

# The Metrics that Matter for Technical Forecasting

Optimizing PreSales deployments, ensuring  
consistent deal execution, and improving  
revenue predictability

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# Introduction

In the modern B2B buying experience, PreSales teams are critical. They are the preferred partners for buyers, and they own what is often the largest component of the sales cycle. In businesses that are more enterprise-oriented or more consumption or expansion-driven, their role is even more prominent as the focus shifts from signing an initial deal to growing the relationship after the initial deal is signed.

Yet the science of how to measure and manage PreSales teams is nascent. What gets attention is unfortunately often what is easiest to measure. Because PreSales teams do not “own” the deal and have not traditionally had dedicated solutions to manage their work, this problem has only recently gotten more of the attention that it deserves.

Now, as a result of more extensive research, there is growing recognition that PreSales performance is an important driver of [overall revenue growth](#), and there is growing demand for the science of PreSales analytics. We have so often heard more and more from PreSales leaders that they wish they knew more about what others are doing and finding useful.

As the technical win is so crucial to winning deals in today’s B2B selling environment, PreSales sentiment on deals acts as a quality check for the sales forecast, and a powerful signal for revenue leaders interested in knowing which deals in the pipeline may potentially be at risk.

In this eBook, you will receive an overview of the metrics that matter for technical forecasting, based on what we have learned from our work with PreSales leaders at the world’s leading B2B technology companies. Whether it’s optimizing PreSales deployment models, assigning the right sales engineers to every opportunity, or driving more predictable revenue, we cover the greatest opportunities for change in each area, and the metrics you can use to make more informed decisions.

“...in the work of the soft professions, it becomes very difficult to distinguish between output and activity. And as noted, stressing output is the key to improving productivity, while looking to increase activity can result in just the opposite.”

Andy Grove, *High Output Management*

# Improving the Technical Sales Process

PreSales team members are the preferred partners of prospects and customers and are scarce and highly skilled resources. How do you wield their valuable time and energy to get the best outcomes? We will walk through three types of opportunities that organizations often uncover.



## Deployment

getting the right person in the right deal at the right time.



## Deal execution

employing winning patterns once you are in a deal.



## Pipeline and predictability

using PreSales insights to improve deal targeting and reduce forecast risk.

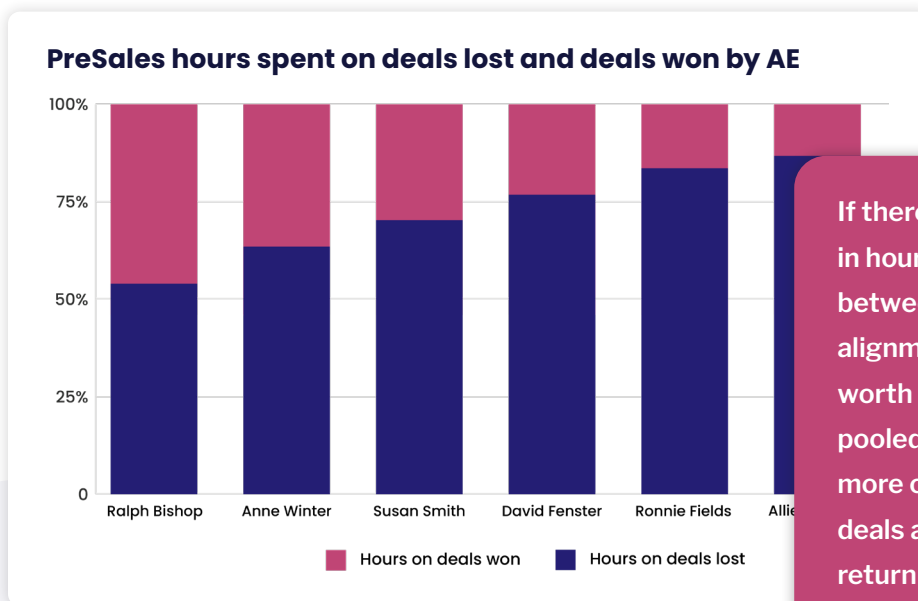
## Optimizing PreSales Deployments

Before we look in depth at models for deploying SEs on deals, there is a simple question that often leads to surprisingly profound discussions. How much time should SEs spend on deals? Often SE time is split between supporting deals, supporting existing customers, and supporting internal initiatives, such as

recording a video for marketing. We will call this split between deal support, account support, and internal initiative support SE focus. This question often flies under the radar because it is often invisible. Once teams have data, it opens up a host of interesting conversations.

