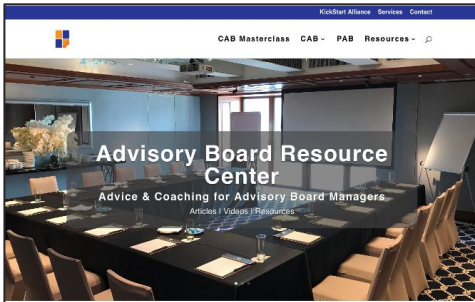




Running a Customer Advisory Board

with Mike Gospe

CAB Strategist & Professional Facilitator



CABstrategy.com



KickStart
Alliance

www.kickstartall.com

Listening posts

& what you are listening for

CAB

- Business strategy
- Future directions
- Customer priorities

User Group

- Immediate use cases
- Best practices
- Training needs

Focus Group

- Product
- Use cases

Surveys

- NPS
- Customer Satisfaction

Social Media

- What others are saying about you

Press & Analyst

- Competitive threats
- Positioning

Onboarding

- Training needs
- Account Management
- Documentation

Conference

- Hot topics
- Trends
- Industry insights

PAB

- Partner Strategy
- Ecosystem
- Customer priorities

Listening Posts: Categories

1. Strategic Direction



2. Product & Use Cases

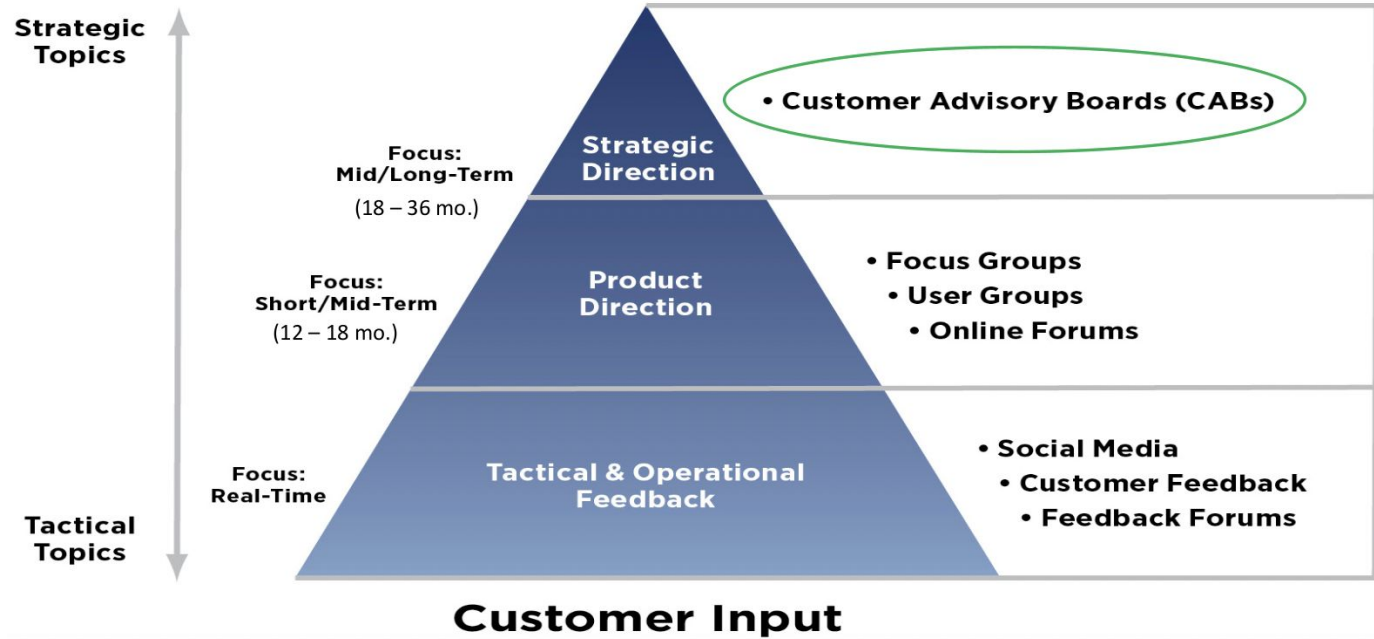


3. Customer Satisfaction



Use the right tool for the right job.

