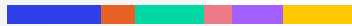


# HOW TO MAKE MARKETING OPTIMIZATION A DAILY HABIT



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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

*This report is the first in a series of e-books to help B2B marketers with their optimization efforts, brought to you by ON24® and NetLine.*

Whether you're a Chief Marketing Officer, a Chief Revenue Officer, or anyone leading marketing efforts in your organization, you'll know that optimization leads to a host of benefits: a better buyer experience, higher conversion and closing rates and ultimately, increased customer lifetime value. As the speed of change continues to increase, optimization becomes a vital tool for marketers to keep delivering results in the face of steep competition and rising targets.

But most discussion around optimization is geared towards B2C marketers, who typically deal with single buyers and simple sales cycles. What should B2B marketers be doing—and how can leaders set the foundations to make continual optimization a lasting habit?

To help you in your journey, this guide provides both an overview of optimization for B2B marketing and the actionable steps you'll need to take to make it a success.

## Read on to discover:

- Why optimization is different for B2B marketers and why it's vitally important.
- Why optimization should cover the entire customer journey and not just the stages traditionally 'owned' by marketing.
- What the common barriers to optimization are and how you can dismantle them.
- Why benchmarking is a crucial element in setting optimization goals.
- The steps you should take to build an optimization culture.

# WHAT IS B2B OPTIMIZATION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Before this optimization e-book, ON24 and NetLine produced the *B2B Marketer's Guide to Scrappy Marketing*. This report was about getting marketing done fast with limited resources, finding out what works well—and what doesn't.

However, there comes a point where once campaigns are up and running, reinventing the wheel doesn't seem like the best thing to do. So what should marketers do in this scenario?

Optimization is the answer.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY OPTIMIZATION IN B2B MARKETING?

Unfortunately, the definitions for optimization that apply to B2B marketers might be somewhat lacking.

Merriam Webster defines optimization as “an act, process, or methodology of making something (such as a design, system, or decision) as fully perfect, functional, or effective as possible.” But while “functional or as effective as possible” might be applicable, there's no way to define perfect—and as we covered in the scrappy marketing series, pursuing perfection can often hold marketers back from doing anything at all.



The idea of conversion rate optimization has been commonplace since at least the early 2000s, with Moz defining it as “the systematic process of increasing the percentage of website visitors who take a desired action.”

But while that might be fine for businesses that transact exclusively online with just one buyer, the reality of B2B marketing means such a limited approach is simply too narrow.

## OPTIMIZATION IN B2B MARKETING SHOULD COVER ALL OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

For many B2C marketers, the customer is a single person, who more often than not is acting alone.

### Things are more difficult for B2B marketers.

As customers are businesses or organizations with multiple employees, there are often multiple people who must be marketed to—a critical factor contributing to the rise of modern *account-based marketing*. The book *The Challenger Sale* covered how the number of people that get involved in a buying process has grown, with the latest analysis estimating that the average number of stakeholders may be greater than 10 individuals. Naturally, decision making is taking longer. As such, the typical way in which B2B marketers measure performance—the number of marketing-

qualified leads (MQLs) they generate— isn't enough to truly impact the bottom line. **A whitepaper download or simple handover to sales cannot be the endpoint of conversion.**

Putting the customer first and optimizing the outcome of such a process needs a wider view and should not be siloed within marketing and outside of sales and customer success. It should start with understanding the experience of all stakeholders within a target account, ideally working back through their journey to find out where improvements can be made. This can lead to a better customer experience and more marketing-influenced revenue.

### WHY IS OPTIMIZATION IMPORTANT—AND CRITICAL TO LONG-TERM SUCCESS?

At a simple level, optimization can help provide any marketer with some easy wins. By identifying key points in the buyer journey and making the process simpler, easier and of a higher-quality, marketing can increase its contribution to the bottom line. But there's also a bigger picture at play. The reality is that the length of time for which companies can enjoy success is shrinking.