## What is the right PreSales deployment model?

**Key metric:** hours spent on deals lost vs hours spent on deals won.



If there are large discrepancies in hours spent on deals won between pairings in a direct alignment model, it may be worth considering moving to a pooled model where teams can more consistently map SEs to deals and deal stages where the return on their efforts can be maximized at all times.

Many organizations adopt direct alignment models where a given AE is always paired with a specific SE. While the most straightforward example is an exclusive one-to-one pairing, this may not always be the case—running a 3:1 support ratio with direct alignment would mean that a group of 3 AEs will always be assigned the same SE whenever PreSales resources are needed.

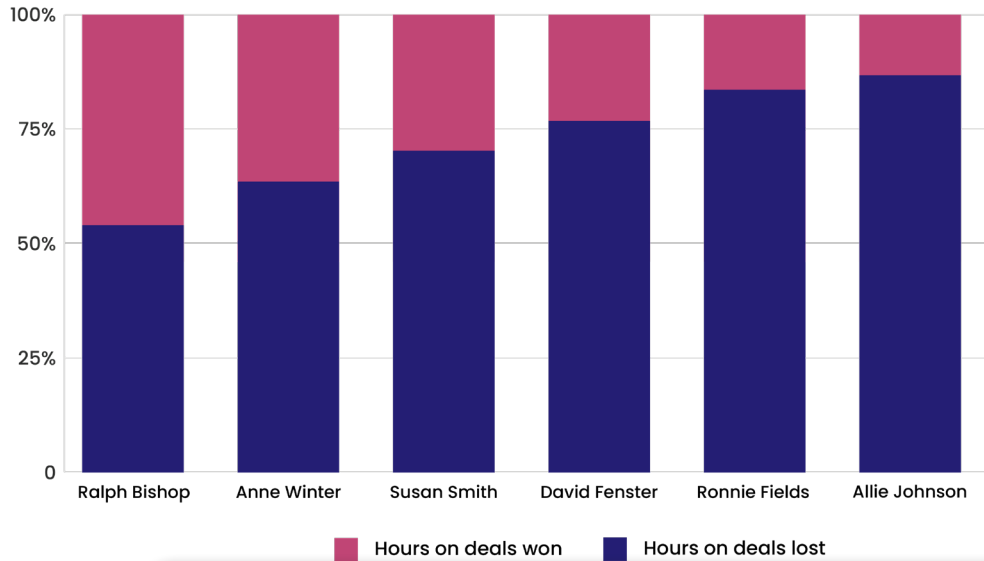
This structure is purported to foster closer working relationships (and therefore greater effectiveness) between individual Sales and PreSales team members, but the number of deals where an AE can make effective use of SE capacity varies over time. During periods where opportunity volume is lower, SEs can diligently find ways to contribute but may not be able to deploy their time as effectively.

By contrast, aggregate demand for PreSales resources across an entire group of AEs tends to be more consistent. If there are large discrepancies in hours spent on deals won between pairings in a direct alignment model, it may be worth considering moving to a pooled model where teams can more consistently map SEs to deals and deal stages where the return on their efforts can be maximized at all times. While this does not mean that a pooled deployment model is always the answer, it is valuable to look at whether the lift in deal outcomes achieved through direct AE to SE mapping is enough to offset the cost of greater variance in individual deal flow.

