Five Keys to Leading, Enabling, and Managing Highly Effective Remote Selling Teams

The Remote Sales Productivity Study

JUNE 25, 2020
1. Key Findings

Remote selling has become the ‘next normal’ in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic as 4 Billion people worldwide – including employees, salespeople, clients, and consumers – are being forced to remain at home. Few organizations were prepared for this scale of employee dispersion. Sales productivity has dropped in the immediate wake of the pandemic as newly displaced managers, salespeople, call center representatives, and customer support agents struggle to adapt to changing buyer expectations, uncertainty and working remotely. The Revenue Enablement Institute executed the Remote Sales Productivity Study to better understand how sales leaders are adapting to the new buying reality and learn ways to improve the productivity and effectiveness of remote selling teams in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Working in partnership with the Sales Management Association, our Faculty of academics and experts conducted over 150 quantitative and qualitative interviews with sales leaders, managers and effectiveness professionals in April and May of 2020.

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- 98% of sales leaders report their businesses will be disrupted by an average of 16.5 months as they adapt to uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working;

- Sales productivity has dropped by 20% as sales teams struggle with shrinking demand, personal and business uncertainty, changing buyer expectations, and working digitally;

- Adapting to changing customer expectations and demand for responsiveness is regarded as the top sales productivity challenge by almost three quarters of respondents;

- Managing uncertainty will be a constant pressure. Uncertainty about demand is regarded as the biggest risk to the revenue plan and employee uncertainty about the business and their role is hurting productivity;

- Most respondents feel their sales technology stack is not effectively supporting remote selling in terms of providing visibility, engagement, speed, and sales rep productivity;

- Visibility into seller activity, customer engagement, forecast commitments, and pipeline health were identified as the top 4 ways to better manage remote sales productivity;

- Market demand has shrunk in the short term. Sellers anticipate a potential 77% decrease in customer retention, 42% drop in cross sell and upsell opportunity, and an 18% drop in new business acquisition;

- Most organizations have decreased their sales budgets in response to this drop in demand. 67% of respondents had budget cuts while 31% have held budgets fixed. Only 2% of organizations indicated they had an increase in growth funding during the crisis.
Leadership skills will be at a premium. Sales leaders must be much more disciplined and focused in how they respond to the crisis. But they must act regardless of their situation. Those that wait it out will suffer.

Business leaders are looking to leverage advanced analytics to increase the return they are getting on their investments in sales technology, data, and people assets;

The research identified five areas sales leaders, managers, and effectiveness professions must focus on if they want to sustain and grow the productivity of their remote selling teams in the short and long term:

1. Speed: Accelerating communication, lead flow and response times across the organization – from top to bottom and across functions and organizations;

2. Tools: Arming sales teams with four basic tools to sell remotely – unified communications, network hardware, collaboration, and sales enablement tools;

3. Visibility: Sales leaders must stop flying blind and leverage their engagement data to get better visibility into forecast accuracy, sales engagement, pipeline activity and account health

4. Hyper-focus: Double down with highly focus pipeline and relationship building on the most viable opportunities, accounts and prospects as customer demand shrinks and sales resources are cut back;

5. Run new plays: Create a new playbook for virtual selling to fill the gaps in the customer journey where virtual engagement must replace face-to-face interaction
LEADING, ENABLING, AND MANAGING HIGHLY EFFECTIVE REMOTE SELLING TEAMS

A survey of 150 marketing executives by the Revenue Enablement Institute and The SMA found that high performing sales organizations are taking five steps to sustain and grow the performance of their remote revenue teams in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic.

1. **SPEED:** Accelerate communication, lead flow and response
2. **TOOLS:** Arm your sales teams four basic tools to sell remotely
3. **VISIBILITY:** Stop flying blind and leverage your engagement data
4. **HYPER-FOCUS:** Double down on pipeline and relationship building
5. **RUN NEW PLAYS:** Create a new playbook for virtual selling

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS DISRUPTED REVENUE TEAMS SIGNIFICANTLY

- **16.5 MONTHS OF DISRUPTION**
  - 98% of sales leaders report their businesses will be disrupted by an average 16.5 months as they adapt to uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working.
- **20% LOWER PRODUCTIVITY**
  - Sales productivity has dropped by 20% as sales teams struggle with defining demand, personal and business uncertainty, changing buyer expectations, and adapting to working digitally.
- **67% ARE CUTTING BUDGETS**
  - Most organizations have decreased their sales budgets in response to this drop in demand. 67% of respondents had budget cuts while 31% have held budgets fixed.

VISIBILITY IS NOW ESSENTIAL TO SALES MANAGEMENT

Visibility into forecast commitments, customer engagement, seller activity and pipeline health were identified as the top 4 ways to better manage remote sales productivity.

SALESPEOPLE REQUIRE 4 BASIC REMOTE SELLING TOOLS

Most respondents feel their sales technology stack is not effectively supporting remote selling in terms of providing visibility, engagement, speed, and sales rep productivity.

UNCERTAIN MARKET DEMAND IS THE TOP REVENUE PLAN RISK

Uncertainty about demand is the biggest risk to the revenue plan. Sellers anticipate significant decreases in customer retention, cross sell and new business opportunities.

New Business Acquisition 18%
Customer Retention 77%
Upsell and Cross Sell Opportunity 42%

SPEED IS CRITICAL TO THE NEW BUYING REALITY

Almost three quarters of sales leaders view changing customer expectations for responsiveness as the top sales productivity challenge.

VIRTUAL SELLING WILL REQUIRE A NEW PLAYBOOK

Sales leaders rated their remote working effectiveness as below average in delivering product demonstrations, sales coaching, and guidance, and prioritizing and planning opportunities and accounts in a virtual setting.

HYPER-FOCUS ON PIPELINE AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Sales leaders must double down on a shrinking bullseye of viable opportunities as less than one in five accounts and prospects are likely to be in market to buy in the next 16 months.
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3. About the Report

This comprehensive research initiative was led by Stephen Diorio, Executive Director of the Revenue Enablement Institute in collaboration with expert faculty and with the contribution of industry practitioners and experts. Mr. Diorio is a leading authority in go-to-market transformation, sales and marketing performance measurement, virtual selling channels, and revenue enablement. He is author of Beyond e: How Technology is Transforming Sales and Marketing Strategy (McGraw Hill).

To define and execute this best-practice analysis, we worked with leading academics, experts and practitioners in the field of Revenue Enablement and sales management to conduct qualitative and quantitative interviews with over 150 sales leaders, managers and effectiveness professionals between April and May 2020. These experts lent their research and decades of practical experience and external validation to the recommendations of this report and how growth leaders will need to evolve the way they lead, enable and manage their revenue teams in light of the new buying reality in a post-covid-19 economy.

The Faculty contributing directly to this analysis include:

- **Leonard Ferrington, Managing Director, Summit Partners.** Len has a 16-year track record of successfully funding, guiding, and growing enterprise solutions that leverage advanced analytics, AI, intelligent business automation, e-learning and unified communications to grow revenues and build highly effective teams. He and his team at Summit Partners have focused expertise in solutions and innovations that can enable virtual selling as part of the 21st century commercial model and the new buying reality.

