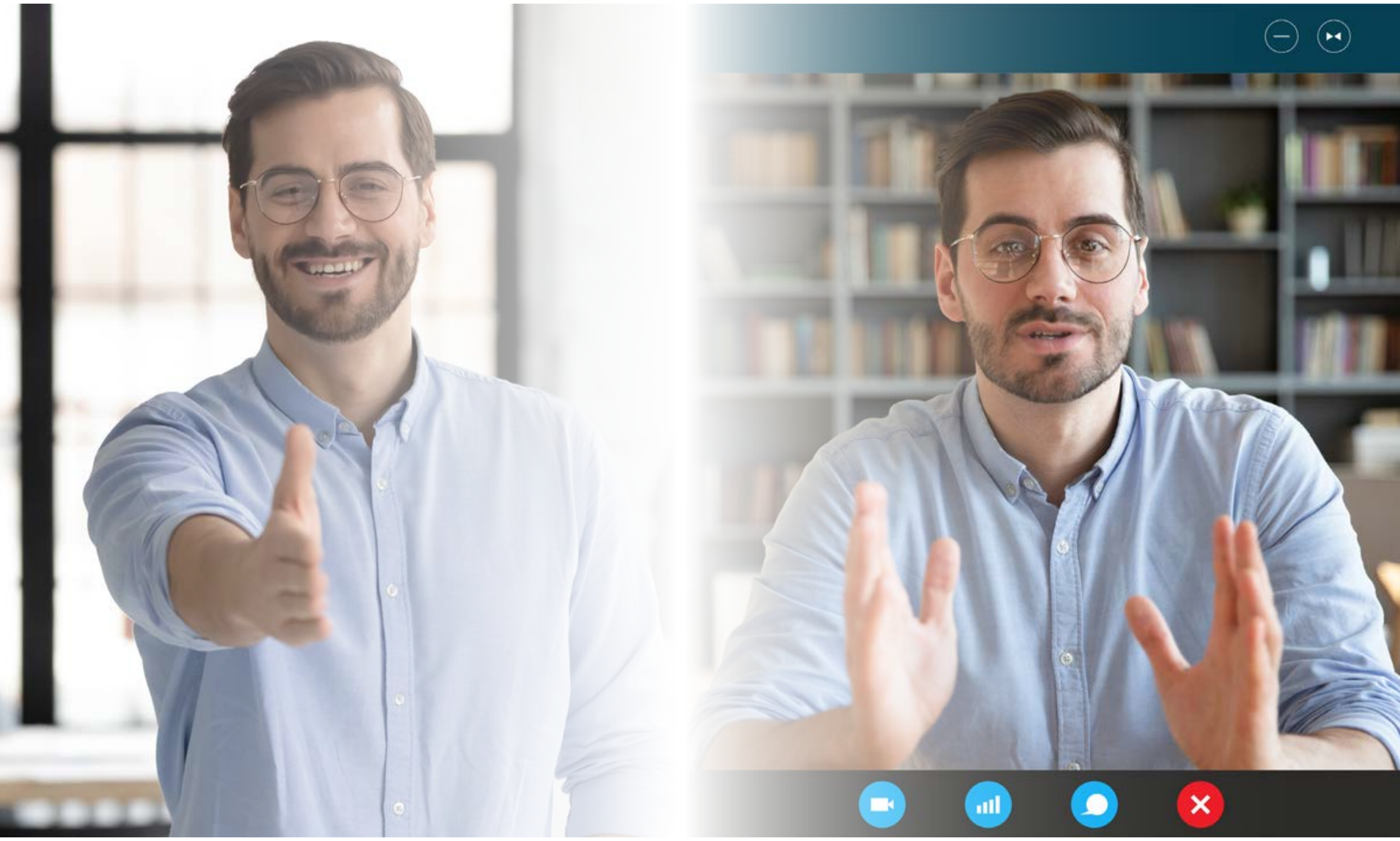
FOCUS REPORT:

SMM SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT

# The Digital Sales Revolution

**Virtual selling is here to stay. Have you taken the necessary steps to adapt?**



# Responding to the Digital Sales Shift

**The pivot to pandemic-induced virtual sales was quick, but some version of it is here to stay. Here's what it means for managing sales teams.**

BY PAUL NOLAN

Nick Kavadellas is thankful for golf, not only because he's enjoyed playing it for years, but also because it is one of the few face-to-face selling tools he has continued using during the COVID-19 outbreak. In fact, Kavadellas, CEO of Georgia-based Orasi, a software developer, reseller and consulting firm, was scheduled to play a round with a client and a prospect the day after we spoke with him in November for this story.

But Kavadellas recognizes the golf course doesn't suit everyone as an effective setting for a sales meeting. Orasi's team of 12 field sales reps is supplemented with 10 inside salespeople who call on a second tier of prospects. When the field reps were forced to stop calling on customers and prospects in person last March due to the pandemic, the company was faced with a challenge.

"We realized that for the foreseeable future, instead of having 12 field people and 10 inside, we really had 22 inside sales reps. Learning to manage sales virtually versus the way we'd done it historically was going to be a learning curve," Kavadellas said.

## FEATURE STORY

### Trends that are here to stay

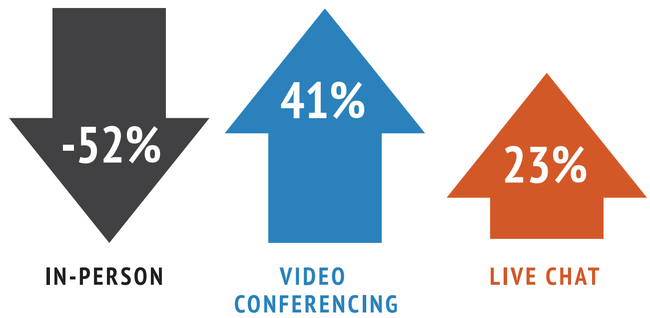
The shift to less face-to-face interaction with customers and prospects isn't a 2020 development. Buyers have increasingly embraced completing their own research for years. A Sales Benchmark Index survey from 2017 reported that in nearly 75% of sales situations, customers prefer not to meet in person.