## Where can we reallocate SE time towards the most promising deals?

**Key metric:** hours spent on deals lost vs hours spent on deals won

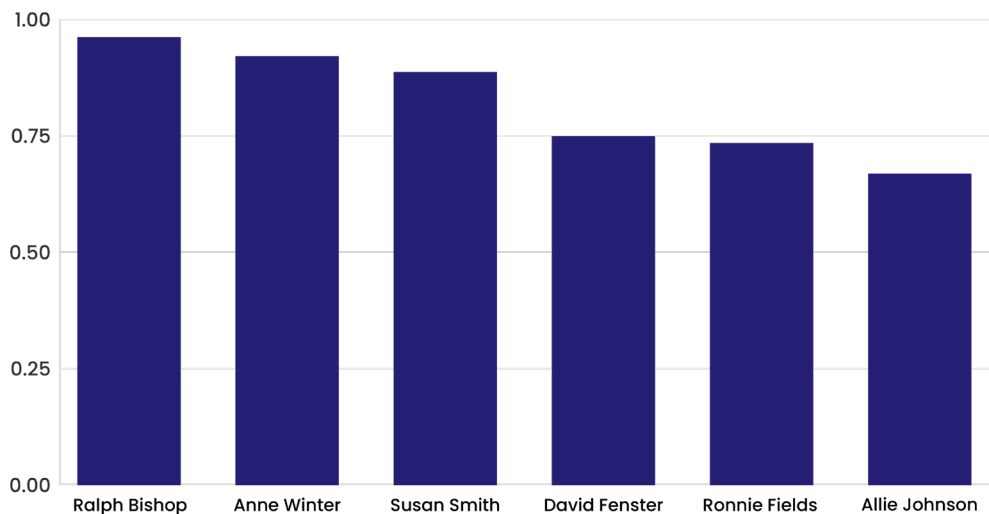
**PreSales hours spent on deals lost and deals won by AE**



Unfortunately, all SEs end up investing time and energy in deals that they did not believe in. Looking at the ratio of hours spent on deals won and hours spent on deals lost is a simple way to surface these kinds of issues.

**Key metric:** Percentage of deals with technical win that were closed / lost

**Percentage of Deals with Technical Win Marked Closed Won**



SEs quickly develop some of the keenest intuitions about whether a deal is likely to close, as we discuss in greater detail in an upcoming section. Unfortunately, all SEs end up investing time and energy in deals that they did not believe in. Looking at the ratio of hours spent on deals won and hours spent on deals lost is a simple way to surface these kinds of issues. You and your team likely already have good hypotheses about the kinds of deals where you are and are not likely to succeed. Use those deal attributes to slice the ratio of hours won and lost. When the ratio of hours spent on deals lost spikes, you have probably confirmed one of your hypotheses.

There are several types of opportunities that customers commonly encounter.

**Customer segment.** There might be a customer vertical that looks superficially promising but lacks product fit. This may happen when there is a need and the customer segment promises large deal sizes, drawing the attention of AEs, but the issues lie below the surface and are only surfaced once SEs engage in deeper technical discovery. Once you establish those patterns with data, you may be able to shape the GTM teams target segments or qualify deals out more efficiently.

**Level of qualification.** Another key question is how early or late SEs should be involved in a deal. Comparing hours spent against qualification criteria often

surfaces opportunities here, especially when you focus on qualification criteria that are knowable prior to SE involvement. For instance, was there a real budget, an appropriate buyer, and a real pain point? This might lead to better sales team enablement or, in the case of pooled models, qualification checks prior to SE assignment.

**Deal size.** How much you should invest is proportional to the upside that you might gain. We talk in the People section above about how you can establish the right deal size thresholds for SE involvement when you design your staffing levels. Once you establish those, however, you may or may not see thorough adherence. As market conditions shift and your team grows, the average hours spent per deal might also change. By regularly looking at how much time is spent on deals of different sizes, you can catch these kinds of opportunities. For example, if your deal size threshold for SE involvement is \$20,000, are SE hours being spent on deals below that size? If you predicated SE involvement in SMB deals on an average effort of 10 hours per deal, how often are deals consuming significantly more time than that?

**Account executive.** You may see some account executives systematically make much better or worse use of SE time. By surfacing those patterns, you can coordinate coaching, enablement, and capability-building investments. Those