- **Saurabh Goorha, Senior Fellow, The Wharton School.** Saurabh is a Chief Product Officer with industry-leading expertise in using advanced technology and analytics to build highly effective virtual selling channels. He has pioneered the use of AR/VR in the sale of experiential and utilitarian products and advanced psycho-linguistics models and algorithms to assess customer sentiment, intent, and trust in the absence of non-verbal cues and body language.
Bob Kelly, Chairman of the Sales Management Association. Mr. Kelly leads the only global professional association for managers focused in sales force effectiveness. Over the last decade, he has hosted and led research, forums, and tools to help sales operations, enablement and leaders evolve the discipline of sales management to address the new buying reality.

Leonard Lodish, Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School of Business. Professor Lodish is a leading authority in sales management and at the vanguard of data-driven sales resource allocation and talent assessment – pioneering the development of analytic models and decision support systems for sales force deployment, talent, and resource allocation. For the last decade he’s taught the Leading the Effective Sales Force curriculum to a generation of global sales leaders.

Jeff McKittrick, VP of Sales Business Capabilities for Hitachi Vantara. Jeff is a leading authority in revenue enablement with over 15 years of sales operations experience building and implementing digital selling and sales enablement platforms at Cisco and Hitachi Vantara. Jeff and his team at Hitachi Vantara won Sirius Decisions’ Program of the Year for Sales Operations for their work on creating the Digital Selling Platform.

David Reibstein, Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School of Business. Professor Reibstein is a work leading authority in marketing measurement, management, compensation and short- and long-term growth resource allocation. He is author of Marketing Metrics: The Definitive Guide to Measuring Marketing Performance.

Michael Smith, Senior Managing Director, Blue Ridge Partners. Mr. Smith is an authority on virtual selling and sales channel acceleration. He has helped over 300 organizations unlock new growth by designing new organizational approaches, incentives, and systems to optimally reallocate sales time and resources to the best customers, markets, and territories.
4. Executive Summary

The coronavirus pandemic has forced billions of people worldwide to remain at home - creating globally displaced selling teams and accelerating the formal adoption of virtual selling channels. Few organizations were prepared for this scale of employee dispersion as only 6% of businesses had formal work at home programs at the start of the year. Sales productivity has dropped by 20% in the immediate wake of the pandemic as newly displaced managers, salespeople, call center representatives, and customer support agents struggle to adapt to working remotely. 98% of sales leaders report their businesses will be disrupted as they face uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working.

Remote selling is fast becoming fundamental to selling success in a new buying reality where business to business customers conduct most of the buying journey online and now billions of sales reps, customers and consumers must work from home in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Before the pandemic hit, most sales organizations were already struggling with changing buyer expectations and increasingly digital and complex buying behavior. Most of the buying cycle was already happening online and 12.5% of B2B product sales were digital. This “new school” buying behavior has serious ramifications to sales leader because a once orderly selling funnel has now devolved into a non-linear vortex of digital buyer engagement.

The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated those trends as billions of people – including customers, consumers, and sales reps - are unable to leave their homes, travel, shop, go to the office, or attend conferences and events. This has created a crisis that has forced the adoption of remote selling as sales team have scrambled to bring field sales teams inside over the last 90 days. Looking past the pandemic, the coronavirus response has pushed most sales organizations past a tipping point where the adoption rate of remote selling channels and “new school” digital buying practices will transform selling as we know it by disrupting demand chains and dispersing selling teams globally.
Based on the study findings, we can expect the rapid adoption and maturation of remote selling over the next 16 to 18 months, until ultimately virtual account executives and a more robust digital selling infrastructure are fundamental components of the commercial model.

Right now, most sales leaders don’t have the luxury of thinking about this sales transformation. They are struggling through daily crisis meetings and focused on only those priorities which are critical to enterprise survival. So, through the lens of crisis management, it’s expedient and fair to characterize virtual or remote selling as a short-term disruption for face-to-face sales reps to endure by using Zoom for sales meetings.

But this analysis reveals that remote or “virtual selling” – defined as the ability to conduct high value sales interactions through remote digital channels - is here to stay. It is very different from face to-face selling. And most organizations are not yet particularly good at it. Managers surveyed in this study rated their remote working effectiveness as average at best. Sales leaders and managers acknowledged their teams were moderately effective conducting certain tasks remotely such as customer calls and emails, responding to leads or customers, and collaborating with others. Overall they felt they did not excel at remote selling. No single category was rated as effective. The interviews highlighted some real deficiencies in remote selling effectiveness – notably delivering product demonstrations, sales coaching, and guidance, and prioritizing and planning opportunities and accounts in a virtual setting. As the dust settles and CEOs and their growth leaders can look past the “bottoming out” of the epidemic towards recovery and the “next normal”, they’ll need to seriously examine and reengineer their commercial model going forward.

In the rush to adapt to remote selling, they must not lose sight of the fact that virtual channels offer sales leaders tools to sustain sales productivity in the short term, and the potential to transform sales performance and accelerate growth in the longer term. The results of this survey strongly suggest that anyone leading a sales organization in a post-Covid economy needs to keep three things in mind:

1. Technology enabled Virtual Account Executives (AE’s) have the potential to dramatically outperform traditional selling models in terms of engagement, productivity, speed, and cost to sell;

2. Second, remote selling is materially different from traditional field sales from a cost, coverage, control, and customer experience perspective;

3. Remote selling is here to stay in the new normal. The go-to-market model has changed permanently. Remote selling and Virtual AEs are now a major – if not primary – component of the commercial model. For better, and for worse.

From a commercial model standpoint - remote or “virtual” sales models are far more than a trend, and certainly more than field sales reps on zoom. Your organization can double customer engagement, productivity, and speed at lower costs by enabling your remote selling teams with seven key capabilities.
“Virtual selling is neither inside sales nor traditional “feet on the street”” according to Michal Smith, Managing Director of Blue Ridge Partners. “A Virtual Sales Rep meets the needs of modern buyers by using digital communication channels, advanced analytics, and virtual, video and collaboration platforms to deliver in minutes or hours what traditional sellers often take days or weeks to deliver. At the same time, the new model gives management and sellers unprecedented transparency into the selling activities that are the critical leading indicators of revenue growth. In our work helping companies adopt virtual selling, we found that Virtual Sales Reps quickly become indispensable – and delivered two to three times the speed, productivity, and engagement with higher margins, as the average field-based seller.”

Virtual selling can dramatically improve the coverage, control, and cost effectiveness of your sales channels while offering “new school” digital buyers the speed of response and experiences they demand. Organizations that rely on field sales reps to sell complex offerings can dramatically improve customer engagement, productivity, and speed at lower costs by incorporating Virtual AE’s into their commercial models and arming them with analytics, insights, and automation.

