

Eighty Twenty CMO

How LINK Built a Scalable Revenue Machine with Eighty Twenty CMO

CASE STUDY



“Everything Mike has done has freed us up to go out and sell.

He’s set LINK up for long-term marketing and sales success, and turbocharged a side of the business we were really struggling with before.”

Brian McClennon,
President and CEO of LINK



LINK is a workplace savings, retirement and record-keeping SaaS platform that helps Canadian employers attract, reward, and retain employees.

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges

- Transitioning from product development to sales and marketing
- Lacking a scalable CRM, buyer personas, or measurement framework
- Needing key hires to drive the program long-term
- Leadership lacked time and marketing expertise

Solution

LINK engaged with Eighty Twenty CMO, who:

- Determined priorities and high-ROI investments
- Established who to hire, then sourced, vetted and interviewed candidates to drive long-term success

Collaborated with internal teams to:

- Set up CRM and measurement framework
- Create buyer personas and journeys
- Improve lead generation
- Build lead and deal stages
- Develop new purpose-built SaaS website structure based on SaaS best practices

Results

- Strong foundation of people, processes and technology
- Marketing and sales activity clearly tied to ARR
- Clear roadmap for the future

Challenges

Going to market with no time to implement

LINK was at a critical crossroads.

It had successfully built a strong product, and now needed to navigate the daunting shift from ‘product development team’ to ‘high-performing sales organization.’

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“We’d built a platform and had done some customer discovery and validation along the way,” says President and CEO Brian McClennon. “But to start scaling revenue, we needed to make a radical shift to becoming a marketing and a sales team.”

Initially, Brian and his team explored weekly training programs to level up their marketing acumen.

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“We soon understood the concepts and knew we needed to get the fundamentals in place,” explains Brian. “But as I got buried in other responsibilities, like raising finance and closing deals, I didn’t have the bandwidth to execute. I couldn’t afford to focus there.”

Past attempts at securing a CRM had failed. Key processes and hires needed to be put in place. The program needed strategy, clarity, and clean data to drive it.

Brian knew inaction was not an option.

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“Getting into the market and proving traction was critical,” says Brian. “If you wait too long, you’re burning through cash and potentially going deep into what could be a big mistake: building something wonderful you can’t monetize.”

Full-time vs. fractional: a high-stakes decision

LINK’s partners considered a full-time CMO hire, but felt it was a heavy commitment at this pivotal stage.

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“With a full-time CMO, it’s an unknown entity. You’re putting all your eggs in that basket, and it’s difficult to get out of.”

Brian was attracted to being able to ‘try out’ a Fractional CMO, but that brought its own risks. Delegating leadership requires considerable trust, and others in the business were hesitant.

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“Others told me: ‘You can’t outsource this. How will they be able to speak our language and understand the space like we do?’”

Questions loomed large:

- Would a part-time engagement be enough?
- Would the outcome justify the cost?
- Would a Fractional CMO really save executives time?

When one of the partners met Mike (Principal, Eighty Twenty CMO), and was impressed by his enterprise experience and background in performance marketing, LINK’s team decided it was worth testing a three-month engagement to ‘get the fundamentals’ in place.

That engagement was extended twice—to nine months total—on the strength of what Mike accomplished.

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“In retrospect, we got so much more than I expected,” laughs Brian.

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“As I got buried in all the other work I’m responsible for, like raising finance and closing deals, I realized I didn’t have the bandwidth to execute.”

Solution

A collaborative, data-centric approach

Discovery, planning, and earning trust

Mike set up discovery conversations with leadership to identify priorities, determine accountabilities, and set milestones with clear deadlines.

This was distilled into a granular Performance Marketing Roadmap. The ultimate goal: to build out scalable revenue generation.

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“He methodically identified the performance marketing goals that would best ladder up to our business goals, clearly explained what we needed to focus on, and set goals against those things,” says Brian. “Every business has its nuances. Mike picked up the ins and the outs of our business and industry very quickly, which I found impressive.”

To ensure traction, Mike was intentional about shepherding stakeholders and earning buy-in—even remotely.

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“He’s not shy about taking a stand and holding anyone accountable in any setting,” Brian explains. “His ability to be confident and decisive built trust, opened up the conversation, and forged relationships from the start.”