Though many field sales reps are already accustomed to using web meetings or phone calls to navigate some of the sales process, what is new for a large percentage of sellers is 100% reliability on virtual interaction to sell. And there are some industries that still rely on printed catalogs and handshakes to close deals — "knuckle and hand kinds of businesses" as one source we spoke with calls them.

Conventional wisdom holds that even in those industries in which business was mostly conducted face-to-face prior to the pandemic, customers will be reluctant to return to that model in a post-pandemic world. Scott McCartney, who covers air travel for *The Wall Street Journal,* worked with three airline industry analysts to determine the long-term impact of COVID-19 on business travel. They estimate total air travel could drop between 19% and 36% permanently due to changes in business travel.

The cost savings to businesses is too significant, and the efficiencies from buyers' perspectives too valuable, thus both sides of the sales equation will likely want to retain the Zoom meeting model for many sales calls.

**In-person sales have decreased by 52% since the pandemic began, while video conferencing has increased by 41% and live chat by 23%.**




SOURCE: WWW.MCKINSEY.COM

Scott Galloway, a professor of marketing at NYU's Stern School of Business, states in his book, "Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity," that the pandemic's most enduring impact will be as an accelerant of dynamics that were already trending. "Take any trend — social, business or personal — and fast-forward 10 years. Even if your firm isn't there yet, consumer behavior and the market now rests on the 2030 point on the trend line — positive or negative," he writes.

## The Path to Better Virtual Interactions

Remote selling has an information gap, says Liston Witherill, founder of Serve Don't Sell, a provider of remote marketing and sales training for service-based businesses and independent consultants.

In remote selling, less information is transmitted, so more weight is assigned to each individual piece of information. The challenge for the remote seller is to fill in as much of the information gap as they possibly can. Witherill lists these core remote selling skills that must be mastered:

- Video meetings need to be highly structured.
- Sellers need to be IT support for themselves and their meeting attendees.
- Meeting plans must be clear and concise.
- Use of multi-media — slides, videos, and screen shares — is critically important to keep prospects engaged.
- Content should be used to stay in touch with and nurture prospects who aren't yet ready to buy.
- Send prospects one-off, custom videos as soon as a conversation is started over email or when they complete a form.

What does it mean for B2B sales managers as they strategize for 2021? Is it necessary to train sales reps on new skills? What components of an existing sales process transfer well to virtual interactions? What should sales kickoffs look like? Here are some key points to keep in mind.

### 1 Virtual calls require more precise planning and a tighter focus.

Virtual sales conversations, product demos and other virtual customer interactions leave less room for mistakes, says Charles Brennan Jr., president of Brennan Sales Institute and the author of "Take Your Sales to the Next Level." A fan of Formula 1 racing, Brennan compares a virtual sales call to driving these super-speedy machines (which can exceed 230 mph).

"If you make mistakes virtually, you're into the wall. You're not going to get the next opportunity. People shut you down more rapidly," he says. In-person sales calls, which often stretch to 90 minutes or more over a meal, are more like driving on a four-lane highway with ample room to maneuver. (Read Brennan's take on page 14.)

"If you don't have a plan to get someone involved in a higher discussion in a virtual world, things will start to shut down quickly. You have to be intriguing," Brennan says. Reps on virtual calls must make their added value apparent within the first 15 minutes.

Andres Lares, managing partner at Shapiro Negotiations Institute, agrees that virtual sales calls require more extensive pre-call planning so reps can be on point. However, Lares cautions against jumping right into a sales presentation for fear that time is tight. His company is emphasizing training salespeople to be more succinct, precise and sharp, while also focusing on the personal part of relationships to establish trust.

"The engagement piece is the skill you need to layer on the most," Lares says. "It's being willing to spend more time than ever on the person, the personal, the relationship aspect and the business. You can always get to [product features and similar messages] via email. You can send a deck or a proposal, but you want to spend that rich time with video on the relationship-building and building credibility."

### 2 Role play virtual sales interactions.

Reps must practice to get the right rhythm for condensed virtual sales calls. Because virtual calls will be condensed and there will be more of them, it's wise to role play calls at various stages of the selling process.

"It's almost like sellers regress in a lot of ways in online meetings," says Tom Pisello, chief evangelist at Mediafly, a provider of a sales enablement and content management platform. "Sellers will show up and throw up, using a PowerPoint to drive the whole meeting, which they had moved away from in person. Now that they're online, they feel like

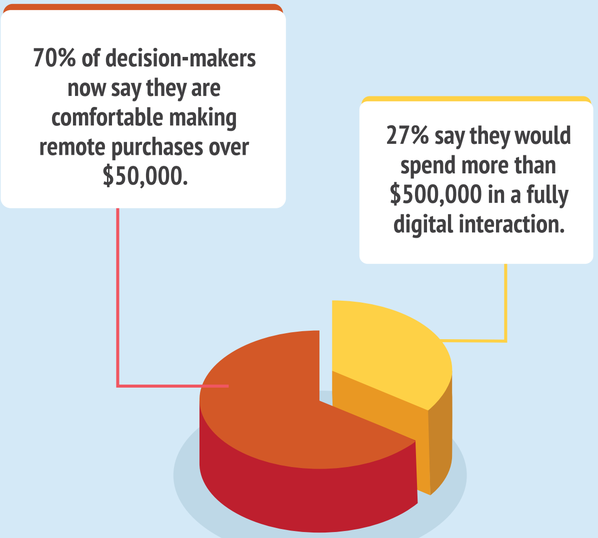
## How COVID-19 Has Changed B2B Sales

Customers will drive the stickiness of virtual sales calls, so sales teams need to recognize how the shift affects their go-to-market strategy. Jess Pingrey of Fit Small Business offers these insights.