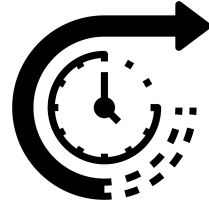
Where do CABs fit in the larger voice of customer model?



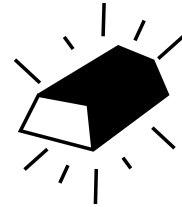
What is a customer advisory board (CAB)?



**A strategy-level
focus group**



**The future of the
customers'
business**



A strategic asset

What is the true value of the CAB program?

GOOD FOR

Designing and executing strategic initiatives & aligning company priorities ✓

Listening to your customers about how their business needs are changing ✓

Outpacing your competition as you build trust in tougher economic times ✓

THEY ARE NOT

Product focus groups, user groups, and customer appreciation events ✗

A way to drive short-term leads ✗

A marketing gimmick ✗






CABs vs. Focus Groups

These are often confused

	Customer Advisory Board	Product Focus Group
Objective	To learn how to maintain your leadership position AND be stay relevant	To prioritize and tune product features and benefits
Focus	Mapping your business strategy to the evolving needs of customers	Product use cases
Type of Meeting	Strategy-level exploration about customers' business & how host can help	Interactive discussion focused on product
Roadmap window	18 – 36 months out	6 – 18 months out
Executive Sponsor	CMO, Chief Strategy Officer (Stakeholders = CEO, executive staff)	VP Product Management (stakeholders = product marketing/management)
Who's Invited	8-12 VP or C-suite executives	A different set of 6- 10 product buyers or users, per meeting
Frequency of Meetings	2 – 4 meetings / year; combo of virtual and in-person	Series of meetings conducted in a region

2023 Customer Advisory Board Model

A simple example of a fully integrated CAB program

	Jan - April	May	June - July	Sept - Oct	Dec
	<p>Plan</p> 	<p>Virtual Meeting</p> 	<p>CAB "pods"</p> 	<p>In-person Meeting</p> 	<p>Appreciation</p> 
Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ New charter statement✓ Invitations✓ CAB member interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ CAB meeting #1 (virtual, 90 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Mini breakout groups (virtual = 1 hour; or local, in person = 2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ CAB meeting #2 (in person, full day; includes pre-meeting network reception)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ CAB member appreciation
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align internal stakeholders• Invite CAB members to help build the CAB program• Gather initial CAB member insights on key topics prior to the Kickoff meeting• Share vision, strategy overview with CAB members prior to Kickoff meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome CAB members• Establish a common frame of reference that will be explored throughout the year (<i>initial discussion: "trends & drivers" shaping customer priorities</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assign CAB members to a pod: 2- 4 members per pod• Schedule pod discussions (hosted by a designated company executive)• Distribute notes to all CAB members as pre-reading material prior to CAB #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share & expand upon insights gathered from pods• Explore in depth 2-3 themes or product concepts• Schedule CAB member Account Reviews prior to end of year• Share CAB guidance internally in prep for next year's planning exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Express thanks and appreciation to the group (in person or virtual) for being a CAB member• Reiterate thanks and appreciation (in private) in Annual Account review meetings• Acknowledge wisdom and guidance offered by CAB

5 Step Methodology to Plan your CAB Program

1

CAB
objective(s)

2

Theme &
“Big
Questions”

3

Attendee
Selection

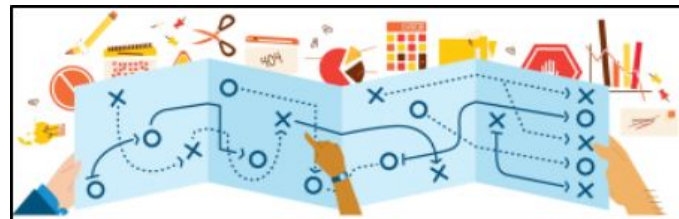
4

Agenda
Outline &
Abstracts

5

Content
prep

CAB Modular Playbook



Core Playbook

Before the 1st meeting

- Set business objective
- Define CAB Charter Statement
- Interview CAB members
- Provide CAB member homework assignment

CAB Series

- Virtual meetings +
- In-person meeting
- “CAB pod” breakouts
- Follow the 80/20 rule