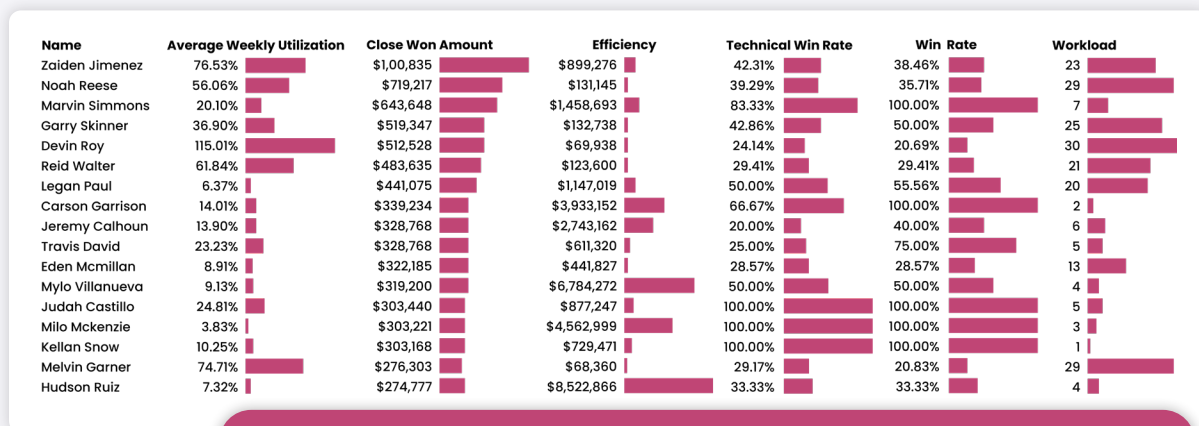
might include training AEs on when SE involvement is effective and how to qualify or strengthening their ability to self-serve.

One organization implementing a system for AEs to request SE involvement in deals found that framing process changes in a

positive light (i.e. an opportunity for their technical counterparts to be properly acknowledged for their work) helped drive greater adoption, and enabled the SE team to support 100 newly onboarded sales reps in the space of a year.

## Where can we better balance capacity across SEs?

**Key metrics:** utilization, closed won amount, efficiency, technical win rate, win rate, and workload by team member



Are there any team members who are 'known quantities' and have become overloaded? Are there new team members who are not set up to hit their goals because they are not yet in enough opportunities?

Once you have your team as a whole engaged on the right kinds of deals at the right time, you need to balance individual workload. This is a multi-factor problem. You want to capitalize on your strongest and most seasoned SEs, but you do not want to overload them. You want to ensure all team members have an opportunity to achieve their revenue goals, and you want to create opportunities for team member

growth. Moreover, all deals and all times in the deal lifecycle are not created equal. Having five mid-market expansion deals in a 'Finalizing Technical Win' stage is usually very different from having five enterprise new business deals in a 'POV' stage.

Here, we will assume that you have already determined what a fully loaded SE looks like and have used that to design



appropriate staffing levels. If not, how to approach that problem is discussed in the People section above. As part of that, you have hopefully also identified the most important determinants of SE load. In some organizations, this might simply be the number of assigned open opportunities. In organizations with significant variation in effort over the deal lifecycle, that might be the number of deals in a certain set of PreSales stages (e.g., POV). In organizations where SE effort varies significantly by deal type, you might look at open opportunity revenue or even the sum of a custom level-of-effort (LOE) calculation.

Whichever the right measure for your organization is, you now want to use that to regularly scan across team members. Are there any team members who are 'known quantities' and have become overloaded? Are there new team members who are not set up to hit their goals because they are not yet in enough opportunities? As part of this, it's valuable to complement your primary measure of workload with some additional metrics. Looking at load

alongside technical win rate helps identify cases where outcomes may be slipping because a team member is being asked for too much. Looking at load alongside utilization helps identify cases where something outside of the norm is driving up effort required and putting team members in an unsustainable situation. That might be a particularly intense deal or contributions to other internal initiatives.

It may make sense to address some imbalances through one-off interventions. In other cases, they might signal an opportunity to improve processes. Is there less AE and SE manager comfort drawing newer SEs into certain deals? How much of that is a reflection of outcomes? Is it mindsets that need to evolve or are there additional steps to ramp, mentor, and apprentice newer team members that would better position them? Are there assignment models that would optimize the chance to hit quota by using the strengths of seasoned team members, and creating opportunities for new hires?

## Ensuring consistent deal execution

Once you have the right person in the right deal at the right time, how do you help them win more often?

SEs learn continually from their own recent experiences in deals. The opportunity then is to help them learn more from each other and also to help them step back and see the broader patterns in their own work that are less obvious day-to-day.