Virtual selling channels have such compelling economic potential because the leverage technology in ways that augment and enable sales reps to deliver high value customer interactions faster and at lower cost than field sales reps. Channel augmentation and enablement is not to be confused with channel migration – which is shifting low value transactions to low cost channels. The book was written on channel migration in the 1990s and early 2000s – when companies like Dell, IBM, GEICO, and Charles Schwab used the principle to dramatically reduce the cost of selling the computer, insurance, and financial advice. For example, IBM was able to migrate $8.8 Billion-dollar in sales from field sales to a tele-web channel reps while lowering selling costs by 40%.
Virtual selling channels offers similar, if not greater potential to improve coverage, control, and customer experience at lower selling costs. Properly designed and enabled, a virtual selling channels can double the visibility, engagement, speed and productivity of your sales channels while offering buyers the speed of response and experiences they demand. Remote selling can achieve such results because they give sales managers much more flexibility to redefine the role of the sales rep in ways that better address rising buyer expectations for fast and complete access to expertise, support, information and advice. This means organizations can expand coverage with fewer resources by moving beyond traditional geographic, territory and functional constraints and put the best resources in the best spot to advance a deal. Incorporating virtual AEs into your commercial model can improve channel performance four different ways:

1. **Improved coverage** – Working remotely provides sales leaders the freedom to release traditional constraints of location and travel to focus the right people on the right accounts, prospects, and opportunities regardless of geography, territory, or function.

2. **Greater control** – Remote selling creates more complete digital tracking of sales conversations, behaviors, and engagement activities that can be used for coaching, customer engagement-based measurement and optimization algorithms. As evidence, survey respondents identified the need for more granular customer engagement and seller activity data to give them better visibility into sales activities, buyer engagement, forecast accuracy and pipeline health as the top 4 ways to improve sales team productivity.

3. **Reduced cost-of sales** – Remote selling reduces travel, event and market development costs while improving productivity by automating time spent on data, time recording activities and increasing the cadence of selling. Over three quarters of organizations that participated in the survey have cut the SG&A associated with sales in response to reductions in demand without commensurate loss of customer engagement. Several anecdotally report these cuts will allow them to make their profit numbers in 2020 alone.
4. An enhanced customer experience
   – A properly enabled remote AE can deliver a superior customer experience. The survey respondents identified the ability to deliver personalized and relevant content and respond faster to customer questions as two top ways remote selling can improve the customer experience.

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<th>BUSINESS IMPACT OF COVID-19: BUDGET CUTS</th>
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From a technology perspective, the pressure to adapt to this new buying reality will accelerate the adoption of existing but grossly under-utilized technologies that offer the potential to multiply seller performance – including but not limited to algorithmic selling, sales enablement, 5G communications, DTC channels, and even augmented reality.

- Today, only about 12% of B2B product and service sales are conducted through digital channels according to the Duke CMO survey;
- Real adoption rates of available technologies like AR, AI and 5G in sales are hovering at between 5 and 10% according to an analysis by the Revenue Enablement Institute;
- Organizations have not nearly realized the potential of sales automation and enablement as a “force multiplier” to expand seller capacity by first freeing up face time, and then ensuring more reliable stream of customer engagement and activity information, and finally realizing the full potential of CRM and sales technology stack.
Adoption of all of these existing technologies is going to increase as work-at-home sellers and buyers struggle to do their jobs remotely and look to technology to fill the void and replace the unique aspects of face to face interaction. How sales organizations will deploy these technologies, and to what degree, are one of the goals of this report and a central focus of our research at the Revenue Enablement Institute.

“As the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis rages, sales forces are coping with cratering (or surging) demand, distracted or unreachable buyers, uncertain economic prospects, and plenty of personal uncertainty to boot. They will lunge at technology suddenly indispensable in a social distancing selling environment,” according to Bob Kelly, Chairman of the Sales Management Association.

Kelly warns sales leaders to be smart about where and how to use technology to improve the productivity of remote selling teams. “The push to remote selling has exposed many of the flaws in CRM and sales technology that have so far failed to provide sales leaders the visibility and leverage they will need to remain productive in the crisis and make the transition to remote virtual selling,” according to Kelly. After three decades of lukewarm adoption of CRM and sales enablement, Bob sees the coronavirus as a catalyst to finally shove sales organizations to intelligently adopt and leverage technology at scale. “It’s only when the tide goes out that you learn who has been swimming naked in terms of sales technology adoption and the ability to rely on their sales technology infrastructure to guide remote selling efforts,” warns Kelly, invoking Warren Buffets advice. “In most cases, these technologies are not providing sellers the visibility and agility they will need to adapt to the new environment – as currently deployed and adopted.” As evidence of this, the recent SMA research report Unlocking CRMs Value study revealed that most firms CRM implementations suffer from lower than acceptable ROI, unsatisfactory user adoption, and lots of unrealized potential.

This underperformance of sales technology will seriously impair productivity and make visibility into selling activity the Achilles heel of remote selling. This will render sales managers blind and “swimming naked” because they are unable to manage, measure and coach revenue teams they cannot see.
To help sales leaders, managers, and effectiveness professionals learn ways to improve the productivity and effectiveness of remote selling teams in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the Revenue Enablement Institute undertook this Remote Sales Productivity Study. Working in partnership with the Sales Management Association, our Faculty of academics and experts conducted over 150 quantitative and qualitative interviews with sales leader, managers and effectiveness professionals in April and May of 2020.

Sales leaders can draw six key insights from this research:

1. The commercial model has reached an inflection point with no turning back
2. We are dealing with a new buying reality
3. Sales visibility is now fundamental to sales management
4. It's time for advanced analytics to deliver speed, productivity, and engagement
5. Managing uncertainty will be a constant
6. Sales leaders will need new skills to navigate the new environment

These key implications are explained in greater detail below.
1. The commercial model has reached an inflection point with no turning back

“New school” digital buying has overtaken over “old school” face to face selling as the primary selling model.

98% of sales leaders report their businesses will be disrupted by 16.5 months (on average) as they adapt to reduced market demand, uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working.

Sales leaders are now being forced to adapt their commercial models to this new buying reality in several ways:

- Transitioning from “old school” selling based on face-to-face relationship building to virtual selling approaches that are better suited to meet the demands of “new school” buyers who prefer to work through digital channels;
- Building “digital first” sales infrastructure. “In general, businesses that invested ahead of the curve in virtual selling infrastructure have weathered the initial crisis better in general than those that did not - and are well positioned to gain share in the recovery,” according to Joe Galvin, Head of Research for Vistage International, a network of thousands of CEOs;
- Accelerating the adoption of sales analytics, automation and communications technologies in order to generate more return, intelligence and productivity from legacy CRM technology and data assets.

“The global spread of the coronavirus is going to serve as a tipping point for virtual selling model that represents a centerpiece of the commercial model of the future,” reports Micheal Smith, a Managing Director at Blue Ridge Partners who has helped over 100 businesses improve their selling performance. “Tactically, businesses are having to implement a basic remote model because of the virus to minimize exposure to both staff and customers. Strategically, they must address the needs of modern buyers who expect higher levels of digital engagement and demand faster answers to questions – regardless of whether they are marketing, sales, product, and service issues. Now is the time for companies to build on what is now required for safety reasons, to start building toward that longer-term strategic model.”

David Reibstein, Professor of Marketing at Wharton echoes this sentiment. “Many of the gains and changes made during the crisis will become permanent” notes Professor Reibstein. “For example, we can fully expect a faster transition to virtual meetings, classrooms, and selling models that will become permanent after the crisis is long past. Direct online selling will get a boost that will not just rebound back to its pre-disease levels, but we will find a hysteresis, that is a long-term effect.”
Bob Kelly, who has been tracking sales management trends for decades, anticipates the pressure to respond to the coronavirus will provide sales leaders a tipping point – or “shoving point” - in their efforts to become adaptable, technology-enabled, and learning agile. “The response to the coronavirus crisis has created a “shoving point” that will force sales managers to truly rely on technology or be left behind. That shove will send many reeling. But I ultimately believe most sales forces, or their managers will rise to the challenge and adapt to challenging markets, reorganize with heightened purpose, and remake their organizations in a more remote selling model.”
2. We are dealing with a new buying reality

77% of leaders believe adapting to changing customer expectations is the biggest productivity challenge

Sales leaders viewed changing customer behavior as having a range of positive and negative impacts on their ability to sell. The net long term impact these combined forces will have on overall sales effectiveness will greatly depend on how they enable and manage their selling teams going forward.

