

## HOW TO SELL DIFFERENTLY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

### IS FACE-TO-FACE SELLING DEAD?

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The answer is – not quite, but it is on life support.

The pandemic has completely changed our buying and selling behaviors. We have reached an inflection point and are now transitioning to a “new normal” in selling -- and this is a transformation that is as predictable as most companies will continue to schedule most sales meetings via web video-conference, rather than in-person. This will occur in part because we have become more accustomed and proficient with it, but mostly because of cost considerations and fear of spreading the virus. If a company can save money on travel expenses they will do so, as often as possible, even if they acknowledge that face-to-face selling is more effective. Or, they will encourage all of the initial and secondary meetings to occur virtually, but allow travel once you reach the “best few” stage with the prospect. Also, out of an abundance of caution, many companies will continue to discourage visitors to their offices.

As a B2B salesperson, it is my preference to sell by meeting with prospects in person. It offers many advantages, including the opportunity to greet the attendees before and after the meeting, and during breaks. It is easier to observe the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and read body language for reactions during the meeting. In-person meetings are naturally more informal and it is easier to receive immediate feedback. Much of this cannot occur with web meetings.

I am more effective when I converse with and handle the questions of buyers while sitting around a table, in a workshop or a classroom-style setting. It suits my style of building trusted relationships with people. The onset of *shelter-in-place* and physical distancing orders, and company travel restrictions, make that no longer possible. Meetings that were previously scheduled in person have been replaced by less optimal web video-enabled meetings, which are barriers to building trust. An adjustment needs to be made by the salesperson to compensate for the lack of meeting people in person and “looking them in the eye.” Our usual practice of hand-shaking when being introduced is now a practice that will be discouraged.

Expect your CFO to promote greater use of web-conferencing versus in-person sales. The financial implications are significant: a 10 percent decrease in sales effectiveness, for example, coupled with a 90 percent decrease in travel expenses will lower the cost of sales.

As we work out how to navigate this environment consider these 7 suggestions on how you should sell in the new normal:

1. Schedule more calls with the buying team **before** the sales presentation than your previous practice. Learn more about what they are trying to accomplish and build relationships with the buyers. Don’t abuse their time - keep the calls short and to the point
2. Take the time to prepare a well-designed meeting agenda. It should cover all of the areas that are important to the buyer and should be agreed upon with the prospect in advance.

3. Don't fall victim to video conferences rife with technical or audio/video difficulties, mostly due to unfamiliarity with the platform being used. Contact the attendees in advance to familiarize them with the software and ask them to access the meeting at least ten minutes before the beginning to work out any issues.
4. Be mindful of video fatigue. Many corporate leaders are now spending the majority of their day on video-conferences. Since your competitors are also doing video-conferencing, what can you do to make yours different and more interesting? Hint: It is not a long, boring PowerPoint presentation.
5. Contact more prospects with the extra time you have now that you're not traveling. This should result in increased sales productivity and results, even considering the probable decrease in the win/close ratio due to the lack of in-person contact.
6. Develop more effective meeting introductions with video-conference than you likely did in the past. This should consist of greater discussion of the project background, as well as a greater explanation of the goals of the meeting.
7. Update sales collateral to reflect the new reality. For example, graphics with handshakes need to be replaced.

The pandemic is not just impacting the style of B2B selling; it is also changing almost everything in our personal and business lives. It is transforming real-estate, insurance, and financial advisor/wealth management sales practices, and employee recruiting and hiring. Much of our secondary and university-level education has been shifted to video instruction as well.

Companies that have used telesales or inside sales will have an easier time making this transition, as this is not a significant change to their style of selling. Also, many millennials will have an easier time with this transition, as they are more accustomed to using the web for communication. You can learn from them how to best utilize telephone scripts, emails, PowerPoint presentations, and product demonstrations.

The change from in-person to web-based selling is a new paradigm and will require an adjustment. You must be adaptive and take advantage of the opportunity afforded to contact more prospects in the extra time provided by not traveling. Your possible decrease in the win ratio can be offset by increases in the quantity of closed opportunities – and greater sales success!