Category

Commercial Excellence

Customer Success & Expansion Playbook (Onboarding, Retention, Expansion)

A lifecycle model connecting onboarding speed, health scoring, and expansion motion so net revenue retention becomes a managed number instead of a lagging surprise.

- Practitioner
- Intermediate
- Template Included
- Workshop Ready

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- 8 minute(s)

Overview

A customer success playbook covering onboarding milestones, health scoring, churn risk triage, and expansion triggers — built to move net revenue retention from a reported metric to a managed one.

How is a "first value" milestone different from a generic onboarding checklist?

A checklist tracks whether tasks got done (account provisioned, training scheduled); a first-value milestone tracks whether the customer actually experienced the outcome they bought the product for. A completed checklist with no first-value moment still predicts churn — the milestone is the thing that correlates with retention, not the task list.

Do we need a dedicated CS platform to run a health score, or can we start with a spreadsheet?

You can start with a spreadsheet pulling usage exports and CRM notes manually — that's often the right way to validate the weighting before buying tooling. Move to a dedicated platform once you're scoring more accounts than a manual weekly refresh can handle, typically past 50-75 accounts per CSM team.

How many inputs should a health score have?

Three is a practical minimum — usage, engagement, and commercial sentiment — because usage-only scores systematically miss accounts that are active but politically at risk. More than five or six inputs usually adds noise without adding predictive power; validate each

input against real churn history before keeping it.

Should CSMs be compensated on expansion revenue?

Most effective CS orgs tie some portion of variable comp to expansion and retention, not renewal alone, specifically to counter the incentive to avoid surfacing risk. The exact split depends on your model, but zero expansion incentive reliably produces zero proactive expansion behavior.

How often should the health score be recalculated?

Weekly for Red-tier accounts, at least monthly for the full book. Real-time scoring sounds appealing but usually just adds noise from short-term usage blips; a weekly or monthly cadence with a human review of Red accounts is more actionable.

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