- On the positive front, they see an opportunity in the desire for personalized and relevant content as a way to improve sales effectiveness. This is corroborated by the fact that sales content budgets were the least likely to be cut as organizations reorient during the crisis.

- In addition, sales leaders view direct engagement through remote channels - time spent on digital media and channels – social, mobile and email – as being highly productive, which time spent on calls viewed as the second most positive change.

- In terms of headwinds and obstacles, the absence of events, conferences and face to face sales meetings were deemed to have the biggest negative impact on their ability to sell.

- The sales experts and executives we interviewed were concerned that growing customer expectations for the speed and completeness of response by customers will present challenges to their sales teams under current coverage and role definitions, particularly “old school” sales reps who have historically relied on face to face relationship building as a core part of their approach.

“Organizations are going to need to rewire their commercial engines to better reflect the new buying reality where customers are channel agnostic and buyer behavior is non-linear…”
"Organizations are going to need to rewire their commercial engines to better reflect the new buying reality where customers are channel agnostic and buyer behavior is non-linear," reports Brent Adamson, distinguished Vice President in Gartner's Sales practice. "It's a big job. It's going to be painful because it involves reworking the legacy commercial infrastructure, and creating new roles, processes, and metrics. So, getting it right in the next several years is probably a reach. But companies that even start to make progress creating metrics, dashboards and incentives that are a more accurate proxy of the current buying reality are going to have a significant advantage over the competition." According to Adamson, companies that align their metrics and incentives with customer buying behavior will give them a much more accurate picture of the cost of sales, the opportunity cost of selling time, and how different resources contribute to their commercial organizations in terms of commercial outcomes. This will allow them to make much better decisions about how to allocate people, technology, data, and content resources based on what they are contributing to the top line, bottom line and value of the company.
3. Sales visibility is now fundamental to sales management

Greater visibility into seller activity, customer engagement, forecast accuracy, and account health represent the top four ways to improve the effectiveness of remote selling teams.

The lack of visibility into pipeline activity, seller actions, buyer engagement and account health have emerged as a critical issue as sellers struggle to measure and manage the productivity of increasingly dispersed selling teams in remote work-at-home settings. Visibility into seller activity, customer engagement, forecast commitments, and pipeline health were identified as the top 4 ways to better manage remote sales productivity by the sales managers in the survey.

Getting access to granular sales activity and customer engagement data is an urgent issue for the simple reason you can’t manage what you can’t measure, and you can’t measure what you can’t see. In addition, remote selling requires fast communication between revenue team members. And “horizontal” information flow across sales, service and product silos is particularly important to serving modern buyers. This means sales leaders must find ways to inform the entire selling team with fast, transparent, and inclusive information about all client activity and engagement to their remote revenue teams can effectively prioritize, coordinate, and act on client opportunities.

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<th>THE TOP WAYS TO BETTER MANAGE SALES TEAM PRODUCTIVITY</th>
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<td>What would help you better manage your sales team productivity?</td>
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<td>Better visibility into sales activities</td>
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<td>Better data and insight to improve forecast accuracy</td>
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<td>Improved visibility into pipeline health</td>
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<td>Better use of CRM</td>
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<td>Improved internal communications across all teams</td>
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<td>Better access to prospecting and dialing tools</td>
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<td>Easier access to sales training materials and tools</td>
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Revenue Enablement Institute Survey of 108 sales leaders May 2020
This finding is corroborated by industry research and experts on the front lines. For example, SMA research also confirms the importance of using sales technology to get better visibility to all members of the revenue team. “To adapt to this crisis sales leaders must find ways to unlock the untapped value potential of CRM by eliminating the top obstacles to adoption, which include ease of data input, assistance managing the pipeline, ease of use, and creating a single source of sales force information,” warns Bob Kelly. “Sales leaders must do their part to make this transformation happen. Right now, 95% of sales managers and practitioners cite the lack of management encouragement to adopt these technologies as a big part of the problem.”

Jeff McKittrick, the VP of Sales Business Capabilities at Hitachi Vantara reinforces the critical role of sales leadership in using technology as a force multiplier that provides visibility, productivity and speed rather than expensive technology overhead. “The trick has always been management’s commitment to leveraging sales automation technology in the selling process by providing the right incentives, culture, and user experience to get salespeople to use these tools,” shares McKittrick.

For virtual channels to be effective, sales leaders must find ways to inform the entire selling team with fast, transparent, and inclusive information about all client activity and engagement. This allows managers to delegate authority to the edge of the organization to support quick actions and decision-making by remote sales employees, without giving up control and accountability. For example, DHL used advanced customer engagement analytics and sales AI to create relevant data, insights, and measures of customer engagement quality for their selling teams. “Analytics and AI give us unprecedented visibility into the opportunities and provides actionable next steps for our sales executives to sell with the buyers perspective, helping customers be more successful,” according to Ton Verleg, the VP of Global Sales Development at DHL.
4. Advanced analytics must deliver more speed, productivity, and engagement

Executives need to demand that advanced data analytics and AI deliver twice the productivity, engagement and speed from the technology and data assets they have already.

Most respondents believe their sales teams productivity has decreased by 20% since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as sales teams struggle with personal and business uncertainty, changing buyer expectations, and adapt to working digitally;

Overall, most respondents did not feel their sales technology stack was supporting remote selling very effectively in terms of providing visibility, engagement, speed, and sales rep productivity. Of 10 categories where technology could improve remote selling effectiveness – no one category was deemed more than moderately effective at supporting remote selling. Of those, technology provides some support in quickly sharing information with internal teams and conducting pipeline meetings.

### PRODUCTIVITY: EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTING THE SALES TEAM

| Rate how effective your team is at working remotely in the following areas |  
|-----------------------------|-----------------|  
| Quickly sharing information with internal teams | 3.79 |  
| Conducting pipeline meetings | 3.67 |  
| Quickly sharing content with customers and partners | 3.63 |  
| Tracking and visibility into email and meeting activities | 3.52 |  
| Accessing selling assets and tools | 3.42 |  
| Tracking and visibility into calls and web meetings | 3.39 |  
| Conducting coaching sessions | 3.33 |  
| Tracking and visibility into buyer responses and engagement | 3.10 |  
| Conducting product demonstrations | 3.07 |  
| Leveraging data analytics / AI to gain insight into seller... | 2.91 |  
| Leveraging data analytics / AI to gain insight into buyer intent | 2.78 |  

Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 5 with one being not effective and 5 being very effective.

Revenue Enablement Institute Survey of 108 sales leaders May 2020
However, the survey indicates technology has not lived up to its potential. Particularly leveraging data analytics and AI to gain insight into buyer intent and seller effectiveness - which scored the lowest of any technical capability in terms of supporting remote sales.