### Where can we increase win rate by investing in winning activities and deliverables?

**Key metrics:** win rate with and without a deliverable or activity, average effort by deliverable or activity, and attach rate per deliverable or activity

Deliverable	Win Rate When Attached	Win Rate When Not Attached	Attached Rate	Average Hours
POC	51%	36%	33%	42
Workshop	50%	40%	9%	25
Test Drive	45%	40%	22%	19
RFP	15%	44%	10%	22
Value Assessment	55%	39%	15%	4

What is the win rate when I do a POV or test drive? Does the POV result in a higher win rate? If one group of SEs regularly performs prospect research prior to a discovery call, does that help them win more consistently?

Often, in order to win a deal, SEs must invest substantial time and energy in one or more deliverables. Common examples include POVs or POCs, workshops, test drives, and RFPs. This leads to valid and important questions. When is a more time-intensive POV worth it and when are prospects' needs better satisfied with a lighter weight test drive or workshop? Are RFPs good investments? The answers to these questions depend on the characteristics of the buyer, the product, and the business model.

You can approach this empirically by experimenting. For example, if you are considering whether to do a POV or a test drive for a certain type of deal, you could explore that by answering these questions. What is the win rate when I do a POV for this kind of deal? What is the win rate when I do a test drive instead? Does the POV result in a higher win rate? If so, is the increase in the win rate, multiplied by the average deal size, enough to justify the additional hours that I have to spend in order to complete a POV?

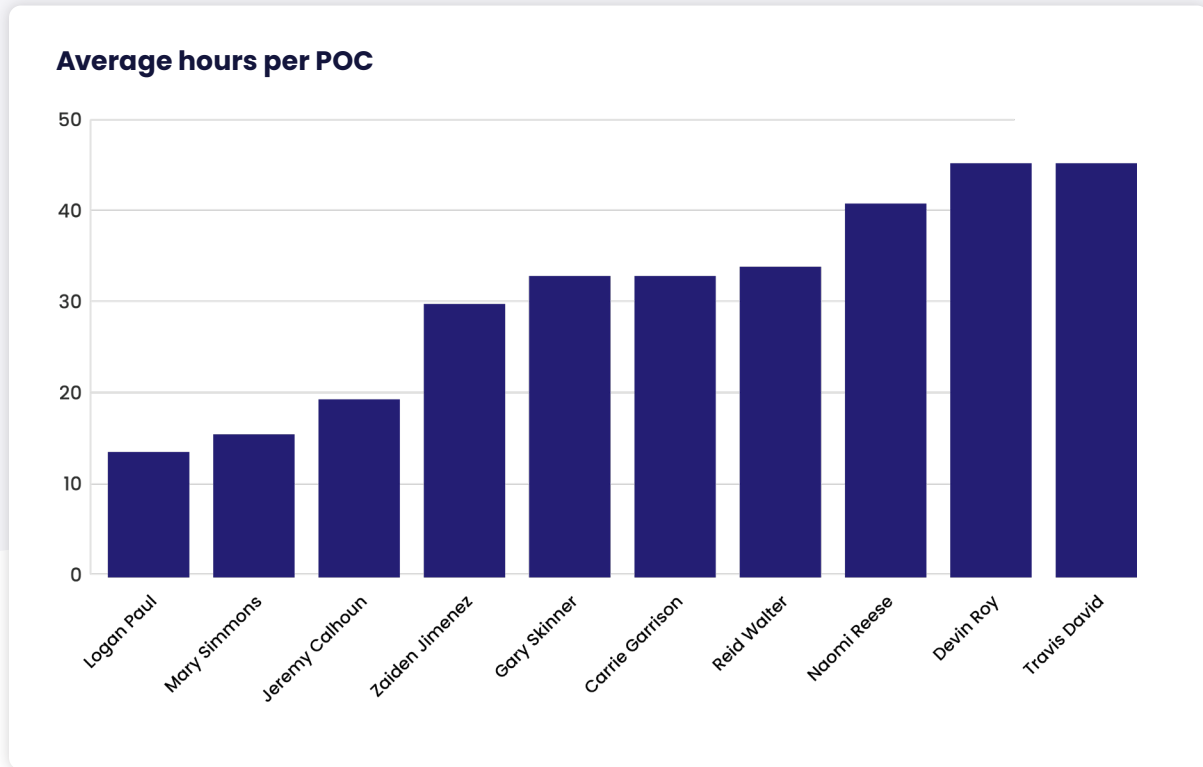
The important thing in this case is that you set up a valid comparison. To pick an obvious example, it would not make sense to compare win rate on commercial deals (where you do not do POVs) to win rate on enterprise deals (where you do POVs). Those deals are, of course, different in other ways, and you would not learn much from that comparison about whether POVs are the right choice for enterprise deals. If you are designing this as an experiment, you would need to take a group of deals where you would normally run a POV, separate some of them out, and do a test drive with those deals instead. You will also need to do that with enough deals that you are reasonably confident that the results you see are not up to chance. Since that involves some effort and some risk, it makes sense to do this when you have a good hypothesis that there's a better way.