**Buyers are not afraid to make big purchases online.** Seventy percent of decision-makers now say they are comfortable making remote purchases over $50,000, and 27% say they would spend more than $500,000 in a fully digital sales interaction. Salespeople should not be timid about tackling large sales deals virtually. It's not necessary to work up to an in-person close.

**Buyers have higher expectations when making purchasing decisions virtually.** They are researching more and expect to have discussions on a higher level. Half of them require more justification before making a purchase decision. Sellers need to be well-organized and able to tailor each discussion to the buyer's unique needs.

**Online selling isn't just for warm leads.** Sales reps shouldn't hesitate to reach out to new prospects virtually. Buyers welcome well-crafted and informative emails and videos if they address the buyer's needs. Sales managers must be sure their reps are equipped with—and adept at using—CRM and other virtual selling tools such as custom video software and your organization's video conferencing platform.




SOURCE: WWW.MCKINSEY.COM

they have to fill that blank space with something, so up goes the presentation and out go the lights of the buyer."

Pisello says it's important that salespeople understand the unique questions and needs of each person they meet with so they can tailor the call to those points of information. For many companies, that means repackaging their presentation materials for easy access to what matters to the customer. Role playing can help reps get comfortable with designing each presentation to suit the needs of the individual client, eliminating parts of a presentation and jumping ahead to other parts instantly within each conversation. In October, Mediafly purchased Presentify, a European company that helps brands repackage their sales content for more interactive and engaging presentations.

### 3 Use all the tools in your toolbox.

Video interaction with customers and prospects is more precious, which means it should be scheduled judiciously. Yes, virtual selling requires more touches that are shorter in length. However, salespeople need to be conscious of what's best handled in a Zoom call and what can be delivered via email or a text. If you want to get strong content into your prospect's hands that supports your value-added message, for example, text a link or send a quick email.

### 4 Ensure tech proficiency and use.

Your reps won't use the tech tools they have if they aren't properly trained on them. Kavadellas says his focus for training this past year, as his field reps went completely virtual, was to make them more proficient on the Salesforce CRM software his company uses. Orasi's field reps were not as adept as the inside sales team at using the CRM software, nor had they established the habit of using it.

Kavadellas says some of his inside sales reps led instruction on best practices with the CRM as well as how to convince prospects to agree to a virtual call and how to engage them more quickly on those calls. Orasi also began using a third-party training vendor before the pandemic for training on virtual sales calls.

It's important that reps are thoroughly comfortable with Zoom, Teams or whatever virtual conference platform you use, not only so they don't encounter technical delays that steal precious sales call time, but also because they will likely serve as IT support for the customers and prospects who are on their calls.

## 5 Reps need to take inventory of their social media connections.

Because salespeople will be spending more time in front of their computers, making the most of virtual interactions will include paying more attention to their social media connections, says Brynne Tillman, CEO of Social Sales Link, a sales training company that focuses on using LinkedIn to boost performance. Dozens of potential sales leads are hiding in plain sight in reps' LinkedIn connections, she says.

"From current clients, to past clients, to prospects, to referral partners, to centers of influence, to community leaders and coworkers: All of them play a role in sales. If we begin by categorizing our existing connections, when we get to the next step, which is building deeper relationships, we'll know who we're going after and what kind of conversation we want to have with each."

## 6 Invest more in marketing content and make sure reps are up to speed on it.

It stands to reason that if customers are relying less on in-person meetings for information, they're relying more on their own online research. This is certainly not a new trend, but it is also one that is certain to increase. A LinkedIn report states that Demand Gen research shows marketing content has more influence over B2B buying decisions than ever, with 49% of buyers saying they rely more on content to guide their decisions than they did a year ago — and 78% consuming three or more pieces of relevant content before talking to a salesperson. Blogs, webinars and podcasts are among the most influential content, according to the Demand Gen survey.

"More than three quarters (78%) of buyers say they are placing more emphasis on the trustworthiness of a content's source than they did a year ago, and 65% say they are consciously focusing more on credible content from industry influencers," the report states. "The barriers to entry for B2B content are going up, but so too are the rewards when you signal value and credibility in the right way. Choosing the right formats for different stages of the buying journey is a big help."

## 7 Monitor your reps' well-being.

It's not all about technical proficiency and improving virtual sales call skills. Your reps need to feel good physically and mentally to perform well. As we noted in a previous focus report, the wear and tear of COVID-19 and what will be more

*continued on page 8*

# Virtual Sales Kickoffs Must Look and Feel Different

BY RUSSELL WURTH

Although sales kickoffs will look different in 2021, the circumstances give companies the opportunity to plan a truly unforgettable event. The key to a successful remote SKO is tailoring the event to a virtual setting. Likely each employee will be remote, separated from their team members and unable to genuinely connect with them during the event. This naturally leads to a lack of enthusiasm and makes it easier to get distracted by other things like their email, barking dog or family.

By acknowledging these hurdles and making a few adjustments, attendees can remain attentive and engaged. Switching formats regularly between live, pre-recorded and more visual presentations — like an animation with various speakers — will hold attention far better than relying on the same format.

Save your employees a headache and get right to the point. If you're going to talk about the successes and challenges of the past year, sum it up in a couple minutes. Remember, the first hour of any event is the most important, so it should leave an impact on the attendees and make them excited to continue participating.