This makes it imperative for sales leaders find ways for advanced analytics can improve the return on underperforming growth technology assets - data, CRM, and the marketing technology. They can accomplish this in several ways:

1. Accelerating information flow across internal teams was regarded as the top way technology infrastructure supports remote selling.
2. Hyper focus on shrinking the bullseye of viable opportunities, accounts, and prospects.
3. Advanced analytics and sales AI can help sales leaders better manage and multiply the effectiveness of their remote revenue teams by leveraging the customer engagement data that already lives within their organizations.

In the short term, some of the most practical and impactful ways data-driven algorithms can help sales leaders better empower, manage, measure, and coach their remote revenue teams include:

1. Qualifying opportunities based on buyer intent;
2. Prioritizing accounts;
3. And recommending the right content, plays and actions with the best chance of success.

According to Jeff McKittrick, the VP of Sales Business Capabilities for Hitachi Vantara, any organization can leverage sales analytics and automation as a “force multiplier” to expand seller capacity in three ways:

1. First freeing up 10-30% more sales face time by automating planning, content selection and CRM reporting tasks.
2. Then ensuring a more reliable stream of customer engagement and activity information to the entire remote selling team;
3. And finally realizing the full potential of CRM and the sales technology stack.

“In my experience, sales effectiveness and productivity can be increased two-fold or even more by giving sales reps the right tool, information, and content at the right time, and giving managers the insights they need to make better resource allocation decisions and sales performance metrics,” related McKittrick. “The trick has always been management’s commitment to leveraging sales automation technology in the selling process by providing the right incentives, culture, and user experience to get salespeople to use these tools. In the absence of these factors, adoption of sales automation is under 20% at many organizations even after putting five to ten tools in the sales technology stack. So, salespeople continue to spend their time searching for information which takes critical selling time away from engaging customers.”
“The coronavirus pandemic has changed this dynamic,” continues McKittrick. “The pressure to drive sales in virtual channels should be a tipping point where the value of sales automation can be fully realized because sales teams need every minute of time as they double down to protect customer relationships, adapt to dynamic market opportunities and increase customer engagement to drive sales in a challenging economy.”

For example, advanced analytics and sales AI can better allocate seller time and multiply seller effectiveness by qualifying opportunities based on buyer intent, prioritizing accounts, and recommending the right content, plays and actions with the best chance of success. “It’s clear AI works in sales,” according to Leonard Lodish, Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School of Business. “The trick has been to get sales and marketing leaders to try it and see it through to successful long-term value creation. The shift to virtual selling models will actually accelerate adoption of sales AI. Because sales leaders are finding it’s difficult to manage, measure, and coach remote sales forces they cannot see. Or evaluate sales meetings they cannot attend. This will force many businesses to experiment more with advanced analytics to measure, manage and improve the performance of virtual sales reps.”

“The perception of how to use AI in sales is very different from the reality,” continues Lodish. “The perception is that sales AI involves complex and advanced applications – like real time language analysis. In fact, these are beyond most firm’s capability from a data and organizational maturity standpoint. The reality is Sales AI doesn’t have to be advanced to be impactful in the short term. There’s a broad continuum of applications of AI in the selling model ranging from relatively simple to very complex. There are many high impact and simple to implement sale AI applications most organizations can be taking advantage of today. Organizations are dramatically improving sales performance by using algorithms to help with the basics of account and lead prioritization and qualification, recommending the content or sales action that will lead to success, and reallocating sales resources to the places they can have the most impact.”

In the short term, some of the most practical and impactful ways data-driven algorithms can help sales leaders better empower, manage, measure and coach their remote revenue teams include:

1. Opportunity prioritization based on buyer intent and engagement;
2. Recommending next best sales actions;
3. Selling time optimization;
4. Sales coverage realignment across geographies, accounts and business lines;
5. Talent assessment and optimization.

“Sales AI doesn’t have to be advanced to be impactful in the short term. There’s a broad continuum of applications of AI in the selling model ranging from relatively simple to very complex...”
Sales leaders are missing a big opportunity by not using the customer engagement data available to them to create advanced measurement and sales optimization systems. Most organizations are sitting on top of large amounts of customer engagement data in a variety of Revenue Enablement systems – including CRM, exchange (email and calendar), content management, marketing automation, web sites, social media, customer engagement management systems. And that’s not counting data third party partners (like LinkedIn or D&B). This information needs to be used to track and inform the right sales behaviors, actions and performance incentives.

For example, advanced customer engagement analytics and sales AI were fundamental to helping DHL transform the way they sell, according to Ton Verleg, the VP Global Sales Development at DHL. “We changed the way we sell and for that you need to be armed with relevant data and insights,” relates Mr. Verleg. “The analytics and AI give us unprecedented visibility into the opportunities and provides actionable next steps for our sales executives to sell with the buyers perspective, helping customers be more successful.”

The most advanced companies are using AI tools to better assess customer sentiment, intent, and trust in the absence of non-verbal cues and body language, according to Saurabh Goorha, Senior Fellow at The Wharton Customer Analytics Initiative. Based on his research, he sees a growing role for psycho-linguistics models to measure effectiveness and credibility of people interactions in virtual communications. “In traditional in-person sales interactions, non-verbal “leakage cues” can hinder the sales communication process leading to suboptimal impact for motivated sellers,” according to Goorha. “Virtual settings allow the seller to selectively present information about themselves, and the absence of traditional non-verbal cues, such as gestures or broken eye contact, leads to a phenomenon called “motivational enhancement effect”. The motivated sellers may be more likely to engage in strategic communication behaviors that maximize credibility and effectiveness of their pitch in virtual sales channels.”

“Sales leaders are missing a big opportunity by not using the customer engagement data available to them to create advanced measurement and sales optimization systems.”
5. Managing uncertainty will be a constant pressure

Uncertainty represents the biggest risk to achieving the revenue and productivity goals

The coronavirus is battering the economy and creating uncertainty about future demand. The global economy is forecast to contract by 3% as billions of employees, customers and consumers are unable to leave their homes, travel, shop or in some cases work. This has paralysed some industries and created opportunities for others. The uncertainty about the future is so great that 20% of the corporations in the S&P1500 have withdrawn investor guidance on revenues and profits for the coming year.

The survey respondents cited uncertainty about market demand – having enough market demand for our products – as the top risk to the sales goals and revenue plan. Worries about closing enough business, clients not having the funds to continue purchasing, and not getting enough leads and sales meetings to fill the pipeline were also paramount. In addition, employee morale and the personal uncertainty about their jobs, role and performance were highlighted as the second most significant productivity challenge by the sales managers surveyed.

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Score is based on the respondents rank ordering of the 6 options.

Revenue Enablement Institute Survey of 108 sales leaders May 2020
Most of the survey respondents feel the market will remain uncertain through the end of 2021. Michael Smith corroborates this point of view, "Executives expect monthly revenues to decline by about 14% over the next three- to four-month period and remain more than 10% below at the end of the year. Many companies predict even steeper revenue drops of 20-30%+. When asked about revenue run-rate by the end of 2021, respondents indicate they expect to be roughly back to the pre-crisis levels by Q4 of ’21. While no one has a crystal ball, responses suggest that we are in for a long U-shaped recovery rather than a quick bounce back in the coming months."