You can also approach this without having to design experiments if you look at the variation that is already present in your organization. For example, if one group of SEs regularly performs prospect research prior to their initial discovery call, does that help them win more consistently?

A business spend management organization tracking specific steps in its technical sales process found that SEs adhering to the company's sales best practices were considerably more effective. Deals where the opportunity team had performed thorough discovery, run a technical assessment of the customer, and conducted a dry run before presenting to the buyer were more than twice as likely to close than when the team did not follow those steps.

## How can we complete winning activities and deliverables more efficiently?

**Key metric:** average hours by team member by deliverable or activity

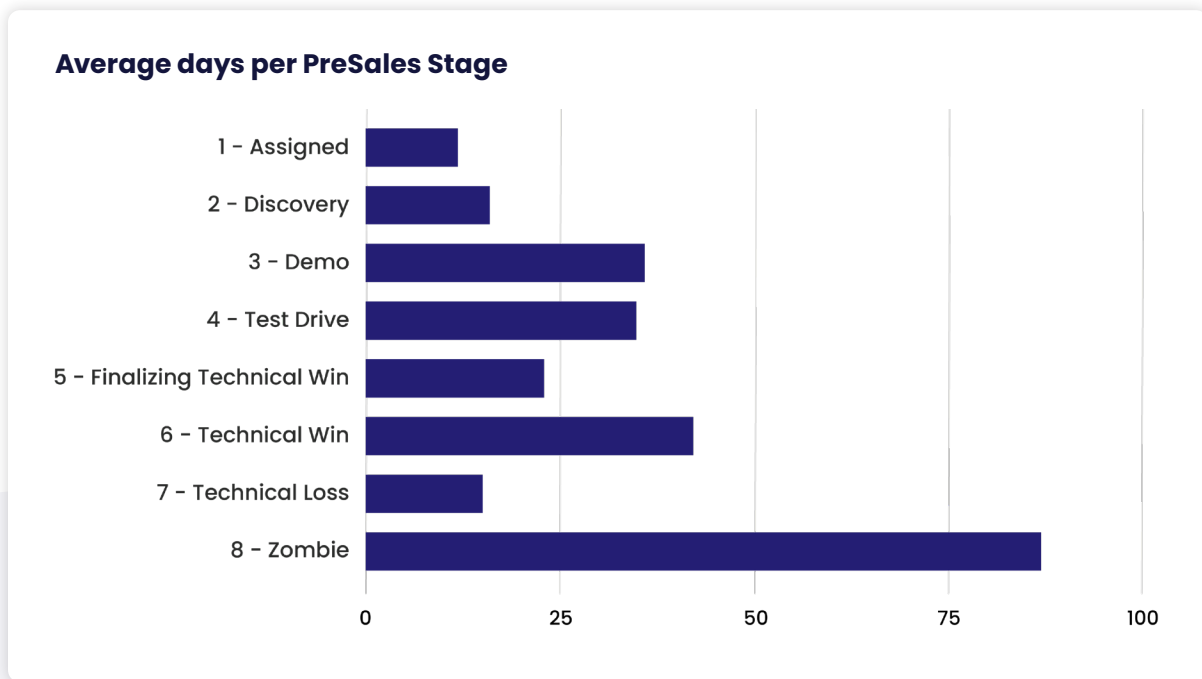


Once you know what winning investments to make, how do you make them as efficiently as possible? This is an area where you can learn a great deal by looking at variation within your team. The more complex and time-intensive the activity, the more variation there often is in how quickly team members are able to complete it. By studying that variation, you can identify the team members who achieve good results while also operating efficiently. You can then encourage those team members to document their methods and train others.

