

The new normal of sales and marketing



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A compilation of best practices from 50 top sales and marketing leaders



All business success rests on something labelled a sale, which at least momentarily weds company and customer. ”

–Tom Peters

In the wake of the pandemic and the economic and social challenges that have followed, that “wedding” Mr. Peters refers to has been disrupted. How are sales organizations responding?

Over the past several weeks, my colleague Larry Hoglund and I have conducted interviews with fifty sales and marketing executives across the U.S. They represent a wide array of businesses, some selling B2B, some B2C; some with a direct sales organization and others selling through an independent distribution channel.

A series of best practices have emerged. How each organization has implemented these may vary based on their market or sales channel but we believe you can take great inspiration from these practices.

- 1. We're not going back.** It's possible some things may return to “the way we used to do things” but don't count on it. Plan on creating a new normal, with the expectation to succeed under changing conditions.
- 2. Move fast, act boldly.** There's a line from a movie: “A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.” Move quickly and boldly because your competitors will if you won't.
- 3. There are buyers out there but they have different expectations now.** There are still markets for your products and services but the market is buying differently. It is your job to amend to their needs and expectations, not the other way around.
- 4. Embrace changing customer expectations.** Some ways you interact with the market will return to normal but others may never go back. In those cases, you may even see the new way of doing business is better for them – and you.
- 5. Listen, then listen some more.** Customers want to be heard. Give them a forum. Let them know you care and are there to help. Successful selling has always started with listening and it's even more important now.
- 6. Give customers all the news – even the bad news.** Customers may not like to hear bad news, such as a delayed order due to a supply chain issue, but they dislike it more when you hide or don't communicate at all.
- 7. Amp up the online presence.** The trend of the market beginning their relationship with companies online has increased dramatically. You need to meet them with the [right digital resources](#) to keep things moving.



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8. **Differentiate in ways that enrich the brand.** You may need to follow what some of your competitors are doing but also find ways to differentiate your products and services to meet emerging needs. Is there a new application for an existing product? How about a change in the way you finance a product so it makes it easier to buy?
9. **Selling may be different but it's still high tech and high touch.** Yes, there is more time being spent in a virtual selling mode but look for and enhance ways that live interactions can add value.
10. **Corporate events may not be happening in the same way but you can still show up.** Social distancing and travel restrictions may make some live interactions difficult but there are still ways to create events that inspire and engage your market.
11. **Don't scrimp on technology.** Sales enablement tools that were "okay" six months ago may need to be replaced because "okay" simply isn't good enough anymore.
12. **You can do more virtually with the market than you thought you could.** Just because something has always been done live, doesn't mean a virtual approach can't work and, in some cases, it may even offer additional benefits.
13. **New customer expectations mean your sales organization will need to be re-trained.** Your sales team may need to focus on new behaviors and competencies. To help them gain the confidence they need in the market, sales training programs will be essential.
14. **Even though you can't conduct training in-person, you can still train.** With a thoughtful design using the latest insights on how people learn, digital sales training programs can achieve results.
15. **Short-term sales goals will help focus your sales organization.** Are weekly goals too frequent? When conditions are changing so quickly, maybe not.
16. **Sales compensation and incentive plans will need to be reviewed.** The total rewards offering for your sales organization will need to be reviewed and amended, from top performer programs to incentives for new product sales.
17. **You'll need to get creative in recognizing top performers.** You may need to rethink top performer programs so your very best still feel recognized and rewarded for their contributions.
18. **Some companies will have different sales plans based on different markets.** In one segment you may have to cap commissions where business is exceeding expectations and in another, protect pay where markets are closed. These plans may need to change again as conditions warrant.
19. **Some of your team may have trouble with this new normal.** Show them you care. Many "road warriors" are struggling. It's important to [find ways to help them](#) through these challenging times.

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20. **Learn best practices from your best producers.** Many of your best producers have already evolved and are succeeding. Encourage them to share what's working so others can benefit.
21. **Tap into telesales to help field sales.** Where possible, transfer insights from telesales to better enable your field sales teams.
22. **Some in your sales organization may not make the shift and you'll need to consider that in the future.** When you need to make a change, recruit and select people who may be even better at thriving in the new market.
23. **Help business partners sell better and build better businesses.** If you have channel partners, they have many of the same problems you do. [Act as a resource](#) to enable them to be better sellers and better-led organizations.
24. **Sales team collaboration can be successful in a virtual world.** Online fatigue is real so you'll need to get creative in how you communicate with your team and keep collaboration alive.
25. **Communicate, and re-communicate, the plan.** As you lay out plans to your sales organization, you'll need a communications strategy that is clear and inspirational.
26. **Learn from the nearer-term crisis to build a better long-term culture.** Use the successes of acting quickly and boldly to transform your culture now and in the future.

A “new normal” for sales and marketing is inevitable. As Peter Drucker wisely said: “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” How much we create that new playbook through our leadership, moxie, grit and innovation — that's up to us.

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