



Mercuri International

# Predicting the winners of the future



As a salesperson, you are responsible for the development of your customer portfolio. The expectation is usually that it should grow. However, the reality is that some customers will grow and some will not. The reason for decreasing revenue is not only the work done by the sales representative, but it is also directly connected to the conditions of the customer and how the customer's business develops over time.

If you become successful in predicting the future of your customers' business, you will be more successful in picking the winners.

For many sales professionals, time is the most limited resource. You cannot invest the same level of energy in every account. That means choosing where to focus your efforts is one of the most strategic decisions you make. Think ROSE (Return of Sales Effort) The same logic also applies in other areas, such as the stock market. You cannot invest money in every available stock; you need to invest in the ones you believe will deliver the best ROI.

Based on my experience as a sales consultant, many companies and salespeople prioritize accounts based on:

- Revenue today
- Strength of the relationship
- Products/services they buy today (upselling/cross-selling opportunities)
- And more

"This is simply my way of combining two things I enjoy, sales and stocks, in my work as a salesperson."

These indicators matter but do not always show future potential. A high-revenue customer today may decline, while a smaller one in a growing industry could become a major account.



If you only look at current numbers, you risk:

- Over-investing in declining customers
- Missing emerging growth accounts
- Losing your strategic position with future market leaders
- Building account plans based on outdated assumptions

## Successful sales professionals act like sales strategists

The most successful sales professionals I have met think more like business strategists. They ask questions such as:

- Which industries are growing?
- Which companies are benefiting from global trends?
- Which customers will have increasing budgets in the future?
- Which customers may face pressure and reduce investments?

“This is why combining customer segmentation with PEST analysis provides an effective approach to sales planning. It helps sales professionals move from simply managing accounts to actively shaping their future portfolio.”

## Why you should combine PEST with customer segmentation

This approach links internal customer insights with external market forces. Customer segmentation focuses on understanding your existing portfolio. It typically includes factors such as:

- Revenue contribution
- Growth potential
- Strategic importance
- Strength of relationship
- Share of wallet (SoW)
- Long-term partnership potential

Using PEST analysis can help understand the external forces shaping your customers' future. You are likely familiar with PEST, so this will be brief. While PESTLE exists, the focus here is on PEST.



## PEST's four dimensions

1. Political – regulations, trade policies, tariffs, government incentives
2. Economic – interest rates, investment levels, economic cycles
3. Social – sustainability expectations, demographics, changing consumer behavior
4. Technological – digitalization, automation, AI, innovation

These forces shape industries and affect customer growth. Salespeople don't need to be economists—just connect global trends to your customer base.

These forces shape entire industries and directly influence how your customers will grow, or struggle, in the future.

“From my perspective, salespeople do not need to become economists or political analysts to use this approach. The key is simply to connect global trends with the realities of your customer base.”

For a practical approach, consider:

### 1. Map your customers (customer platform)

Define them as:

- Strategic accounts
- Growth accounts
- Maintenance accounts
- Smaller or emerging customers

This gives you a clear view of where your revenue comes from today.

### 2. Identify macro trend affecting their industry

Look at look at the broader trends shaping your customers' industries.

Ask yourself:

- Are new regulations affecting the industry?
- Are there new technologies disrupting the market?
- Is demand increasing or decreasing, and why?
- Are supply chains shifting geographically?

## Illustrating an ongoing challenge: tariffs

“I will use one of my favourite companies, Volvo Trucks. A company like Volvo Trucks, which has production facilities in the United States, may benefit from increased tariffs on imported vehicles. Competitors relying primarily on overseas manufacturing could face higher costs, such as another Swedish truck company with production mainly in Europe and China, could face higher costs.”

For sales professionals in transportation or manufacturing, such shifts affect which customers will grow and invest. Volvo Trucks could be a future winner in the North American market.

Based on tariffs and other factors, you can ask: Which customers benefit or face pressure? Who is investing in new technologies or expanding markets? This reveals which customers may grow and which may struggle. It's not just about the portfolio but understanding customers and creating meaningful conversations about these changes.



**Henrik Frohm**  
Managing Director  
Mercuri International

## Adapting account strategy based on insights

Focus more time on growth accounts, build relationships with emerging leaders, identify new decision-makers, and align solutions with customers' strategic goals. This makes account planning forward-looking rather than backward-looking.

This approach expands the salesperson's role beyond managing relationships and opportunities, toward acting as an advisor who understands customers and the forces shaping their future. It enables stronger conversations about industry developments, strategic challenges, solutions, and future opportunities.

“What ‘Predicting the winners’ means for me. I want to make one thing clear: no one can predict the future with certainty. But we can form hypotheses about it.”

Sales professionals who combine customer segmentation with PEST analysis dramatically improve their ability to anticipate change.

They begin identifying:

- Which customers are likely to expand
- Which industries will invest more
- Which companies will lead their markets

And by recognizing these signals early, sales professionals position themselves not just with the biggest customers of today—but with the winners of tomorrow.

Grow your people  
Grow your business



**MERCURI**  
international