As one example, a company providing sales software found there was a great deal of variation in the time required for POC preparation. They identified who was doing it more efficiently and how and trained their whole team on this approach. As a result, they reduced POC preparation times by 20%.

## Where can we improve deal velocity?

**Key metric:** velocity by PreSales Stage



Some PreSales leaders would say deal acceleration is the number one goal of PreSales, and yet deal velocity is notoriously challenging to measure. While many organizations are well positioned to understand overall deal velocity by looking at the difference between creation date and close date, this, by itself, tells you little about where improvement opportunities are. This is especially true for larger deals and longer sales cycles.

What is more helpful is capturing the stages of the PreSales process and recording velocity within each of these stages. First, this allows you to look specifically at the parts of the deal lifecycle that PreSales owns. Second, this helps you understand how much each part of your standard PreSales process contributes to

overall deal cycle time. Additionally, it helps to uncover trends over time, and where risk lies within current deal cycles. From there, you can drill into the stages that take the longest on average, stages that have the most variability in completion time by team member, or stages where the completion time is the most surprising.

For example, 'test drive' might be the longest stage in the PreSales process, with significant variability in average completion time across team members. That suggests best practices that could be more widely shared. Alternatively, you might be surprised by the time required to move from technical win to close. That might suggest an opportunity to do more to advance the political or commercial win in the deal alongside the technical win.

## Improving pipeline health and revenue predictability

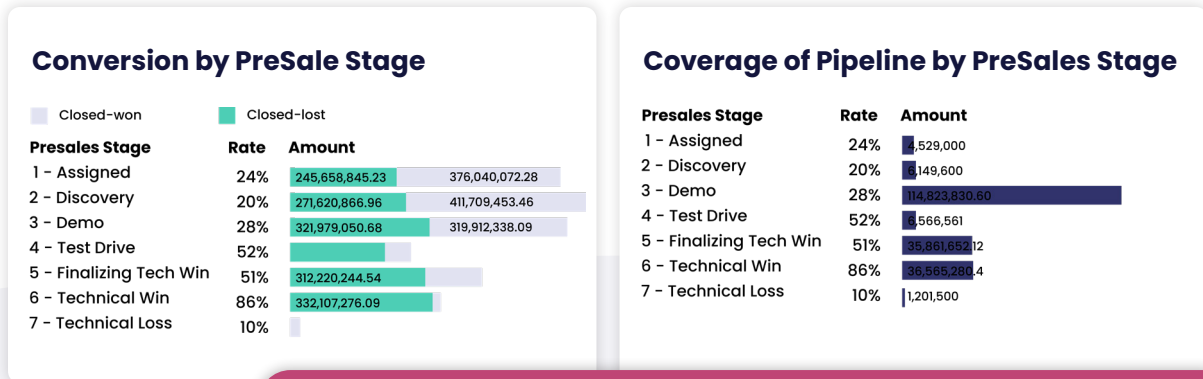
Because PreSales team members are closest to the product and own such an extended and critical part of the sales process, they have especially keen insights into deal outlook. When PreSales leaders and CROs incorporate those insights into the sales forecast, they can significantly improve revenue targeting and predictability. However, in order to be effective, PreSales team members often need to translate intuition into analysis. The sales team generally owns the forecast, and PreSales team members must work collaboratively hand-in-hand with their sales colleagues in order to achieve their shared goals. It can be uncomfortable and

unpopular for SEs to contravene overly optimistic assessments of their sales colleagues. And yet this is exactly when their insights are most valuable.

When teams incorporate the most important insights about the state of the technical win into the sales forecast, emotion is taken out of the equation. PreSales team members are not contravening valued colleagues; they are simply explaining the situation on the ground. This leads to better, more objective risk assessments. Some of the insights we have seen be especially helpful are below.

## Does the overall level, mix, and stage of PreSales activity support the forecast?

**Key metric:** coverage (conversion by PreSales stage multiplied by deal amount)



Take the historical win rate for opportunities passing through each PreSales stage and multiply it by the amount of revenue in that stage. Then, compare the average stage duration with the amount of time remaining before the end of your quarter. How much revenue is likely to close in time?