Post-series

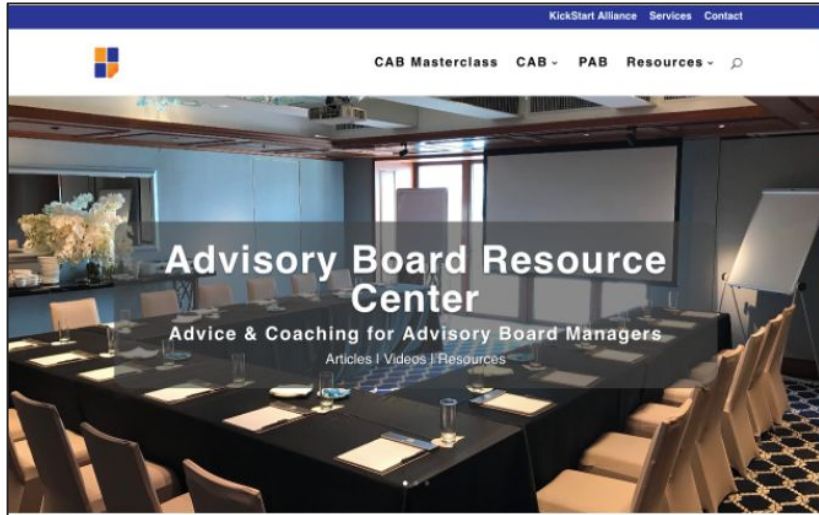
- Distribute output reports
- Socialize reports internally
- Integrate with Account Meetings
- Refer back to annual planning exercises
- Provide input for next planning cycle

Additional touchpoints

- Online surveys, NPS
- Annual account reviews
- 1:1 with CEO & new CAB member
- Integrate with other research

- CAB member appreciation event
- Sync with conferences & user groups
- LinkedIn private group
- Private slack channel (with curated content)
- CAB member visits