Taking time to let participants clear their heads after a long session can help prevent Zoom fatigue. It's important to plan several breaks throughout the day, scheduling them so attendees can leave their computer for 15 to 20 minutes, and offer breaks that are interactive and get people moving (e.g., stretching or jogging in place to get the blood pumping). Don't stuff your kickoff schedule with speakers from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., let the event and your attendees breathe.

*Russell Wurth is vice president of enablement at Showpad, a sales enablement platform.*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**Responding to the Digital Sales Shift,** *continued from page 6*

than a year of working from home can be taxing on salespeople who are often highly social beings.

Charlie McCarter, vice president of global client delivery at ServiceSource, a market leader in outsource sales services, told us that while his team of salespeople have always sold virtually, they miss the energy of a sales floor and the support of physically working together.

"Without being face-to-face and feeling what we would refer to as a very audible buzz on the floor, our leaders have to be much more adept at paying attention to their teams, staying engaged, making sure there are frequent check-ins and not assuming that every one of their team members is having the same experience. That has been the biggest shift in learning for us. Everyone's family situation is different from their professional situation and those worlds have collided," McCarter says. "It has become paramount that frontline leaders are engaged and paying attention to their employees' signals the same way we expect our employees to pay attention to end-user buying signals or relationship signals.

### Adapting is not an option

The accelerant that is COVID-19 means B2B sales will increasingly be customer-driven and reliant on digital-first communication. Gartner expects that by 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions between buyers and suppliers will occur through digital channels.

"As customers increasingly learn and buy digitally, sales reps become just one of many possible sales channels. Because of this, sales organizations must be able to sell to customers everywhere the customer expects to engage, interact and transact with suppliers," says Cristina Gomez, managing vice president of Gartner.

For B2B sales and marketing professionals, the shift means making transitions that may have already been initiated happen quicker. The trends and predictions you've been reading about are here. A comprehensive content marketing strategy is a must. Training salespeople on cutting-edge digital sales skills should be a priority. Engaging customers and prospects where they want, when they want is mandatory.

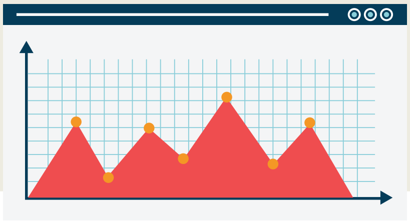
"If a salesperson was average in person, they're going to be worse virtually," Jeni Wehrmeyer, chief operating officer and chief marketing officer of Anthony Cole Training Group, told us. It's a frightening thought, but one that sales managers must take to heart. Every sales team has middle performers, and 2020 was challenging enough. Companies can ill afford to let performance slide in the year ahead.

## Digital Sales By the Numbers

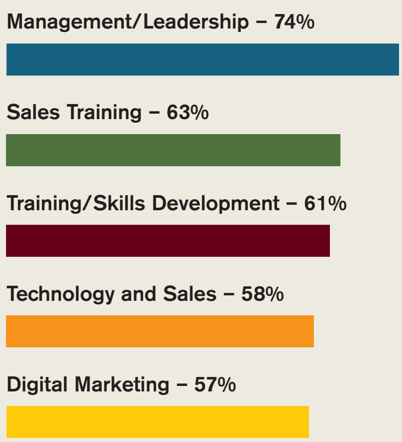
**80%** of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur in **digital channels.**

**60%** of B2B sales organizations **will transition** from experience- and intuition-based selling **to data-driven selling**, merging their sales process, applications, data and analytics into a single operational practice.

Source: The Future of Sales in 2025: A Gartner Trend Insight Report



The emergence of digital sales is reflected in a 2020 poll of *Sales & Marketing Management* readers, who **identified these topics as "very important"** for them to get more information on:




**73%** of millennial workers are **involved in decisions to purchase** products or services for their companies, and millennial B2B buyers cited **internet search and vendors' websites** as their top two means of researching products and services.

Source: Merit

**80%** of decision-makers prefer to get company or product information through **articles over ads**.

Source: Content Marketing Institute

# 4 Forever Changes Transforming B2B Revenue Activities

BY TIM RIESTERER

Sales training and enablement leaders, it's time to level up. Buyers are searching for more information on their own. That means they are engaging with your content further down the funnel. As a result, your content can't be just a companion to a sales-led customer conversation—it needs to be able to stand on its own, address your buyers' big questions, showcase your unique value and motivate action.

When buyers eventually do talk to your reps, those conversations will most often happen remotely. This makes all sellers "inside sellers," which opens the door to improving their productivity, performance and cost structure, while also imagining how former field sales teams should be operating on a cadence versus an expense account.

There are four forever changes transforming sales training and enablement from here on out:

- Marketing is the sales development team.
- All selling is inside selling.
- Enablement is now a series of sprints.
- Customer success is customer selling.

You can jump on these changes and charge toward the new reality of selling, or you can hold back and be told to address these issues to catch up with your competitors. Whatever choice you make, this article presents a glimpse into your future.

Let's look at each of the four forever changes in more detail.

## Marketing is the sales development team

The B2B buying process isn't as linear or predictable as most companies assume. Buyers are interacting with content much further down the buying journey. The buying process is more complex and convoluted than ever, handoffs are less defined, and buyers are getting wrapped around the axle trying to figure things out for themselves.

The companies that win will make it easier for people to self-serve and make more buying-related decisions without speaking to a salesperson. This will transform the messaging, content and interactions driven by your marketing department and challenge companies to shift their expectations for when something converts to a sales lead.