Analysis by Innosight has found that the average tenure for companies on the S&P 500 has shrunk from 33 years to 24 in 2016. By 2027, that length of time is forecast to be just 12 years. In the next decade, **about half of these large public**

**companies are expected to be replaced by newer firms** on the index. Companies need to change to stay competitive.

It's also not just companies that need to change. Individual marketers need to optimize their own skills in order to maintain their employability in an increasingly tough environment. By bringing optimization into their own work, they will be able to demonstrate continued results even as competitors up the challenge.

In the short term, optimization is also important as key factors can change rapidly. Targets go up at the same time as the costs in acquiring new customers rise. Meanwhile, potential buyers disengage after being deluged with poor-quality marketing and sales outreach efforts.

### THE MARGINAL GAINS OF OPTIMIZATION ADD UP

However, there is good news even among the challenges that B2B marketers are facing. Continually adding small gains adds up over time to an improved experience throughout the buyer journey—whether at the qualification stage, during an interaction with the sales team or even as they consider renewing or upgrading.

Ultimately, this creates an ever-rising lift in performance that can help your company to be a lasting success.

## ON24 TIP

**MAKE SURE YOU SET A STRATEGY BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR OPTIMIZATION EFFORTS**

While it's always preferable to do something rather than nothing, optimization will work best when you review your own data and create a strategy with goals against which you can work. To find out how Hortonworks managed to optimize its marketing to create 25% fewer webinars but with 120% more influenced pipeline, [sign up for the on-demand webinar](#).

# WHY B2B MARKETERS SHOULD OPTIMIZE FOR THE ENTIRE CUSTOMER JOURNEY



In this section, we'll make the case that when it comes to optimization, focusing exclusively on the early stages of the customer journey is an approach that can both limit your success and create a disconnected experience for those considering buying from you.

## OPTIMIZATION NEEDS TO BE ALIGNED WITH HOW CUSTOMERS TAKE THEIR JOURNEYS

The previous article touched briefly on how the customer journey for B2B purchases differs to those within B2C.

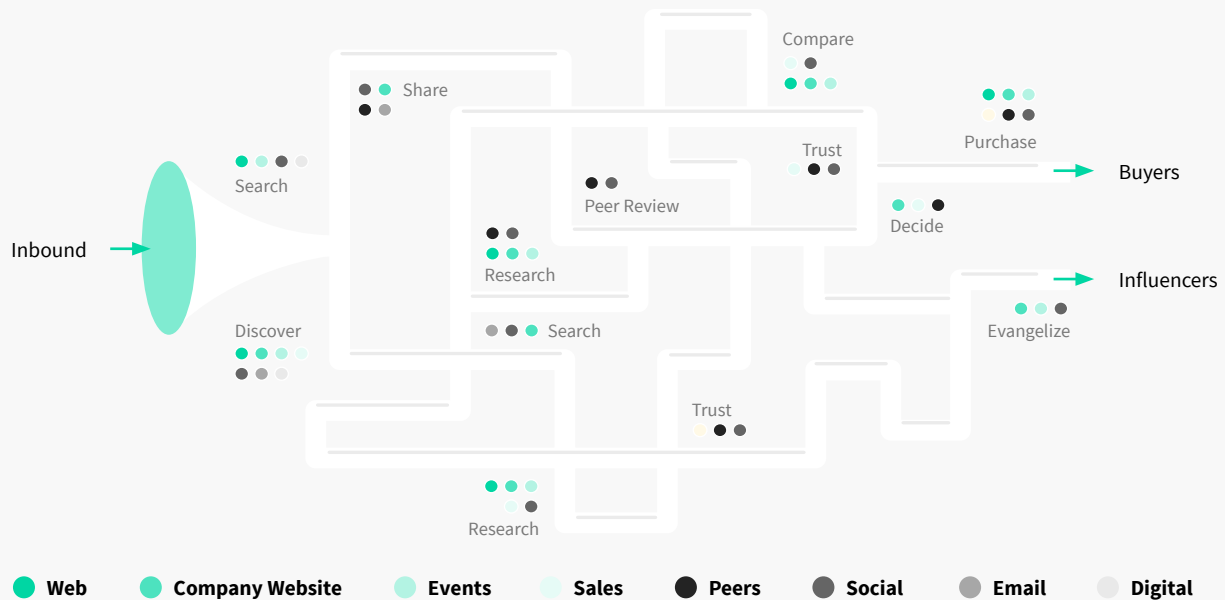
While those selling to consumers often only have to deal with a single individual and can manage almost their whole experience through the website, B2B marketers have to contend with multiple people in a buying unit, lengthier and more complex sales cycles, and the fact that the ultimate point of revenue is looked after by

departments other than marketing—those being sales and customer success (i.e. post-purchase and renewals) teams.

