



California's premier designer and retailer of commercial photovoltaic systems with a major focus on the sustainable food, beverage, and agriculture-related market sectors as well as deep experience in solutions for retail, corporate office parks, auto retailing, and refrigerated warehousing.

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Rob Erlichman,
CEO

The Challenge

Since 2002, Sunlight Electric has been successfully providing Northern California's commercial market with innovative solutions for solar power, leveraging their expertise to demonstrate real value for their customers.

For businesses, one of the great things about buying a solar power system is that in addition to the environmental benefits, it has the potential to save hundreds of thousands to millions in electricity costs over the life of the system. However, despite companies' desire to "go green" and the strong ROI potential of an investment in solar, a fair percentage of prospects who receive proposals from Sunlight Electric decide to "do nothing."

Recognizing that even a small increase in close rates would have an enormous impact on sales, Sunlight Electric's CEO, Rob Erlichman, developed a series of product offerings that might accomplish that goal. However, without hard data as to why prospects do not ultimately purchase, it wasn't clear which of the possible initiatives, if any, would actually work. That led Rob to reach out to Topline Strategy to help him get answers to the following questions:

- Why do prospects enter the market for solar?
- What matters most to prospects when evaluating solar projects?
- How do projects like solar fit into the company's overall plan?
- What separates prospects that convert into customers from those that do not?
- Which of Sunlight's proposed initiatives would actually move the needle on sales?

The Approach

Over the last 17 years, Topline has worked with many companies facing similar situations. Topline described their Sales Chain Analysis methodology, the firm's approach to these types of engagements, to Rob.

In Sales Chain Analysis, Topline conducts interviews with a cross-section of accounts that progressed to different stages in the sales cycle to develop deep insight into their thinking and decision process.

Sales Chain Analyses Account Types:

- **Wins/Losses** - What are the compelling reasons to buy and how does the company compare against their competitors?
- **No Decisions** - Why was the account interested enough to engage but not to buy? What could have made the difference?
- **Leads (closed)** - What was the account looking to accomplish and what did they do instead of purchasing from the company?
- **No Contact** - What are the dynamics in the 'hidden market' outside of the company's sales experience? What are the drivers of adoption and how fast are they changing?

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CEO*

Topline then complements the market interviews with secondary research into the market and competitors. By analyzing all the data and applying their breadth of consulting experience, Topline develops a market-driven strategy that will achieve the client’s goals.

The Results

After Topline completed their research, they were able to provide Sunlight Electric with specific recommendations on how to increase the close rates. “Topline’s insights into how customers make purchase decisions around solar power gave us valuable insights, ones we’d never otherwise have, about how we sell. The ROI on the Topline Strategy project is incalculable,” said CEO Rob Erlichman.

- **Key Finding: Despite Offering a Range of Financing Options, Many Customers Are Averse to Adding Debt with Real-Estate Backed Financing**

Said Erlichman, “What Topline gave us insight into is the reluctance of prospects in the current environment to add debt, even for healthy and growing businesses. In the past, debt-financing has been the predominant way our customers finance their projects, so we’ve led with that option. Prospects yet to adopt solar, in the current fiscal environment, are open to non-debt financing which we can easily focus on and support.” Erlichman continued, “based on Topline’s findings, we have now revamped our selling process to more clearly focus on the merits of non-debt financing in the right situations. I expect this change will really move the needle on our close rates.”

About Topline Strategy

The Topline Strategy Group is a boutique management consulting firm that specializes in market strategy, customer experience and investor diligence for B2B technology businesses and their investors.

Founded in 2001, and with offices in Boston (HQ) and Silicon Valley, Topline Strategy has completed hundreds of successful engagements with technology businesses of all sizes, from start ups to industry leaders.

Topline’s unique approach to consulting is based on three core principals:

- Senior consultancy model - Topline’s principals are deeply engaged in all aspects of the work, including both the market interviews and the analysis of the data.
- Primary research focus - Engagements are centered on gathering primary data via surveys and interviews.
- Broad B2B technology industry expertise - Topline only works with business to business technology companies. Through this focus they have gained deep expertise in many technology areas.