CABs in 2024

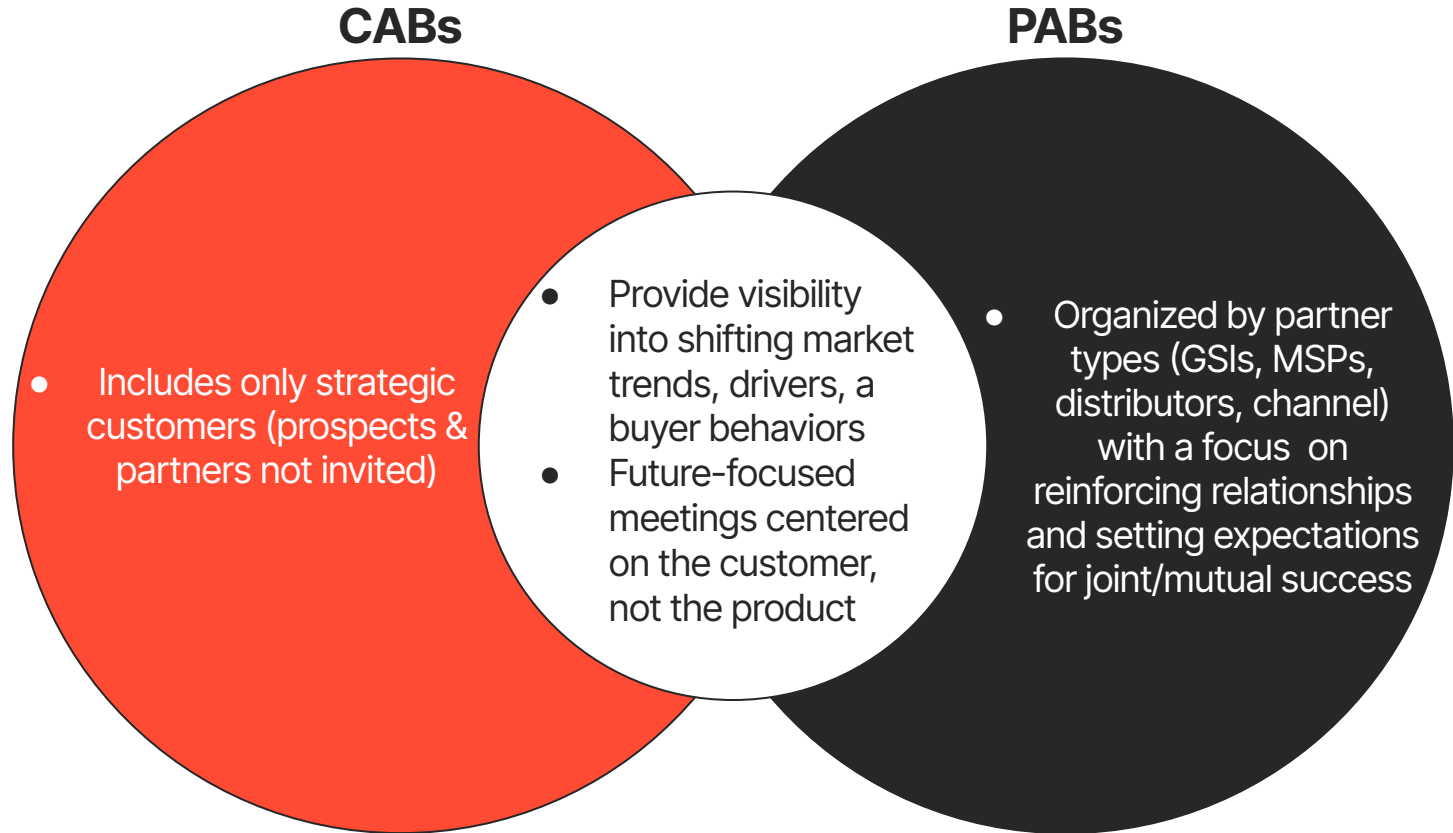


- Follow the best practices shared in my CAB Resource Center (www.cabstrategy.com)
- Jump start your CAB planning with my Private CAB Masterclass

- Customers expressing a growing appetite for strategy-level CABs with their most important vendors
- CABs are valued higher during times of economic/geopolitical unrest
- But, growing frustration with vendors that don't follow CAB best practices
- Companies will use both virtual & in-person best practices
- Enterprises treat the CAB as a strategic asset, not a marketing or sales event
- Companies planning now for spring & fall engagements

Questions

How are customer and partner advisory boards similar and different?



How established does a company need to be to get value from an annual CAB *program*?

Customers & history	B2B companies with 50+ real paying customers, a few years of market presence, and \$25M+ in annual revenue
The executive team	CAB initiative supported by CEO (driven from the top); CMO for CPO is often the CAB executive sponsor
Enterprise focus	CABs are good for when companies are selling complex products and services to enterprise markets
Proper budget	Multiple levels of engagement; budget ranges from \$25 - 100K+ depending on DIY or hiring a CAB strategist to guide & facilitate virtual and/or in-person meetings, etc.

Who should you invite to join your CAB (which types of companies, which person from the company, how many)?

Pick customer executives who have the right responsibility & in-response to your objective

No more than 10-12 customers

Maintaining a 2:1 ratio of customers/vendor

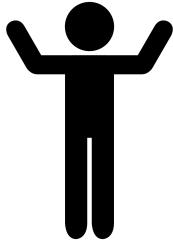
Your CAB, as a strategic asset, will result in valuable conversations and learning

Ask yourself: **What do you want to learn?**

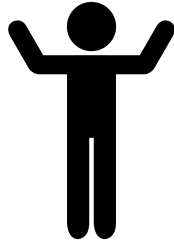
Ask yourself: **What are you prepared to do with the information that you collect?**

Tip: Sales executives and product managers are not invited to attend these meetings

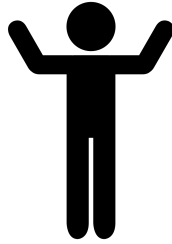
Who are involved in setting up and running a CAB?



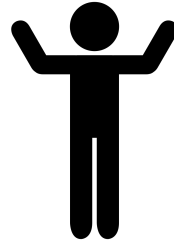
CAB Executive
Sponsor - host
*(typically the CMO
or CPO)*



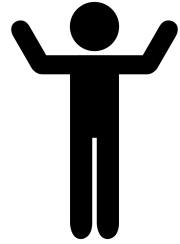
CAB Operations
Manager
*(typically a product
marketer or event
manager)*