For example, we are currently conducting brain research and field studies to determine the performance of traditional static marketing content such as eBooks versus more interactive assets. Which types of content and experiences drive self-service buyers to take more action, accelerate their interest and move them further down the proverbial funnel?

How will websites change to encourage more interaction? Will demos, for example, look more like an online trade show exhibit where buyers engage virtual sales presentations, video demonstrations and precise content based on a "choose your journey" approach? Will these demos then steer prospects to a custom portal on a website where they are invited to collect what they find and share out to their buying team members?

**Takeaway:** Sales training and enablement must become buyer enablement regardless of the channel and preferred buyer experience.

## All selling is inside selling

Before the pandemic 70% of B2B selling was already "inside selling." Nearly half of all sales were being done by official inside selling teams, while 50% of outside sale teams' customer communications were taking place in a virtual setting—email, phone calls and web conferences.

In an instant, selling became 100% virtual. It's going to be a long time before customers go back to their buildings, let alone let reps in to see them. And it's going to be a long time before CFOs will willingly sign big sales expense checks again.

As a result, every company is now taking a critical look at how to finally get the productivity out of their field sales team they've been wanting for 20 years. Now that these sellers are stationary, the feeling is they can be put on cadences that resemble inside sales processes and productivity targets instead of loosey-goosey field behaviors.

In some cases, companies that previously only had field sales teams are standing up pilot inside sales programs because they don't believe long-tenured field sales reps can make the transition. Instead, they bring in an entirely new set of sellers to determine the feasibility of such a move, as well as test the best messaging, content assets, skills, touch patterns and technology for their company and go-to-market strategy.

Some are talking about upskilling their sales development reps to conduct deeper discovery and qualify opportunities further because they are more efficient and operate with a more rigorous discipline and activity level than field salespeople. Other companies are discussing how to turn their business development reps into quota-carrying salespeople for certain lower-end segments and product lines.

From there, we're also seeing companies looking to convert some of their previous inside selling activities to even lower-cost and more efficient digital touches. They are trying to determine how many and what types of digital interactions, along with how few and what type of human interactions, produce the best results with certain client segments and product lines.

**Takeaway:** Sales training and enablement must take a lab mindset to identify the most productive and impactful inside selling motions while equipping teams for high-performance virtual customer conversations.

## Enablement is now a series of sprints

Traditional learning paths with catalogue-, competency- and calendar-driven training models just can't keep up with the accelerating pace of business. When unplanned business needs arise, you need to launch dynamic training that equips your team with the messaging, content and skills they need to respond specifically and immediately.

To deliver training at the speed of business, organizations need to move from problem recognition to complete enablement rollout in weeks, not months. The sudden universal acceptance of virtual modalities as a training alternative allows you to do this at scale, reaching hundreds and thousands of reps in a fraction of the time required by previous approaches such as road shows.

Speed is the new premium, which means you must plan and execute like a shark is chasing you. Market changes, competitive threats, key product launches, pricing and contract adjustments, and strategic business shifts are just a few examples of key initiatives that pop up during a year and need a complete messaging, content and skills kit, as well as fluency coaching to make sure your reps are "fit for duty."

Another consideration is adapting your training and enablement based on KPIs in your systems. This data shows where each salesperson is struggling. So, instead of relying on managers to figure out where someone is struggling, you proactively raise the flag and push a relevant dose of skills training aimed specifically at moving the needle on the lagging KPI for each rep, whether that's pipeline development, deal closing, profit margins or client expansion.

There's nothing in your traditional training curriculum or static sales process to help you with any of this. Yet, all executive eyes are on these threats or opportunities. And, your sales reps find themselves in a deficit, unsure how to respond most effectively, but wanting something desperately that makes them relevant to the market and their customers.

These are the exact moments where salespeople, who are continually being marginalized by buyers, can step in and add value. It's where the desired moniker of trusted advisor can be earned, but only if your organization can rally in an instant with the precise story and skills needed for the emergent situation.

**Takeaway:** Sales training and enablement must move from just-in-case training to just-in-time training with a complete custom kit, including messaging, content and skills that match the moment.

## Customer success is customer selling

By some estimates, 70% to 80% of the average company's annual revenue — and as a result, growth — comes from existing customers. However, most marketing and sales organizations take a one-size-fits-all approach, and in some cases take for granted that good service will ensure customer loyalty and expansion.

Recent research shows this can actually backfire when it comes to keeping and growing existing business. Marketing needs to develop a second dedicated funnel for customer expansion. The Customer Success function, originally put in place to ensure implementation and utilization goals, must proactively join forces with account managers to drive commercial activity such as renewals, price increases and up-sell/cross-sell.

Some of the biggest, best companies in the world are taking a "no handoff" approach to customer expansion, meaning that sales and customer success teams are working together from early in the initial sales cycle and continuing throughout the entire customer lifecycle. This requires a common framework for engaging the most crucial commercial moments, and, most importantly, raising the bar on documenting business impact. You must go beyond adoption and utilization dashboards to focus on higher-order department and corporate business metrics.

As a parallel layer, marketing is adapting a distinct customer expansion stance separate from its traditional customer acquisition function, with dedicated staff developing custom messaging, content and outreach programs timed to key milestones in the existing customer journey.

**Takeaway:** Sales training and enablement must help integrate the selling and customer success functions in a seamless commercial approach to keeping and growing existing customers.

## Where to next?

This is just a quick overview of the four forever changes transforming sales training and enablement. Hopefully, you are working on these changes and charging toward the new reality of selling.

While I'm sure no one is still ducking, covering and hoping this too shall pass, there is one question that remains: Are you moving fast enough? **SMM**

Tim Riesterer is chief strategy and research officer at Corporate Visions, a provider of science-backed marketing and sales training programs and consulting services for B2B companies.