In response to this uncertainty, firms are cutting back and hedging their bets until they get a better picture of where the bottom is and how demand will rebound in the recovery.

Most organizations have decreased their sales budgets in response to this drop in demand. 67% of respondents had budget cuts. 31% have held budgets fixed. Only 2% of organizations indicated they had increase in growth funding during the crisis. The heaviest hit budgets are business travel, events, and conferences – where three quarters of firms are cutting back. But over a third are targeting training budgets for cuts, at a time when salespeople need new skills to adapt to remote selling.

"Every business is taking a hard look at all spending, including sales and marketing, to survive in the COVID-19 crisis," reports Chris Hummel, the CMO of United Rentals. "We're no different. Marketing can be a particularly juicy target for cost cutting, especially since the cuts are considered “painless.” Not so fast. Cuts in marketing usually drag down demand and sales, so what happens when the revenue hole created outweighs cost savings?"

Professor Reibstein reminds business leaders with the luxury of retaining growth budgets to consider the opportunities a crisis like this presents. "Cost cuts are inevitable in the crisis and marketing expenditures are often fungible. That said, while others are spending less, it makes whatever spending remains more effective,” according to Reibstein. “Those that invested during the 2008 financial crisis, thrived while others fled. “Share of voice” will never be greater. Massive industries, such as all travel related as well as political advertising are down considerably at the same time people are in front of their screens more than ever and attention may never be greater. This may be the time to invest, that is, if the business can afford to."

Timing the rebound and when and where to reinvest is another dimension of uncertainty. While overall, the study participants believe COVID-19 will disrupt their market for 16.5 months, opinions varied by business and industry. 18% believe it will disrupt it for up to 3 months. 73% of respondents believe this will disrupt their sales goals for up to 12 months. And 7% felt the disruption was going to be permanent in their industry or particular business line.
Moving forward the big questions are when is the bottom and when should we begin to reinvest?” according to Joe Galvin. “Business leaders will stay focused on crisis management until we find the bottom of this one and can assess the damage and determine how long they can survive at this velocity. CEOs are asking when will we have line of sight on when the pandemic is under control so we can shift from crisis to recovery and reactivate face-to-face events, sponsorships and selling channels as part of the go to market mix.”

Professor Reibstein reinforces the importance of getting this timing right. “It’s a very difficult balance for a business leader. Do we wait until the bottom, or do we start reinvesting before we get there? Do we have to wait until full recovery, or will that be too late? Will the cost to regain lost ground be higher than it would have been if we had invested earlier?

Mo Katibeh, the CMO of AT&T shares the same perspective. “Tactically, we’re starting to ask when we will hit peak usage because there are only so many remote users and so many minutes of use in a day,” reports Katibeh. “The good news is so far the networks are handling this traffic well. Beyond that, when the “COVID winter” will end, what steps they need to take in the recovery and what stasis (the new normal) will look like are all open but critical questions right now. In a strategic sense, these short-term changes in usage are not the only dynamic to look at. We anticipate the response to the virus will bring about fundamental and long-lasting changes to the mix and composition of traffic over corporate and consumer communications networks, and the infrastructure that underlies them.”

“Moving forward the big questions are when is the bottom and when should we begin to reinvest?”
6. Sales leaders will need new skills to navigate the new environment

Sales leaders must adapt to rapid change with limited time and resources as a third of organizations report they are cutting or freezing training budgets in the crisis

Successful selling during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis will require new leadership skills. For example,

1. **Building new skills** – The sales leaders and managers surveyed in this study rated their remote working effectiveness as below average in the areas – notably delivering product demonstrations, sales coaching, and guidance, and prioritizing and planning opportunities and accounts in a virtual setting;

2. **Accelerating communications** – leading a remote sales team in a crisis will require disciplined, focused, and frequent communication from top to bottom and across the organization;

3. **Effecting the sales transformation and technology adoption** – Finding better ways to leverage advanced analytics and AI to improve engagement, speed and productivity are going to be essential to being productive in a virtual setting and adapting to the new buying reality. Sales transformation will not succeed without better leadership from the top.

“Leading remote teams during the COVID-19 crisis requires different forms of leadership” according to McChrystal. “We faced a very similar situation in the throes of our fight against Al Qaeda fifteen years ago when we built the Joint Special Operations Command in Iraq in the wake of 9/11”, according to General McChrystal. “We pivoted from being a centrally located, thousands-strong enterprise to a network of small teams spread around the world. “Digital leadership” was not in the job description for our generation, but it became a critical skill

Managing, coaching, and motivating thousands of sales, call center, and service employees in a work at home environment is creating immense new challenges for sales leaders, including:

- **Leadership:** Many sales managers are unprepared, inexperienced, or ill equipped to lead and manage all the activities of distributed revenue teams they are geographically and physically disconnected from;

- **Transparency:** Newly displaced workers are largely untethered from the corporate information systems and networks they rely on for the fast, transparent, and inclusive communication that is central to selling;

- **Collaboration:** Sales, account, service, and success teams must find ways to operate in the absence of the face-to-face collaboration and the physical and cultural anchor points they rely on for coaching, management and communication;
Agility: Customer facing employees working in a remote setting need to be empowered to make quick and informed decisions to support customer engagement at the edge of the organization. This means leaders need to find ways to give up authority without giving up control, take their culture online, and learn to build relationships and trust on digital platforms.

“From a sales channel perspective, organizations are quickly adapting to having tens of thousands of salespeople, call center representatives and customer support agents working from home, shares Mo Katibeh of AT&T. “They are rushing to provide their front-line customer facing employees with the systems, support and communications infrastructure they need to engage, retain and acquire customers in a work at home setting. This includes fundamental hardware like PCs, mobility enabled hot spots, collaboration applications, and remote access VPN capability to give them the secure and scalable access to the applications, systems, networks, and databases they need to do their jobs from home productively as well as support high quality videoconferencing experiences.”

To address this unprecedented challenge, sales leaders must very quickly assess the situation, come up with a plan to adapt, act quickly and follow through with hyper focus.

The first step is to quickly assess the situation in terms of how your team is functioning as a remote network. “In the fight against Al Qaeda, we learned the hard way that you need to first understand yourself before you can understand and adapt to the outside environment,” reports General McChrystal. “While changes in the environment are out of your control, the way your organization reacts to it doesn’t have to be. Right now, markets are changing quickly, and uncertainty can dominate the discourse. Effectively collecting and using the right data from within your organization and from your people can be an incredibly powerful tool for leaders in today’s chaotic environment.”

To do this, McChrystal recommends taking a week to collect qualitative and quantitative data on your employee network to get a pulse on sentiment, morale, functioning, and the level of communication across your remote team. This will allow you to identify the critical issues, communications and priorities that you must focus on to adapt to the crisis.

The next step is to create an integrated crisis response plan that hyper focuses your organization on communications, processes and execution priorities essential for short term survival. A key part of the plan is to provide a common purpose to the larger team by establishing a shared emotional connection and aligning priorities, goals and incentives.