CEO
*(Plays a key role but
is not the host)*



CAB Facilitator
*(using an unbiased
3rd party CAB
expert is best to
avoid bias)*

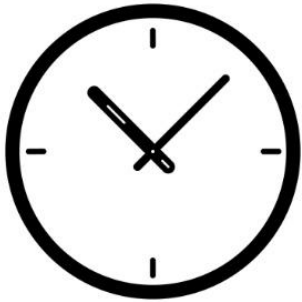


Discussion
Module Owners
*(Members of the
executive team)*

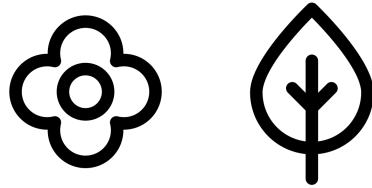
Sales plays a key role in the CAB member nomination process & in the CAB post-meeting follow-ups (e.g. annual account strategic reviews). They are not (usually) invited because customers will perceive your CAB as a sales meeting.

Product managers are also not invited because outnumbering the customers with a "peanut gallery" is a distraction to customers sharing their "truths".

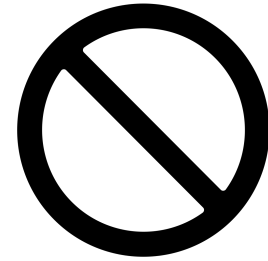
When and where should you host your CAB meetings?



**Virtual CAB meetings
can be scheduled
anytime to attract
global participation**



**In person
meetings typically
are held in the
spring and fall at
an off-site location**



**Not held at your
company
headquarters
(as this creates
bias)**

What's a CAB agenda look like?

1

A networking reception & dinner the evening before to break the ice

2

The CAB meeting follows the next day and runs about six hours, typically 8 - 3pm; this aligns with their attention span and travel schedule

3

Agendas are comprised of "discussion modules" not presentations. Follow the 80/20 rule where customers do 80% of the talking

4

To achieve the best outcome for your team and your CAB members, use a facilitator who specializes in CABs

5

CAB engagement does not end with the meeting; CAB conversations continue with other touch points several times during the year

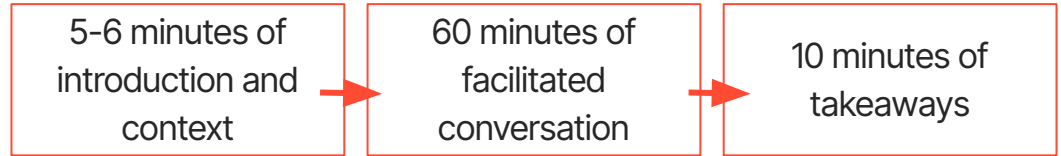
As you plan your CAB, focus on what you want to learn

Use these questions to plan your agenda

Examples of "big questions" used	
Relevance	<i>For us (the CAB host company) to continue to be a leader in our industry AND to be relevant 3 years from now, what do you (CAB customers) think we need to do?</i>
Trends & drivers	<i>What trends and drivers are important to your (the CAB customers') businesses today? Do you see these changing in the next 3-5 years? If so, why?</i>
Brand image	<i>As we expand our business into new markets (x and y), how does our brand image need to change (if at all)? What elements, messages, and proof points work, and which ones don't?</i>
Technology	<i>What technology-inspired benefits and capabilities do you suggest we prioritize in order to deliver more value to you? What investments should we make? What partnerships should we pursue?</i>
Operations	<i>How can we improve our ability to collaborate with you? How effective is our working/account management/sales relationship(s) with you? What's working? What's not?</i>
Competition	<i>(If the competitive landscape is changing, ask) 3-5 years from now, who do you think poses the biggest competitive threat to us? Why?</i>
Customer Satisfaction	<i>If we could do one thing to dramatically help you improve/accelerate/extend the value you (the customer) provide to your customers, what would you like us to do?</i>

What do “discussion modules” look like?

75-minutes long and run by a member of your team



Structured prioritization or voting can occasionally have a place in CABs



Tip: Listen 80% of the time to your customers

What are additional touchpoints (outside CAB meetings)?

- ❑ CAB member interviews
- ❑ Online surveys, NPS
- ❑ Annual account review
- ❑ 1:1 with CEO and CAB member
- ❑ CAB member appreciation event
- ❑ Sync with conferences/user groups
- ❑ LinkedIn private group
- ❑ Customer visits

What are the most important pieces to get right?

DO

Keep discussions strategy-level



Think programmatically



Link your CAB to your annual plan



DON'T

Start planning too late



Be sloppy about follow-up



TIMELINE

How long should the entire process take?