# Adapting to the World of Virtual Selling

BY JAKE MILLER

Until the promising COVID-19 vaccines are produced, distributed and widely received by the public, virtual selling will continue to be the norm for B2B sales. Many believe it will be embraced long after the pandemic is behind us. Navigating the world of virtual selling may seem simple, but being a great virtual salesperson takes more than simply shifting every meeting to a video conference.

Successful virtual selling is dependent upon using modern technology to nurture prospects, share information, conduct demos and host meetings. This technology must be combined with research, engagement and technical aptitude in order to be effective and produce results.

As many companies currently slow their buying cycles or freeze them completely, intelligent virtual selling is one of the only ways to overcome these uncertainties. To adapt to the world of virtual selling, sales leaders must ensure their reps are prepared for the not-so-new normal.

## Prepare like you're meeting face-to-face

Not everything from a pre-pandemic, face-to-face meeting can be simply carried over to a video call. However, preparation is one element of the new sales meetings that should not change.

In the pre-pandemic world, an in-person meeting was an event: It involved travel, hotel stays and client dinners. To prepare for such meetings, sellers completed intense research before sitting down with prospects. The stakes felt higher since organizing a face-to-face meeting could be challenging and you would only be seeing those key decision-makers once or twice a year. You had to get it right.

Now that they're forced to work and meet remotely, sellers seem less prepared than they would be if they were meeting in-person. Reps are failing to do their research to find out if they're connected to any mutual contacts, digging into their DISC style or personality, looking for hints in their LinkedIn profile or reading something the prospect wrote.

We should have the same attitude to video calls that we have for in-person meetings, because they are as important. Prior to virtual meetings, sellers should have been scrolling through their prospects' social media pages to educate themselves on their professional backgrounds and to search for mutual connections. They should be just as prepared as if they'd taken a flight to get there.

## Expect the unexpected

Whether a virtual meeting is one-on-one or with a group, sellers need to expect the unexpected. It's much easier to invite somebody to a virtual conference call than it is to get them to attend a face-to-face meeting. And since many prospects are mostly still working from home, they have more time to jump on virtual meetings. As a result, meeting sizes are bigger; salespeople may find themselves on a call in which they were expecting to meet with two people and see five or more on screen instead.

Sellers must be diligent in checking meeting invites to see if others have been added. This is a simple tactic that can help uncover surprise group meetings and allow the seller to do research on everyone who's scheduled to attend. Make sure sellers understand these new attendees' roles and how the puzzle pieces fit together so they're prepared for questions from unexpected guests.

## Engage multi-taskers

Another challenge posed by virtual selling is engaging multi-tasking prospects. When you're face-to-face with people in a room or in a small video conference with one or two other people, they tend to be more attentive. When a group is larger than three people, you're going to lose some of them. They're checking emails; they're texting; they're working on another project. Sellers have to be more aware of how to overcome distractions. It's a classic challenge magnified by the shift to virtual selling.

Using people's names, asking more questions and keeping things brief are a few tactics salespeople can use to keep prospects engaged. It also works well to ask someone to describe what they just heard in their own words. If you do that once in a meeting, everyone will become more alert. Others will be inclined to engage because they're thinking, "I'm going to be called on next."

## Map the journey

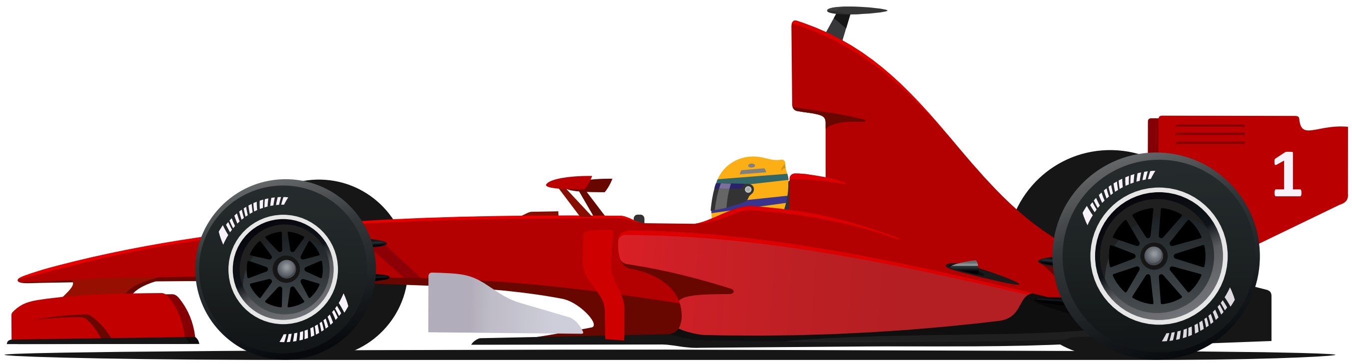
Salespeople must be more organized post-call in the virtual world. Sharing and tracking relevant content has always been a challenge, but it's amplified when sellers are no longer interacting with their enablement and marketing teams in person. This makes it tougher to nurture prospects effectively. Creating a repository for prospect-related content and including an audit trail of interactions with each individual or account has multiple benefits for sellers and prospects.

Recording online meetings for your own note-taking purposes and being able to share that recording with customers is one of the advantages of the shift to virtual. Customers are beginning to ask for a copy of meeting recordings so they can reflect on portions of the discussion, revisit product demonstrations and share it with others who couldn't attend.

In the virtual world, don't forget to document the entire buying journey for each account and share it with the prospect. Meeting notes and call recordings can also be added to the repository, as well as copies of any slideshow presentations the prospect has seen, and a detailed record of email exchanges and questions following the presentations.