As a leader, the most important thing is to act quickly on your crisis response plans regardless of whether you are attacking, pivoting or protecting what you have – or if you are uncertain about how the market will ultimately evolve. “In any crisis, there is a natural temptation to simply wait it out. Today’s leaders cannot give in to this instinct”, relates General McChrystal. “Right now, we’re facing a perfect storm of economic downturn, social isolation and a fast-spreading pandemic. The answer to this problem will not suddenly reveal itself; leaders must create solutions. Any leaders who are not already on a war footing and preparing to fundamentally change their organizations for the foreseeable future must start moving today.”
Recommendations: Five Steps Every Sales Leader Must Take to Sustain and Grow Remote Sales Productivity

The faculty at the Revenue Enablement Institute has identified five things sales leaders must do today to sustain and improve remote sales team productivity in the crisis and set the stage for selling effectively in the recovery.

Five actions you can take to maintain and improve remote sales productivity:

1. **Speed**: Accelerate communication, lead flow and response;
2. **Tools**: Arm your sales teams four basic tools to sell remotely;
3. **Visibility**: Stop flying blind and leverage your engagement data;
4. **Hyper-focus**: Double down on pipeline and relationship building;
5. **Run new plays**: create a new playbook for virtual selling.
1. **Speed:** Accelerate the speed of communication.

Communication is critical in a crisis where sales teams are dealing with market disruption and uncertainty about their priorities, their pipeline and their personal situation. This starts with communicating a new plan to displaced revenue teams. But to lead effectively in a remote setting, managers must also find ways to accelerate the speed of communication to ensure they inform the entire selling team with fast, transparent, and inclusive information about all client activity and engagement. This gives remote salespeople purpose and direction, and it allows managers to delegate authority without giving up control and accountability to support quick actions and decision-making by front line sales employees.

General (ret) Stanley McChrystal - who will be speaking on *Leading Selling Teams In A Crisis* at the SMA productivity conference - strongly emphasizes the critical importance of speeding up communications in the face of a crisis. He advises sales managers to dramatically increase the cadence of communications from weekly to daily updates to create a shared consciousness and common purpose across the entire revenue team. This will help information to cascade down quickly to sellers at the edge of the organizations who must make fast decisions and engage customers with the right messages, solutions and help.

Sales leaders need to increase the speed of communication on four dimensions:

1. Accelerate customer response to address the growing expectations of “new school” buyers for immediate and complete answers;
2. Accelerate the cadence of information sharing in daily meetings with the entire revenue team;
3. Accelerate the flow of information to sales reps at the edge of the organization;
4. Accelerate the follow-up on buyer intent identified in customer engagement data to as close to real time as possible.

Micheal Smith, a Managing Director at Blue Ridge Partners echoes the importance of accelerating the cadence of communications to get sales teams to focus on a tight set of execution priorities and address rising customer expectations for fast and complete communications. “With the advent of digital buying, clients have become increasingly unwilling to wait for answers, information, and advice,” reports Smith, who has coached a dozen leadership teams on ways to adapt effectively to remote selling in the last several months. “The shift to remote work will only accelerate this trend. Your customers are going to expect answers in minutes or hours, not days or weeks.” He also agrees that sales leaders need to create a sales war room mindset. “In a crisis, most of the sales team will freeze-up and lose focus. It’s critical to rally the team, help them understand the challenge, and get them back to doing what they do best -- engaging, supporting, and selling to customers. This will require sales managers to take a more hands-on sales management approach - Not weekly one-on-ones but daily - with huddle calls every morning to keep people focused.”
From a technology standpoint, this means enabling remote teams with solutions that allow them to work with the same, or even higher levels of effectiveness. This can mean augmenting existing platforms – CRM, CMS – to make connectivity work better and faster at scale. It also means increasing the cadence of communications with customer facing employees at the edge of the organization from weeks to days.

Remote sales reps will need to become faster in the day-to-day process of finding and recommending “channel ready” content that meets buyers’ high expectations for relevance, personalization, visualization and collaboration. The desire of customers for more personalized and relevant content was cited as the most favorable change in customer behavior in terms of enhancing the ability to sell effectively. And immersive video and even AR content are becoming more important as online buyers place a premium on the quality and context of content as B2B sellers increasingly use with video and virtual experiences that substitute for face to face test drives, solution configuration, physical design and visual experiences. A prime example is elite colleges are being forced to offer virtual tours of college campuses to prospective students in the absence of college tours this spring.

Modern marketing produces customer data that allows marketers to identify trigger events that signal buying intent, flag inquiries from important influencers within accounts, and make decisions about next best actions based on past customer behavior. However, the window of time your organization has to act on that data is small – gated by customer time, attention and expectations for response. This makes speeding data and decisions about an opportunity from the source (e.g. a web site, an algorithm in marketing) to a customer facing employee who can act on it (e.g. a relationship manager or customer service rep) a critical value driver. Academic research by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) has proven the ability of an organization to generate, disseminate and respond to market intelligence – called Organizational Knowledge Sharing – has a quantifiable positive effect on firm value and financial performance in terms of profits, sales, and market share.
2. Tools: Give your sales teams the basic tools they need to effectively sell remotely.

As a priority, sales leaders must give their revenue teams the tools they need to adapt to virtual selling in the crisis. This includes properly equipping their virtual reps with the basics they will need to operate effectively in a remote environment – unified communications, network access hardware, collaboration platforms, and sales enablement tools.

How and how quickly can your organization develop and enable digital and virtual selling channels has emerged as a critical issue in a market where these channels have become essential to transacting with work-at-home buyers and consumers. In general, we’re seeing businesses that embraced digital first business models are doing much better than those that did not,” reports Joe Galvin, the Chief Research Officer of Vistage Worldwide. “Businesses that invested in building a strong digital infrastructure are benefiting from this dynamic because they have the ability to support DTC commerce and virtual selling models.”

Chris Hummel, the CMO of United Rentals, views digital sales channel investment as essential to B2B selling going forward. “Customers are moving online. They expect a great experience online. And increasingly want to buy online. Remote working in the wake of the coronavirus is only going to accelerate this shift. Before the crisis, some reports suggest that 12% of the sales of B2B products and services across industries were online. That number will only grow in the new normal. So, the impact of digital cuts on revenue will be dramatic and quick.”

Tactically, sales leaders must properly equip their remote selling teams with fundamental digital infrastructure - unified communications, hardware, network access, collaboration, and sales enablement tools - that they will need to operate remotely.

Mo Katibeh, the CMO of AT&T anticipates the response to the coronavirus pandemic will bring about fundamental and long-lasting changes to the mix and composition of network traffic over corporate and consumer communications networks, and the infrastructure that underlies them. “Like Y2K and similar disruptive events – the cost and complexity of moving over 220 million employees, students, and customers to home-based work will force corporations and institutions to upgrade their communications infrastructure,” shares Katibeh. “Moving to a more modern unified communications infrastructure can lead to lower costs, dramatically increase bandwidth, more flexibility, and capability to deliver superior customer experiences in the post-COVID environment.”
This sounds fundamental, but most organizations are ill equipped for remote selling at scale.

- **Networking hardware** is important because less than 6% of enterprise work forces were formally equipped for telecommuting at the start of the year. Like Y2K and similar disruptive events – the coronavirus pandemic will force companies to upgrade their infrastructure by equipping their remote sales reps with networking hardware that tethers them to the back office and front office systems they rely upon to engage customers, transact and communicate.