Buyers and buying teams also do not take linear paths. Instead, they choose their own journeys by interacting with a mixture of self-service content and conversations with people, as illustrated in the image below from ON24's e-book on *The Engagement Imperative*.

While optimization will indeed get results at the early stages, ignoring other touchpoints that may traditionally be in the domains of sales and customer success represents a missed opportunity.

## TODAY'S BUYERS CONTROL THEIR JOURNEYS MORE THAN VENDORS DO



Source: Forrester

### CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS DON'T CARE ABOUT SINGULAR POINTS AND EVENTS

In marketing, the measurement of performance often comes down to a single event or trigger. For example, when a lead form is completed or a prospect passes a lead score threshold that makes them qualified to be passed to the sales team.

It might be tempting for marketers to simply look at optimization in terms of only their targets—for example, the number of MQLs generated or the total value of marketing-sourced pipeline. Your targets might align processes and actions in your company, but the customer doesn't care about your arbitrary targeting methodology or thresholds.

As such, B2B marketers looking to make a real impact need to approach optimization from the customer's perspective. This means looking at each part of their journey and finding out how to improve it, regardless of whether that step is typically owned by marketing.

The mindset around optimization needs to be wide. And if marketing is supposed to 'own' the customer experience, its responsibility cannot simply end when there is a handover to sales.

### THE WHOLE CUSTOMER JOURNEY HAS VALUE

Because the whole experience of interactions between a prospect or customer shapes their decision to ultimately make or influence a purchase decision, optimization needs to look at the journey in its entirety to have the most significant impact.

Furthermore, because retention is almost always far cheaper than acquisition, and because existing customers make the best advocates, any approach to optimization should look across the entirety of the customer journey.

## A THREE-STAGE APPROACH TO THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

So, how can B2B marketers tackle this complexity without inducing too much confusion? Your organization may already have customer journey maps that break down each stage. In this case, that framework may provide a good start when it comes to optimization.

If you don't have buyer journeys already mapped out, we recommend dividing the journey up into three stages for the purposes of optimization:

### Stage 1: Acquisition

This part of the customer journey is the one traditionally associated with marketing. Questions to ask as part of your optimization efforts include:

- What can we optimize to increase our reach across our total addressable market?
- What can we optimize to increase coverage within target accounts?
- How can we optimize our on-page conversion rates for landing pages and lead forms?
- How can we optimize the research stage of the customer journey to encourage more content downloads and consumption?
- How can we optimize engagement during webinars and other events to qualify prospects for sales?

### Stage 2: Engagement and Conversion

This stage of the customer journey is typically owned by both marketing and sales, with the latter taking more control as the sales process progresses. Questions to ask here for your customer engagement marketing include:

- How can we optimize the handover from automated marketing to direct sales conversations?
- How can we optimize the self-serve experience even as prospects are speaking with colleagues in sales?
- How can we optimize the interaction between salespeople and prospects?
- How can we optimize the sales experience through content and collateral?



### Stage 3: Retention and Loyalty

This stage of the customer journey comes after purchase. In many companies, the salesperson responsible for closing the deal then hands off to customer success or an account manager. Optimization questions to ask here include:

- How can we optimize the onboarding experience?
- How can we optimize how customers educate themselves and find out more about the product or service?
- How can we optimize engagement for existing customers?
- How can we optimize customer advocacy?

## ON24 TIP

### BRING YOUR COLLEAGUES IN SALES AND CUSTOMER SUCCESS INTO YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

As prospects, leads and customers get handed over to different teams, there is a risk of causing a disconnect in the experience they are having. To help smooth the transition, bring your colleagues that will be having follow-up conversations into your marketing campaigns. It can be as simple as using their name on an email, or as involved as hosting an entire webinar program. Download ON24's guide on [Using Webinars for Customer Engagement](#) to find out more.

# WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO OPTIMIZING THE B2B CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?



The previous section on the theme of B2B marketing optimization made the case that marketers should optimize for the entire customer journey—not just the part that happens before the handover to sales.

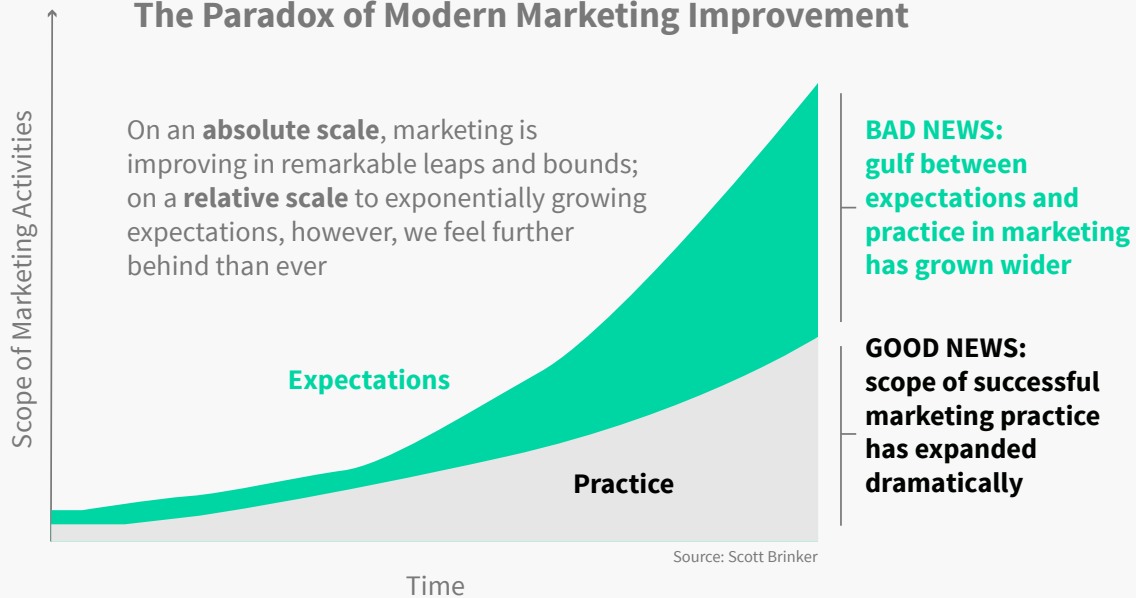
Taking such an approach can drive optimization in a direction that focuses on not just the metrics of a single department, or even on the metrics of a single company. Instead, the approach can change to one that puts the customer first.

## WHY THE SPEED OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE MAKES A FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER ESSENTIAL

Editor of [chiefmartec.com](http://chiefmartec.com), Scott Brinker, has described a conundrum that is present within businesses today—namely that **while technology changes at an exponential rate, organizations change logarithmically**. This phenomenon has been dubbed Martec's Law.

What this means is that although marketing is improving all of the time, the gap between expectations and practice keeps on getting wider.

## The Paradox of Modern Marketing Improvement



Brinker suggests that one solution to this issue is that **marketers need to “ruthlessly prioritize” what changes they need to make.** If companies don’t change in this fashion, there is a risk they will join the rapidly growing cohort of companies that are disappearing.

In terms of the theme of optimization, focusing on the customer and their experience provides a lens by which we can ruthlessly prioritize any efforts.

A survey of more than 12,000 marketers by Adobe and Econsultancy found that **companies with a “very advanced” level of customer experience were almost three times more likely to have exceeded their business goals “by a significant margin.”** So it comes as no surprise that the same report notes that the top priority for B2B marketers in 2019 was optimizing the customer experience.

That being said, there are a number of likely hurdles that B2B marketing leaders will have to overcome to make sure they can effectively optimize the customer experience across the entire buying journey.

Indeed, a customer experience study by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services found that about half of marketers are struggling to use technology to create experiences that are the same as face-to-face interactions.