Moving out of one's comfort zone and mastering virtual selling is more crucial now than ever before, and it will continue to be important long after the pandemic has run its course. **SMM**

Jake Miller is senior product marketing manager at Allego, a leading learning and enablement platform for sales and other business-critical teams. More insights on virtual selling are shared in Miller's webinar presentation, "How to Overcome the 8 Challenges of Virtual Selling."




# New-era Sales Requires a Formula 1-Like Focus

BY CHARLES BRENNAN JR.

Prior to COVID-19, reps could often pop in and see a prospect or existing customer without an appointment. Or perhaps they would could linger a bit, ask for a favor and get access to the person they wanted to meet.

Remember those days (less than a year ago)? It was like driving a car on the highway. A rep could cruise along at 60 mph, flip on a blinker, move to the left lane and drive a little faster without any concern of confronting a problem.

A high level of preparation, insight and vision was not a prerequisite for success. In today's landscape, it's a must.

COVID-19 has created a mask or veil for customers – existing or prospective. Smartphones, tablets, social media and other tech tools provide a way for constant communication, but they also provide a way for customers and prospects to hide. Voicemail boxes are full, emails and texts go unanswered, numbers get blocked and read receipts go without a response. Now that the novelty of virtual meetings has worn off, today's customers have found a way to hide behind all of this.

## No margin for error

Almost overnight, contacting customers, communicating and selling changed. Reaching someone today requires a lot more than it used to. It takes more preparation and increased creativity in terms of how to engage and intrigue the customer.

Cruising down the highway of sales prospecting is over. Now, it's more like driving a Formula 1 race car. Speeds are excessive, the racetrack is narrow, there are a lot of competitors crowding the field, and the margin for error is next to nil. Competing in today's COVID-19 world requires exceptional preparedness, nimbleness and mindfulness. In essence, you have to see down the track *and* into the turn to put distance between you and your competitors.

## This is the yellow flag

Recognizing that the race for sales has changed is the first step to shifting gears and adopting a new strategy. This is not a cause for panic; rather, it's a recognition that opportunity exists. Those who arrive with a better strategy will prevail.

Virtual engagement is essential to connect during whatever is left of the global pandemic era, and it will be essential in the post-pandemic world as well. Engagement is a combination of navigating a conversation over Zoom (or other platform) while simultaneously knowing how to raise that engagement to a new level. To accomplish this, your reps need to determine the two or three topics of discussion that will move an unreceptive customer to receptivity. This is paramount. Realizing that most customers will not re-evaluate their current preset memories, biases or habits unless they have to is an essential baseline.

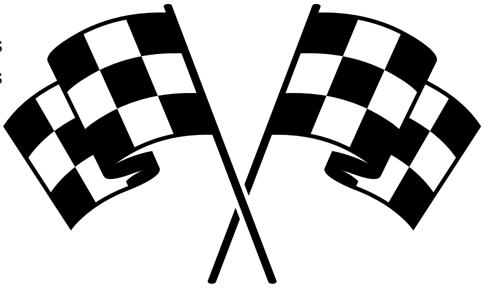
To get a customer to this realization, the conversation needs to reach the level of critical thought. Critical thinking occurs when an individual stops, reflects and re-evaluates what they are doing. That's when they recognize change may be in order.

Get your reps to reassess the conversations they're having. Do they achieve a threshold of critical thinking? Re-examine the questions asked and the topics of conversation. Are your reps merely getting customers and prospects to recite what they already know? That's not getting them to the front of the pack.

Sales reps' questions must create a dialogue that gets the prospect to pause and rethink. That is winner-circle performance.

The choice, with a lot of preparation, is up to you: podium finish or pit row! smm

Charles Brennan Jr. is president of Brennan Sales Institute and the author of "Take your Sales to the Next Level"



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# Build Your e-Charisma

## Physical charms that work in person don't always transfer to video calls

Salespeople tend to think that part of their success is due to strong people skills. Because a good deal of personal charisma is reliant on face-to-face interaction, that part of a sales call went out the window in 2020. If some degree of virtual meetings are here to stay, transferring that skill to an online session is vital.

"E-charisma involves a completely different set of skills and attributes than does [physical] charisma," Leigh Thompson, a professor of management and organization at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University told *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Ray A. Smith.

Confidence that is subconsciously expressed in-person through body language is largely lost in virtual conversations. Smith gathered tips from some of those in the know about effective video interactions.

**Zoom in to stand out.** A video call is no time to be camera-shy. Salespeople should make sure their face takes up at least one-third of the screen, and ideally they are situated in the middle of the screen. As we've all learned by now, it's important to also make sure you are well-lit.

**Have a confident voice.** If you haven't already, equip your salespeople with high-quality microphones and headphones. Role playing video calls shouldn't be out of the question. A focus on rhythm and being articulate will pay off in projecting confidence. The conversation needs to be even more engaging that in-person interactions. It's OK to use notes, but reps shouldn't read verbatim from them in a robotic fashion.

**Make eye contact.** As much as we've heard this year that it's important to look at the camera, not the computer screen, it can be difficult to do. This gets back to not wanting to read from a script.

**Create space for others.** In person, gestures and posture can cue another participant to speak. That doesn't work as well in virtual meetings. Limiting points to groups of three and then inviting feedback through a direct question prevents prattling on too long.

