, regardless of whether they will be receiving an offer – this can help them in their next interview, and will leave a lasting positive impression of your company.

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OFFER

Sourcing and Screening — **Phone Interview** — **Technical Skills Assessment** — **Onsite Interview** — **Presentation/Product Demonstration** — **Offer**

Once you've decided to extend an offer, there are a few things you can do to increase your chances of it being accepted.

The first, and perhaps most important step, is to pre-close your candidate. By this point, you should have an idea as to why the candidate is looking for a new opportunity and what it will take to get them onboard. This is your chance to present your offer and see if they will verbally accept.

Your offer should include at least a 10% increase over the candidate's current compensation, and you should discuss all benefits, perks, and equity. This is also a great opportunity to revisit the conversations you've had about the candidate's motivations, so you can reinforce that it will be a great fit for both parties.

If your candidate has any reservations or would like to negotiate the offer, respond within a day (if not immediately) to show that you're excited to have them onboard.

> **THE BEST WAY TO ENSURE YOUR EMPLOYMENT OFFER IS ACCEPTED IS TO PRE-CLOSE YOUR CANDIDATE.**
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Timeliness is key here, so be sure to contact the candidate with a verbal offer as quickly as possible, and ask that they respond within 48 hours. If any further discussion is needed, do your best to keep the conversation moving and find a resolution as quickly as you can. Any delays could be the difference between hiring your top choice candidate and losing them to a competitor or a counter-offer.

Only once the candidate has verbally accepted should you send out a written offer with the same details you agreed to in the verbal offer.

Then take a deep breath, and congratulate yourself for a job well done.

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CONCLUSION

Sales Engineers are emerging positions that play a key role in organizations expanding within the technology industry. It will become more competitive to hire for this role as companies realize they need it to maintain their competitive advantage.

You're on the right track by starting to build your team now, but you may still face challenges finding candidates with the right skillset. Competition for top talent will be fierce, so make yourself stand out as an employer of choice and attract top talent with a solid product, enterprise customer accounts to manage, a strong leadership team, a fun culture, growth opportunities, and/or equity. Having sales team members that also understand the technical components of a product or service is an integral step for tech startups to move past the initial growth phase and increase their expansion.

> **HAVING SALES TEAM MEMBERS THAT ALSO UNDERSTAND THE TECHNICAL COMPONENTS OF A PRODUCT OR SERVICE IS AN INTEGRAL STEP FOR TECH STARTUP.**
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THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK IN YOUR HIRING!

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