## FOUR KEY BARRIERS THAT MARKETING LEADERS NEED TO REMOVE

### 1. Siloed incentives and targets

The standard revenue model for B2B organizations typically divides up targets based on the various stages of the customer journey.

For example, the most commonly used metric for marketers, according to a study by Demand Gen Report, is the MQL. After this, a sales development team might then be targeted on new opportunities or meetings booked, while more senior sales team members are then actually targeted on the number and value of closed deals. Customer success teams might then focus on renewal volume and value.

These are all worthwhile metrics to optimize for. However, **in the absence of joint incentives, each team might work separately to game the figures they personally are responsible for in a given month, quarter or year.**

Marketing might chase MQLs that are unlikely to result in sales; sales development team members might book meetings that aren't qualified; salespeople looking for a bonus might ignore a swathe of opportunities in pursuit of deals they can close quickly before the month-end; customer success teams only reach out a few weeks before renewal. Put together, this can lead to a disconnected experience, which ill-thought-through attempts at optimization might actually exacerbate. Backing this point up is the fact that, according to the [Harvard Business Review study](#), having a siloed organizational structure is the most commonly-cited barrier to more customized customer interactions.

As such, **B2B marketing leaders need to get buy-in and joint ownership for shared objectives** from the very top.

### 2. Poor relationships with sales and customer success teams

Siloed incentives and targets are often both caused by and a cause of ineffective relationships between teams responsible for revenue. **When teams are also split physically, nurturing and improving relationships can be a further struggle.**

So, how can relationships be improved? In our post on [making your marketing team more agile](#), one of the discussed approaches was to adopt the eight-step change model proposed by John Kotter.

In this model, after initially creating a sense of urgency, the second step is to **build a coalition of people that can help drive through change in different departments**. Look to identify colleagues in different teams that are open to optimizing the whole customer journey and can evangelize on your behalf in their own teams.

### 3. Disconnected data and ineffective technology

When it comes to optimizing the entire customer journey, another common challenge comes down to disconnected data.

If it cannot be ascertained which efforts earlier in the customer journey impacts closed deals or won renewals, a holistic approach to optimization becomes difficult to develop.

Even if data on each customer touchpoint is captured, **if your technology systems such as marketing automation and CRM do not bring this together, identifying the opportunities for optimization can become at the best case tedious**, and in the worst case, it can lead to the wrong conclusions.

Overhauling a technology stack can be a daunting process, so instead, marketing leaders should look for areas that can bring rapid improvement. Identifying a small number of data fields such as

the lead source or marketing campaign IDs that can be included within CRM systems, or sales opportunity stages and values that can be passed back to marketing automation platforms, can help greatly in choosing priorities for optimization. ON24 Connect provides an easy way to pass data from webinars into both CRM systems and marketing automation platforms.

You might find out what campaigns and content really drove results, and which need to be either optimized or revisited.

#### 4. A lack of accurate customer insight

Even if you have shared targets, great relationships and a marketing technology stack that captures every single possible data point, it's still possible that the customer intelligence you have is limited, or captured only in the heads of those that have direct contact with them.

**Make sure that you are speaking with both your customers and also the prospects that chose not to buy.** Webinars are of course one way to do this, but there are other methods too. Surveys, phone calls, interviews, or even just a meeting for coffee can help to identify which parts of the customer journey were lacking—and as a result, find out what can be optimized further.

## ON24 TIP

**OPTIMIZE THE EFFICIENCY OF YOUR SALES AND CUSTOMER SUCCESS TEAMS BY BRINGING MARKETING DATA INTO THEIR WORKFLOW**

Marketing technology can collect masses of data on what your prospects and customers are engaging with, all of which can bring valuable insight to your sales and customer success teams. But if this data isn't clearly making its way into their workflow (e.g., in contact and account records within your CRM) they won't be able to make best use of it. To find out more about the data you can pass to your marketing and sales tech stack through webinars, check out ON24 Connect.

