

5 mistakes to avoid at SKO in 2024

INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of companies spend millions of dollars on sales kickoff (SKO) events. If you're reading this, you're likely one of them. SKO is a monumental event that can ignite the motivation of Sales Teams and drive organizations to reach new heights. It can also spin the organization into a place of confusion that takes months to recover.

We observed that the average cost per SKO attendee in 2021 was \$2,500-\$5,500. A company expecting 100 attendees can expect to pay \$270,000-\$640,000 for the event alone. As leaders grapple with global uncertainty at the micro and macroeconomic levels, the SKO is a massive bet.

In the hundreds of kickoffs that SBI has attended, we've identified five common activities that lead revenue leaders to avoid getting the maximum value out of the significant investment.

Mistakes to avoid:

1. Keynote Overload.

Everyone loves a great motivational speaker, but having too many can lead to diminishing returns. To create the most effective SKO, it's important to ensure that most of the team's time is focused on understanding customer needs and gaining practical insights on how they will achieve their yearly goal.

2. Product/Feature Centrism.

Successful leaders avoid overcrowding keynotes with a heavy emphasis on product and feature updates. Make the most out of your time with sellers by sharing customer stories that are focused on the biggest challenge a specific product or new feature will solve.

3. Limited Customer Presence.

SKO is also an incredible opportunity to showcase the value provided to customers in the previous year. Revenue leaders leveraging customer presence and stories set themselves apart by creating different opportunities for their sellers to feel the value provided to their customers.

4. Limited Interactivity.

Interactivity should not be limited to breakout sessions. Every session that takes place at SKO should have a strategic point of interaction that aligns with a specific learning outcome. This applies to in-person and virtual formats.

5. Data Dumping.

On average, people retain only 10% of what they've learned within the first week. Having a precise reinforcement strategy that is supported by a strong coaching culture is critical to driving outcomes post-SKO.

Market leaders avoid these five mistakes to ensure a purposeful and outcome-driven SKO. This brief explores the key actions revenue leaders need to take to ensure a successful SKO and propel the organization to new dimensions of growth.

VALUE: ACCELERATION SUMMIT PREPARATION IS A GROWTH STRATEGY

Defining value for customers also defines the value for attendees.

To achieve the value that customers expect, revenue leaders must continually refine their purpose, the issues they address for customers, and develop experiences that benefit all parties.

On the right, you'll find a list of cross-functional activities that top GTM leaders undertake to ensure a truly successful summit:

Initiative	Description	Owner	Target Completion
Customer Experience Strategy	Develop a cross-functional strategy focused on how customers buy and implement initiatives that make it easy for customers to achieve their solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Sales Marketing Customer Success 	~6 months before summit
Buyer Journey Maps & Sales Process	Develop a detailed view of the common thoughts and behaviors buyers undergo when making a purchase decision. Create a sales process designed to address the specific buyer pain points in their buying journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product Sales Marketing Customer Success 	~6 months before summit
Account Segmentation	Based on ideal customer profiles, develop a model to understand which prospects and customers will likely generate the most revenue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRO CMO Sales Ops 	~4 months before SKO
Routes to Market & Coverage Plan	Use the output of account segmentation to determine the number and type of individuals you will need to execute on the customer experience strategy and maximize account potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRO 	~3 months before SKO
Org Structure & Design	Based on and understanding of account segmentation and the coverage plan, assess and refresh headcount to ensure the right individuals are in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRO 	~2 months before SKO
Talent Assessment	Determine the next wave of talent needed to execute under the new structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRO HR 	~2 months before SKO
Territory, Quota, & Compensation Plans	Market leaders ensure territories, compensation plans, quotas, and account transitions happen prior to the event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CRO CFO HR 	~1 month before SKO
Market Plans	For all prior activities, create detailed market plans specifying aspects like seller territories, overall potential, primary accounts, and current pipelines. Reps should always have these plans on hand, and they can be utilized during seller quarterly business reviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales Ops 	~1 month before SKO

Notice how the success of the summit requires precise cross-functional coordination and collaboration to achieve a successful outcome. To avoid committing one of the five mistakes most revenue leaders make, it's important to give yourself enough time and space for all important information to be consumed.

Keys to execution:

Define a Sales Methodology

Creating a consistent sales methodology is imperative to crafting an effective sales experience. Make sure the methodology has been introduced to sellers and incorporated into marketing, prior to SKO, so that the in-person sessions are more effective.

Change Management

All of this will inevitably require the execution and communication of organizational changes. Swift preparation and change management is a growth strategy. In the context of SKO, prepare for points of contention. Source questions from sellers and managers on a routine basis and prepare to address them head-on during SKO.

Summit Timing

Leading revenue leaders finalize their SKO schedule no earlier than the sixth week of the financial year. This allows for minimal distraction to sellers and enough time to focus on developing the right strategy. They plan with ample time and are respectful of time zones for regions that cannot attend.

Summit Roadshow

Preparing the organization for action at SKO is the best way to drive engagement. To limit the number of new presentations during the summit, it's important to begin all important announcements prior to it. This can be done with 1-hour/day introductory sessions in which every function showcases its objectives and plan for the FY, anchored around the cross-functional initiatives on the previous page.