Implementing a scalable CRM and building the frameworks

An urgent priority was getting LINK set up with a CRM that fit their needs and team. After careful analysis, Mike identified HubSpot's CRM as an ideal fit.

In short order, the core infrastructure was all in place.

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“Getting HubSpot up and organized, setting up targets and tracking across channels, and creating dashboards was a huge milestone,” says Brian. “Now we just open our deals dashboard and we can see our goals and how we're tracking. We were so far away from having that visibility before.”

Mike collaborated with LINK's team to define bulletproof lead and deal stages, implement tracking across multiple channels, and help the team adopt the tool. His comfort level with data modeling also proved a tremendous advantage.

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“Mike provided so much value by using data-driven projections and showing how that tied into our pipeline,” says Brian. “He can go way down the stack to the analytics behind developing the entire funnel, which was powerful.”

Securing hires and leveling up the team

Mike identified the roles and skill sets required to drive marketing and sales forward and when they should be hired.

He then acted as headhunter, writing up job descriptions, then sourcing and vetting candidates.

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“He took responsibility for sourcing, vetting, and interviewing hires to help us recruit the right people who could keep our vision going and continue to execute against the roadmap even after he'd left,” says Brian. “That saved me at least 20 hours of work per hire, nevermind the cost of a recruiter.”

Once hired, Mike worked closely with new hires, like the Content Marketing Manager, to level up their skills and ability to tie their impact to ARR.

Driving marketing and sales forward

In collaboration with LINK's team, Mike worked to:

- Develop buyer personas and journeys
- Launch a modern, well-positioned website
- Build out a solid content foundation
- Contribute to overall company forecasting and sales strategy
- Plan and create sales enablement collateral

LINK also received a detailed roadmap for the future, from setting up marketing automations and turning on paid media to drive low-cost MQLs, to navigating other key hires.

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“Everything Mike has done has freed us up to go out and sell. We've got resources that we didn't have before and people who are highly qualified. Both will be really instrumental to our success.”

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“One of the biggest impacts here was how assertive Mike is. His ability to be confident and decisive both in one-on-ones and group settings built trust from the start.”

Results

Dramatic short-term progress, a clear roadmap for the future, and a company set up for success

In just nine months, LINK received:

1. A CRM that drives their marketing and sales
2. Bulletproof lead and deal stages
3. Best-of-breed personas and buyer journeys
4. A modern, well-positioned website
5. Two hires from end-to-end
6. A roadmap for the future with full continuity

For Brian, one unexpected benefit was how engaging with Mike brought a degree of executive coaching.

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“Mike has this ability to dig into your psyche, understand your challenges, and provide guidance and insights that only someone who is a step back from your business can provide,” says Brian. “He challenged me to say ‘no’ to poor-fit deals, made me aware when others reacted to my leadership in unexpected ways, and pushed me in areas I needed to grow.”

Initially, Brian saw Mike as a low-risk option to plug an expertise gap. By the end of the engagement, he was astonished how much had been accomplished.

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“I wish we could continue with Mike forever because there’s just a ton of value there,” says Brian. “Mike has set LINK up for marketing and sales success and has turbocharged a side of the business where we were really struggling before.”

Mike’s ability to drive the program forward without hand holding means Brian is freed up to do more of the high-value, CEO-level work he needs to be doing.

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“I have more time back in my diary to focus on closing financing deals and generating more value for our investors,” says Brian.

With better visibility of key performance analytics, team members know how they stand.

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“Having clear visibility of metrics has made everyone more accountable,” adds Brian. “When all the touch points are in a dashboard in HubSpot, no one can hide from being accountable, which improves performance and results.”

So: was a fractional CMO ‘worth it?’

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“Probably one of the biggest endorsements is that I wish he wasn’t going,” says Brian. “He’s left us in a great place, with a framework for the future growth of the company.”

Brian encourages other growing start-ups to turn their performance marketing over to Mike.

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“You need someone who’s senior with experience to come in and set the table for you. With Mike, you get an expert who will help you make a massive gear change and become the company you need to be to continue to grow.”

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“One of the biggest endorsements for Mike is that I wish he wasn’t going. But he’s left us in a good place, with a framework for the future growth of the company.”

Eighty Twenty CMO

Bridge the gap between
where you are—and
where you want to be—
with Eighty Twenty CMO

BOOK A CONVERSATION