## NETLINE TIP

**UNDERSTAND YOUR PROSPECTS CURRENT BEHAVIORS**

Insight into what kind of content is currently resonating with people from all job levels, industries, company sizes, and job functions is valuable insight to understand your prospects. Analyzing real-time, custom buyer engagement behavior with free tools—like NetLine's [Audience Explorer](#)—helps you leverage data from those outside of your direct contact, and more importantly, those who are in-market. Optimizing your strategy with relevant data through a friendly tool is a great way to get your team exposed to the optimization mindset.

# WHY B2B MARKETERS SHOULD BENCHMARK THEMSELVES FOR OPTIMIZATION



In the first sections of this report, we have covered why you should optimize for the entire customer journey and common barriers to optimization success.

In this section, we'll explain why you should benchmark your company's own performance (using both internal and external sources of data) before starting out on your optimization journey.

## BENCHMARKING HELPS TO NEGOTIATE SUCCESS TACTICS

All marketers have heard the adage “what gets measured, gets improved.” In that case, having at least a baseline of measurement helps to set goals for optimization.

However, **understanding the degree to which something can be improved is critical.** It allows you to determine what is realistic and achievable. It also helps you to prioritize efforts where the greatest impact will be.

Using external industry benchmarks and figures are often highly valuable in this regard—and also act as baselines if you aren't able to access

historical performance because it hasn't been measured previously.

If you are looking at optimizing areas that need help from other teams, benchmark data will help demonstrate the potential impact of working together. Likewise, if the CEO or others give marketing unrealistic targets, then benchmarking can help negotiate goals and expectations.

## BENCHMARKING CAN IDENTIFY BOTTLENECKS ACROSS THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The typical B2B customer journey has many steps before a sale is even made. Inevitably there is drop-off at each stage of the process.

**Benchmarking can help to identify where the bottlenecks and drop-off points are compared to the average.** For example, if on-page conversion rates are lower than industry norms, this presents an opportunity for optimization. If the time between a lead being marketing qualified and sales accepted is excessive, optimization can work on improving that.

If there is excessive drop-off after initial sales

meetings have been booked, marketing can provide content and campaigns to keep prospects at this stage engaged with the aim of reducing lost opportunities.

## BENCHMARKING HELPS TO PRIORITIZE WHAT'S IMPORTANT

There is potentially a huge amount of data available to B2B marketers today to help them gauge effectiveness. However, such a long list of metrics can easily become overwhelming.

**Having benchmark data available allows marketers to identify where the quick wins and biggest levers are.** Other areas of improvement can be put on to a longer-term list that can be actioned depending on resources later down the line.

Benchmarks from external sources can also be valuable in this regard because B2B marketers can all too easily pursue paths that might not pay off in the manner expected.

For example, NetLine's 2019 State of B2B Content Consumption and Demand Report found that **while marketers often target their content at the C-suite, 86% of all content consumption**

**activity occurs below the C-Suite**—suggesting that marketers could benefit from prioritizing efforts on the buying committee.

## WHERE TO FIND BENCHMARK DATA TO PLAN YOUR OPTIMIZATION EFFORTS

The first place you should look is within your own systems to identify what data you have at your fingertips. Once you have this, you can look for external sources to identify what good performance looks like.

For webinars, ON24's annual Webinar Benchmarks Report contains figures across a whole range of metrics, while our previous article on [How to Measure Webinar Success](#) contains some ideas on optimizing each.

Industry surveys and analyst reports are also a good place to turn to find data on anything from [content preferences for B2B buyers](#) through to [lead generation figures](#).

Whatever metrics you choose to investigate, remember to keep in mind the customer journey as a whole. By doing so, you'll avoid gaming singular metrics and make sure your efforts enhance the entire customer experience.

## NETLINE TIP

### CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ON CONTENT CONSUMPTION AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

It's all too easy to assume that your most effective content should be targeted at the most senior decision makers, companies with a large employee headcount, or any other criteria you may have used in the past. However, you could be missing out on an active audience that has a need and can influence sales. To find out more, download NetLine's 2019 State of B2B Content Consumption and Demand Report.

# SIX KEY STEPS TO BUILDING AN OPTIMIZATION CULTURE



Earlier we covered what is optimization in B2B marketing and why it's important; why marketers should look at the entire customer journey and not just the top of the funnel; the barriers to optimization; and the importance of benchmarking.