Function	Focus Area
Product	Discuss the product roadmap and any exciting news for the new year
Marketing	Plan to activate the product roadmap and enable sales teams
Sales	Sales process, territory methodology, and compensation structure updates
Customer Success	Post-sale experience and renewal process execution

Management Day

The day before the summit, gather managers and coach them on how to add value to the summit.

EXPERIENCE: CUSTOMER CENTRIC CULTURE IS A GROWTH STRATEGY

Because of their preparation, market leaders often focus on high-impact activities that will drive a stronger culture and customer connection. They design their agendas to be straightforward and engaging, creating experiences that, while seller-focused, are obsessively customer centric.

The goal of SKO is to activate culture and drive strategy. Best-in-class organizations focus on experiential learning techniques to make the most out of in-person time. To the right are some examples to drive activation:

Culture:

Tell Customer Stories Early and Often

This creates a stronger customer-centric culture, a sense of why we exist, and a blueprint for what "great" looks like when it comes to achieving customer outcomes. Stories must include promoters, neutrals, and detractors if possible.

Maximize Interactivity

Attendees should have the opportunity to work with and meet other individuals across the business. Get creative with lunches, breakout sessions, and cocktail hours to drive interaction, fun, and learning. Consider innovative approaches like coffee bars, specialized lunch gatherings, or exclusive mixers for industry-specific attendees, top-performing representatives, or interdisciplinary teams. This allows for cross-functional relationship building and cultural propagation.

Invoke the Art of the Possible

Celebrate wins and offer motivational stories about how seller careers can progress by solving customer challenges and living the company values.

Make Time for Sellers' Stories

Encourage sellers, presales, and customer success teams to share success stories about how they have helped customers become successful. Storytelling is one of the most important outputs or takeaways from SKO. It's also another way to recognize high-performing individuals while keeping customers in mind.

Highlight a Charity

Engage the organization and choose a charity that shares the company's values. Identify opportunities to support the charity while the whole team is together.

Some practical pointers:

Choose a central location for the event, ensuring it's enjoyable for attendees. Provide reliable hybrid options for those unable to attend in person. Not only does virtual infrastructure allow you to increase the number of participants, it also creates recordings that can be re-purposed and shared to new team members who join throughout the year.

Strategy:

Experiential learning is one of the most effective ways to promote interactivity and drive behavior adoption. Below are some examples:

For All

Sales Process and Forecasting Clinic

Using customer stories shared earlier, conduct a hands-on session where sellers can more deeply understand the buyer's journey and sales process.

Deal Clinics

Sellers should present their winning strategies for 1-2 active opportunities. In small groups of 5-10, an A-Player will facilitate the session. Learning from a colleague creates a safe environment, and ensuring a guide from a different region or team helps provide emotional distance from the opportunity and scales best practices.

Competitive Intelligence Desk

Provide dedicated experts to educate sellers about the market, competitive environment, and unique differentiators. This prepares them for conversations where they are up against top competitors.

Territory Refinement

Utilize market plans. During breaks, everyone should be ready to present their market strategy.

Cross-Functional Interlock

Share strategies for mutual support throughout the sales process and entire customer journey.

Group Ideation

Engage in group discussions on enhancing the company, with senior executives listening in.

For Leadership

Coaching Techniques:

- Sales Methodology
- Sales Process
- Forecasting
- Competitive Intelligence
- Territory Refinement

FAQ Orientation

- Territory Refinement
- Compensation plan

ACTION: COACHING IS A GROWTH STRATEGY

All SKO efforts will go to waste if there's no reinforcement. A clear coaching program is the most effective way to minimize the chances of failure. It starts with the executive leadership team and trickles down to the rest of the organization. Every member across the organization plays a role in reinforcement and adoption. To succeed, all levels of sales management must lead by example with front-line sales teams driving the effective adoption of new initiatives and execution plans.

Keys to success:

- 1. Lead by example through a change in activity and vocabulary.**
- 2. Deliver clear, consistent expectations for all with no regional differences.**
 - What exactly do we need to do?
 - What does success look like?
 - How important is this?
- 3. Establish baseline metrics and leverage the market plan.**
 - Focus on closing rate, velocity, and deal size.
 - Publish stack rankings.
- 4. Align job aids to each stage of the sales process and enable managers to coach sellers through them.**
- 5. Gamify progress and results.**
- 6. Use agile methods and external feedback from win-loss interviews for rapid iteration.**
- 7. Share success across the organization in executive emails, Teams/Chatter, group texts, sales meetings, etc.**
- 8. Regularly schedule:**
 - Deal reviews.
 - Seller observation through field rides.
 - Training reinforcement sessions led by front-line management.
 - Communication.

CONCLUSION: IT'S NOW OR NEVER

Utilize the Value, Experience, Action framework that's been outlined in this guide to communicate your vision at SKO. The goal of a live meeting is to activate a customer-centric culture. Remember, culture activates strategy.

WHY SBI

Driven by insights and delivered from experience, SBI continues to help clients grow their revenue, margin, and enterprise value in ways never before possible.

Working with us, leaders can expect confidence and trust with experienced partners every step of the way. We engage and support our clients as an extension of their team, both guiding and working side-by-side to deliver relatable, practical strategies that work for today and tomorrow.

Connect with SBI today and talk to us about how we can help you on **your growth journey**.

CONTACT US: Research@sbigrowth.com



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2021 McKinney Avenue
Suite 550
Dallas, TX 75201
www.sbigrowth.com