One of the most valuable tools here is the consistent tracking of PreSales stages. Once teams have some amount of history, PreSales teams can glean several valuable insights. Two of these are the typical conversion rate between PreSales stages and the average duration of a PreSales stage. These can be used in combination as a forecast check.

Take the historical win rate for opportunities passing through each PreSales stage and multiply it by the amount of revenue in that stage. This gives you a sense of the total revenue that you have in hand. Then, compare the average stage duration

with the amount of time remaining before the end of your quarter. How much of the revenue that you have in hand is likely to close in time? How does this line up with the forecast?

In some cases, there is a strong relationship between a key deliverable and booked revenue. For instance, one security technology company has established a close relationship between the number of POCs and deal volume. By looking at the number of POCs that are sufficiently far along, the PreSales team provides an important check on pipeline health.

## On which deals, in particular, is there a mismatch in forecast category and PreSales insight?

**Key metric:** current quarter deals grouped by forecast category versus PreSales risk factors

Forecast Category	Opportunity Name	Overall PreSale Score	PreSales Stage	Days in Stage	Deal Breaker Product Gaps	Technical Differentiation
Commit	Bold Care	46	2 - Discovery	33	0	
	Trinet Consolidated	60	4 - Test Drive	12	0	High
	Sunrise Inc	81	5 - Finalizing Technical Win	8	0	High
	Rapid Technology	53	4 - Test Drive	56	0	High
Best case	Skyward Enterprises	44	2 - Discovery	22	0	
	Fleet & Wallard	61	3 - Dem0	15	0	High
	King & Co	47	4 - Test Drive	44	1	Low
	Century Distribution	36	3 - Demo	22	1	Low

In addition to using PreSales signals in aggregate, teams can use them to determine which specific deals to target. Many PreSales professionals have had the unfortunate experience of investing many hours in a deal that they did not believe in. This impacts efficiency as well as morale since those hours can usually be redeployed to more promising deals.

When PreSales signals are part of the sales forecast dashboard, they are much more difficult to ignore. We have already discussed some of the items that are often useful above. Looking at PreSales stage and comparing how much time is left in a deal cycle to the end of the quarter is one consistently useful lens. Looking at progress on key deliverables, like POCs, is another.

In addition to these, explicitly capturing SE judgment shines a light on the likely outlook for the technical win. This can be done by asking SEs to weigh in on factors like the level of technical differentiation or capture PreSales concerns explicitly (like a mismatch between prospect use cases and product capabilities). As we will discuss more below, deal-breaking product challenges can also be tied to a deal as Opportunity Gaps, helping teams represent situations where a range of different product challenges exist.

As teams become increasingly sophisticated about looking at these factors in combination, they can incorporate them into an overall score, providing a simpler synthesis of the competing pros and cons of each deal.



# Drive Repeatable Revenue with PreSales Data

It's never been more important for organizations to invest in and elevate their PreSales teams. Through this breakdown of key PreSales metrics for deployment, utilization, win rate, and pipeline coverage, we hope we have illustrated how much impact a fully enabled team can have on forecast accuracy and revenue predictability.

Not only is the PreSales organization more effective, the entire sales organization is positioned to make better use of PreSales time and achieve repeatable wins. By sharing these approaches, we hope we will position more PreSales leaders to make themselves heard in the sales forecast.

For a comprehensive view of all the metrics PreSales can use to prove their impact and drive strategic change, check out our **Definitive Guide to PreSales KPIs**. To learn more about how Vivun empowers PreSales to bring a brand new set of insights to the business and drive strategic change, visit <https://vivun.com/demonstrate-presales-impact> or request a demo.

# About Vivun

Vivun is the leading provider of PreSales software. Its AI-powered platform supports a family of products that enable B2B businesses to accelerate sales and drive revenue more efficiently. With PreSales at the forefront of the modern go-to-market, organizations can manage their solutions teams globally, align sales and engineering to deliver products with incredible fit, and scale their demo abilities without more headcount. Customers include Snowflake, Zoom, Okta, Elastic, ADP, and Harness.

To learn more visit [www.vivun.com](http://www.vivun.com).