

6 ways to build sales incentives your team will love

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The sales landscape continues to rapidly evolve, and companies are rethinking how they inspire and reward their sales teams. Successful companies are embracing incentives that are personalized and meaningful to their teams, designed with the same level of care and intention they expect from their best performers.

Here are six sales incentive strategies that you can use to motivate and engage your sales teams while showing them a little well-earned appreciation.

1 Personalized and individualized incentives

A study by Wang, Duan, and Ning showed that sales teams no longer respond to one-size-fits-all incentives.¹ Top companies are tailoring incentive structures to individual strengths, motivators, and performance styles. Personalized rewards boost engagement, reinforce fairness, and acknowledge each salesperson's unique contribution, making recognition feel more heartfelt and authentic.

2 Flexible reward options: non-cash rewards

The most effective incentive programs extend well beyond traditional cash rewards. According to a study by Dr. George John, while commissions and bonuses still matter, non-cash awards consistently deliver stronger motivational lift.²

That's why companies are expanding their reward mix to include branded merchandise, travel, curated experiences, professional development, and upskilling opportunities. These options create emotional resonance, build lasting memories, and reinforce performance more powerfully than cash alone. People remember how recognition made them feel long after the reward is redeemed.

The result is a smarter, more strategic portfolio of rewards that drives behavior, strengthens loyalty, and aligns with how today's workforce prefers to be recognized.

3 Tiered, open, and closed program structures

Incentive structures need variety. Tiered systems are gaining popularity because they offer something for everyone while still celebrating top achievers in a big way.

Tiered programs reward participants at multiple performance levels with increasing value as results improve. This structure works well when organizations want to motivate the



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full sales population instead of just the top few while still clearly differentiating high performance. Bronze, silver, and gold tiers based on revenue attainment with premium rewards reserved for top performers are an example of a tiered program.

Companies are also choosing between open and closed incentive programs based on participation goals and budget discipline.

Open programs allow unlimited winners who meet predefined criteria, making them effective when the goal is broad engagement, consistent behavior change, or reinforcing core activities across the entire sales team. An example is any rep who hits 100% of quota earns a reward.

Closed programs limit recognition to a fixed number or percentage of top performers, creating exclusivity and heightened competition. These programs are best suited for stretch goals, elite recognition, or high-impact performance moments. A program which invites the top 10% of performers to a premium incentive trip is an example of a closed program.

The right fit depends on your culture and budget, but both approaches help balance inspiration with fiscal discipline.

4 Experience-based incentives: travel and events

Experiences are becoming the “grand gesture” of rewards, signaling trust, appreciation, and investment in the people behind the numbers. Whether it’s individual travel or group incentive trips, companies are favoring experiences that foster connection, loyalty, and unforgettable memories with **46%** of companies using incentive travel as part of their reward strategy according to the Incentive Research Foundation.³ These trips often outperform traditional prizes in long-term motivational impact, and they give teams something truly special to look forward to.

5 Data-driven incentive planning

Incentive programs shouldn’t be emotional. Advanced analytics now play a critical role in setting smarter quotas, identifying top performers, and improving fairness with a study showing that nearly **92%** of companies have measurable results from data analytics.⁴ With better data, leaders can design incentives that are transparent, trustworthy, and finely tuned to actual performance patterns. Just beware of “analysis paralysis.” Too much data can muddy communication. Clear explanation builds confidence and keeps your team aligned.

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6 Behavioral and activity-based incentives

Sales cycles are longer and more complex than ever, so companies are shifting from not only rewarding outcomes but also recognizing high-value behaviors. Rewards for activities such as lead qualification, pipeline development, and exceptional customer engagement help sustain motivation all year long. A soft drink manufacturer did this successfully with **60,000 employees**, resulting in over **34,000 qualified leads** that have **generated over \$30 million in revenue**.⁵ Think of these as everyday gestures that build strong relationships over time and sustain trust, momentum, and performance.

Bringing it all together

At their core, sales incentives reflect how much a company values the people doing the work. The best sales incentive programs strengthen connection, loyalty, and appreciation while driving performance.

Whether you personalize incentives, introduce new experiential rewards, or rethink how you use data, each improvement can help ensure your sales team feels valued, understood, and inspired.

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Sources

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