**Be personable.** Using people's names — "Have you had that type of experience, Janice?" — is a mark of spotlight-sharing that charismatic people do well. SMM


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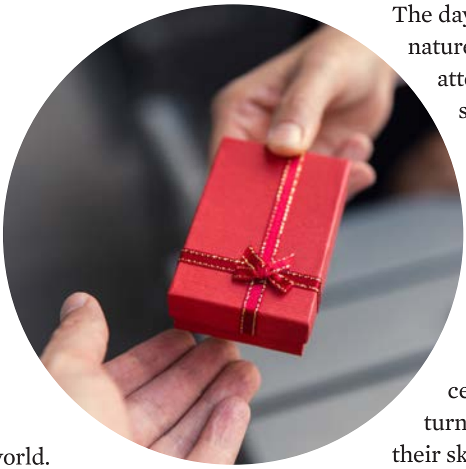
# Training Incentives Are Vital in the Digital Sales Era

BY LINCOLN SMITH



The modern world asks a lot of B2B business owners. Between long-term evolution like the digital transformation and (hopefully) short-term disruptions such as economic downturn or the coronavirus pandemic, it's a lot to navigate. As a longtime member of the incentives industry, I am often asked what businesses can do to better manage their sales teams and their relationships with their channel partners in the constantly changing world. My answer: sales training initiatives.

We're currently in what some might consider the golden age of sales training initiatives. Sales training has grown in importance in the past decade. For example, one of our key high-tech clients initiated a straightforward deal registration program and quickly pivoted to a robust sales training and engagement effort. Today, this popular program creates channel brand advocates by rewarding those who view learning videos, complete in-person courses, take surveys, generate participant content (testimonials), or engage with an assigned sales/account rep (bring them in on a joint sale).

## A closer look at a sales training incentive program

Traditional sales incentive programs reward participants with merchandise, travel or something else (preferably not cash) for achieving a goal. That's a component of what we do at HMI, but equally important are programs that grow our clients' businesses indirectly through training and enablement initiatives.

These sales training/enablement incentive programs can be focused internally, (i.e., at a business' direct sales team) or toward indirect sales channel partners (or both). Either way, a training incentive program helps build its participants' skills in areas such as product knowledge, navigating a digital platform and communication. The result isn't just that they sell more of your product; it also helps them grow their business (if they're a channel partner) or grow as a member of your company (if they're on your internal sales team).

## Why now?

Why is this a trending incentive initiative? It's a product of the era we find ourselves in — the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As technology continues to advance, the products and services salespeople are selling are getting increasingly complex, as are the channels they sell through and buyers they sell to.

The days of the transactional, mundane and repetitive nature of sales are long gone. Anything routine now is attempted to be streamlined through technology. To succeed in sales, sales teams and channel partners need to focus on adding value. They need to be more educated on the value proposition and how the solution helps drive superior results for each stakeholder.

## Why consider a sales incentive strategy?

In the COVID-19 era, online training and certifications have skyrocketed. People have turned to learning to fill their time and improve their skills. Consider that:

- Attendance for massive open online courses (MOOCs) increased 640% from mid-March to mid-April for just one provider.
- LinkedIn learning usage increased 3X during the same period.
- LinkedIn Learning Group memberships increased 130% from February to March.

It's also clear that the digital transformation is upon us. As we move further into the 21st century and our economy becomes more and more entwined with the digital world, businesses are reconsidering their sales structure: How many people should you have on your sales team? And what, exactly, should their role be?

A training incentive program can help your team adjust to the digital transformation and come out on the other side stronger. For example, Motivforce recently conducted a sales training program for IBM in which participating partners ended up selling 10 times more IBM product compared to non-participants.

## Training is expected

Without a sales training initiative, you may fall behind your competitors in terms of channel partnership or struggle with employee retention. Well-chosen incentives are proven to stimulate salespeople to act.

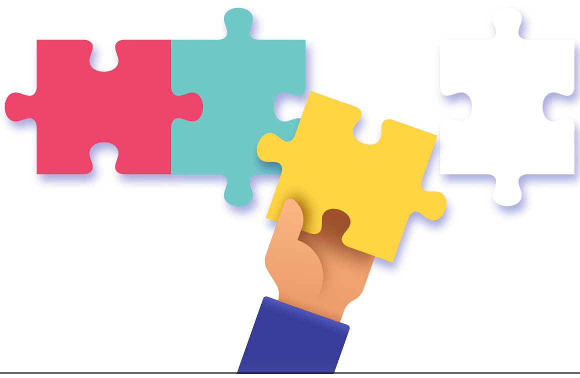
Whether your sales training incentive program participants are indirect channel partners or your inside sales team, helping them achieve professional success is a win-win. Sales commissions will reward results, incentives will reward activities and behavior.

Lincoln Smith is the chief strategy officer for HMI Performance Incentives, where he works with companies in over 30 industries to design strategies to accelerate growth and increase customer engagement.

# Don’t Neglect Channel Partner Programs

In today’s buyer-centric world, salespeople need to create value more than ever or they won’t get in front of prospects. If your go-to-market strategy relies heavily on channel partners, that’s one more step you are removed from your ultimate end-user. Training is essential to having success with channel partners, and just as in-person sales calls shifted to virtual due to the global pandemic, so too has channel partner training.

Georgia-based Incentive Team works primarily with home goods manufacturers who sell through channel partners.



With traditional in-person meetings with these reps not possible, Incentive Team’s clients have focused on creating informative, on-demand videos and offered incentives for completing the courses.

“Selling is positioning a product so it resonates with the consumer walking through the door. We are huge believers that training plus incentives equals the change in behavior that our clients are looking for,” says Peter Goldberger, founder and CEO of Incentive Team.

In many channel partner training programs, sellers earn points for completing on-demand training sessions. The points can be redeemed for merchandise, travel, gift cards and other rewards.

“Organizations are taking whatever they’ve done in the past, setting it aside and looking at the new realities,” says Lincoln Smith, chief strategy officer of HMI Performance Incentives. “Using incentives to motivate channel partners to complete on-demand training is not about trying to buy someone. It has to do with identifying those VIPs that you normally had a lot of touchpoints with and providing them with added value.” SMM