As a marketing leader, your next job will be to identify and set goals for your optimization efforts. But making optimization an ongoing process requires a cultural change too—without this, individual contributors will not pursue continual improvement proactively and of their own accord, putting your organization at risk of decay and decline.

To make this happen, we've put together a few steps that will help you build an optimization culture not just in marketing, but across sales and customer success too.

## I. GET BUY-IN FROM THE TOP ON AN OPTIMIZATION VISION

Before you can get other teams to follow you on an optimization journey, you need to make sure you have support from everyone involved.

Bring up your optimization vision during team conversations if your company is in the process of dismantling silos among teams and targets; you will be talking about working collaboratively in the first place and team members will be receptive to your suggestions. Taking the vision to a higher level should be part of your conversation here.



## 2. WORK OPTIMIZATION INTO OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS

As you set collaborative targets, look to also establish measures that demonstrate optimization in action.

Regardless of the performance review and management techniques your organization uses, or whether they are formal or informal in nature, look to get optimization on the to-do list for everyone.

## 3. MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT THE OPTIMIZATION VISION

If you want everyone to work towards optimizing each part of the customer journey—particularly if you will be setting objectives and targets—everyone first needs to know that there’s a shared vision towards optimization. If they don’t know, then they won’t take the necessary steps.

Schedule a time to come together with leaders from sales, customer success and more broadly across the business to share the optimization vision with everyone.

If you’re part of a large and distributed organization, webinars can also be highly useful as a [communications platform](#) for businesses to get the word out.

## 4. ALLOW ANYONE TO SUGGEST AND MAKE CHANGES IN PURSUIT OF OPTIMIZATION

Great ideas can come from anywhere. However, to make them a reality, everybody needs to feel that they can both suggest ideas and that they are empowered to put them into action.

Cited earlier, our post on [How to Make Your Marketing Team More Agile](#) also notes that removing a fear of failure is a critical step to getting people to shift into a ‘test and learn’ mentality.

Within recent years, the Japanese idea of *kaizen* (translated as “change for better”) has become popular as an approach that allows employees to suggest and make changes. Toyota is particularly famed for this approach and has [reportedly](#) implemented the vast majority of changes that those on the front line have put forward. All of this has energized employees.

## 5. ENCOURAGE KNOWLEDGE SHARING TO CELEBRATE SUCCESS AND LEARN FROM WHAT DOESN'T WORK

To both maintain the momentum for optimization and spread the word about what’s working well, make sure that the results—both effective and ineffective—are visible for people to see.

One practice from the world of software development is the sprint retrospective. The agenda is simple and typically just has three points: what worked well; what could be improved; and what should be done next time? ON24 client Atlassian has a [guide on how to run a retrospective](#), but these points could also be incorporated into any existing meetings you currently have.

To spread this knowledge even further, consider adding these points to your company's own online communication spaces—whether that's on an intranet, a company wiki, or even a channel on a messaging app such as Slack or Microsoft Teams.

## 6. REWARD AND INCENTIVIZE OPTIMIZATION EFFORTS ACROSS YOUR ORGANIZATION

To keep up the good work, make sure you acknowledge optimization efforts, even if an attempt didn't result in a positive uplift.

How you should best do this is up to you, but this should be a regular occurrence. Even if optimization gets on to annual targets, rewarding efforts on such a time scale is unlikely to be enough to reinforce positive behavior. Both informal rewards, such as buying snacks for the team or even just saying thank you, and more structured incentives such as those connected to compensation, should be frequent enough to keep optimization front of mind for everyone.

**Good luck with your efforts on making optimization a success in your organization!**

### ON24 TIP

**AS TEAMS BECOME DISTRIBUTED,  
INCREASE THE QUALITY OF YOUR  
INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TO  
SHAPE COMPANY CULTURE**

When working remotely was a near impossibility, leaders could communicate effectively and celebrate success in person because everyone was in the office. However, trends such as remote working, using freelance talent and globally distributed staff means that new methods need to be adopted to shape culture and encourage best practice. To find out how webinars can help, check out [how ON24 is used for internal communications](#).