- **Unified communications** will become increasingly important of sellers want to meet the rising customer expectations for video content and communication by having the bandwidth and flexibility, and capability to deliver superior customer experiences while reducing costs in the post-COVID environment. "Network performance is becoming more tightly linked to employee performance as the economy becomes more virtual and more customers engage in digital and virtual channels," forecasts Mo Katibeh, the CMO of AT&T.

- **Collaboration tools** like Webex or Zoom are important as for the time being 100% of sales interaction happens virtually. As evidence of this, the use of online collaboration tools from home and business users has risen 400% in the last three weeks, and video now makes up over half of mobility network traffic but represents over 50% of network bandwidth – according to recent AT&T network usage statistics.

- **Sales enablement capabilities** are now essential tools for remote sales teams. Any organization can leverage sales enablement technology as a “force multiplier” to expand seller capacity by first freeing up 10-30% more sales face time by automating planning, content selection and CRM reporting tasks. Properly deployed, sales enablement technology will support better selling time allocation and help realize the full potential of under-performing CRM and sales technology investments.
Strategically, a virtual selling infrastructure gives B2B sellers the opportunity to differentiate the buying journey with video and virtual experiences that substitute for face to face test drives, solution configuration, physical design and visual experiences. A virtual infrastructure can also dramatically extend sales coverage beyond the traditional bounds of geographic, territory, and functional constraints.

According to Saurabh Goorha, a senior Fellow at Wharton and an expert in virtual selling, the shift to remote selling will force these organizations to work harder to adopt sales enablement, 5G communications, DTC channels, and even augmented reality at scale. “Purely virtual immersive technologies and AR/VR devices have traditionally been used for experiential products (e.g. travel & leisure) but they are increasingly relevant for sale of utilitarian products,” reports Goorha. For example, the architecture and interior design industry are using eDesign services which allow sales reps to give virtual in-home consultations and walk-through 3D spaces with pre-sale selections of furniture & furnishings, leading to faster sale and satisfaction. Similarly, higher education recruitment is undergoing a transformational shift by offering virtual tours of college campuses and personalized landing pages for prospective students that drive higher engagement and conversion.”
3. Stop flying blind: Get better visibility into buyer and seller activity

Another top priority is to stop flying blind by getting better control over your customer engagement and buyer activity data. This is essential because it gives sales managers the visibility they need to better manage, measure, coach and empower remote revenue teams at the edge of the organizations with the information they need to engage customers and make the right decisions faster. “To make the greatest use of scarce time we must equip sellers with better information about where the buyer is positioned in the buying cycle and meet them there with the information, content, and plays the buyer needs much faster,” reports Michael Smith.

The survey findings confirm the growing importance of visibility to sales management in a post-COVID competitive landscape. The lack of visibility into seller activities, buyer engagement, forecast accuracy and pipeline health were identified as the top obstacles to remote selling productivity according to a survey of sales leaders and managers.

Unfortunately, the lack of visibility into pipeline activity, seller actions, buyer engagement and account health are the “Achilles heel” of remote selling productivity. Visibility is an urgent issue for the simple reason you can’t manage what you can’t measure, and you can’t measure what you can’t see. For virtual channels to be effective, you must find ways to inform the entire selling team with fast, transparent, and inclusive information about all client activity and engagement.

To stop flying blind, sales leaders must find practical ways to get control of the customer engagement and seller activity data that already exists in their CRM, content, email, and calendar systems. The trick is to not let perfect information get in the way of “good enough” facts to inform selling. Sales leaders need to stop fantasizing about ubiquitous customer data lakes and real time data integration and start to applying the 80-20 rule by listening to the Economist John Maynard Keynes who points out the obvious – “it is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong.” The reality for most sales teams in the absence of perfect data, far too many decisions are still made on gut feel and historic precedent in a data-driven world. 80% “good enough” data is a vast improvement over the current situation – which is largely flying blind.

To stop flying blind, sales leaders must demand better control over their customer engagement and buyer activity data to give leadership and sales teams alike the visibility they need to better manage, measure, coach and empower remote revenue teams at the edge of the organizations with the information they need to engage customers and make the right decisions faster.
This will require sales and marketing operations teams to rethink their existing sales and marketing technology stack and adjust their revenue enablement roadmap to prioritize – or add – the insights, automation, and sales AI capabilities critical to virtual rep productivity and effectiveness. Specifically, this means demanding an “80% good enough” picture of buyer engagement and seller activity by using advanced analytics and sales AI integrating four core data sources almost every organization already has – CRM profile data, email, calendar, and content.

The best way to see, manage, and coach remote employees is to build measures and incentives on this foundation of customer engagement and buyer activity data. Any organization can dramatically improve visibility by compiling this readily available data into four fundamental sales planning, decision-making, and execution capabilities:

1. The ability to measure pipeline activity and account health based on actual customer engagement data;
2. The ability to prioritize opportunities based on data about probability of closing business, economic potential, and current levels of engagement;
3. The ability to quantify buyer intent on a scale of one to ten based on engagement and buying signals
4. The ability to recommend the most relevant sales content or sales play based on actual client response data and context.
The most effective way to measure seller performance, according to Steve Lucas the CEO of iCIMs, is for sales leaders to develop a universal customer engagement quality score that defines engagement excellence to all the stakeholders on the revenue team. Lucas recommends that top management should “define as an organization what a 10 out of 10 looks like in terms of customer advocacy, quality of interaction, content sharing, and other relationship health metrics. And then use advanced analytics to build composite metrics that quantify and track customer engagement quality on a customer and account level.”

Measuring activity and engagement makes practical sense for managers who cannot meet sales reps face to face. It’s difficult to manage outcomes, but it’s possible to manage behavior and activity. It is possible with available sales technology for sales managers to construct measurements and incentives like these. Granular customer engagement and seller activity data provides the raw material to build quantifiable measures of account health, opportunity quality, prospect potential, and seller performance.

Another problem sales leaders need to tackle is the increasingly dysfunctional nature of traditional pipeline metrics. The linear sales waterfall most organizations use to track their sales funnel don’t accurately reflect the new buying reality, and can be divisive, dysfunctional, and subject to gaming. A growing number of B2B CMOs believe that the traditional measures of sales and marketing effectiveness based on the demand unit waterfall model – Marketing sourced pipeline, Marketing Qualified leads, Sales Qualified Leads – are flawed. These metrics lead to constant challenges from sales and finance. They waste precious energy on documenting who gets credit instead of improving account profitability. They also make it difficult to reconcile interactions with many individual stakeholders into a coherent picture of account potential, profitability, penetration, and customer lifetime value.

Robin Matlock, the CMO of VMware suggests the unit of measurement for ABM needs to evolve from traditional marketing sourced pipeline and MQLs to customer engagement and account health. At the Forbes CMO Summit, Matlock shared her experience evolving how ABM was measured. “Getting insights on an account level vs. an individual level was a huge paradigm shift,” related Matlock in her talk. “Thinking about Coca Cola as a holistic account as opposed to ‘I have a lead and I’m tracking this one individual through a buying journey when the buying journey is made up of tens of individual and an account is made up of many leads – Getting the mentality that I want to look at the health of an account. I want to look at the pulse of what is going on in the account. I want to look at trends and how they are engaging with our marketing activity. The solution is quality of the engagement of the customer. Measuring this at scale is the trick. With many stakeholders in the account tracking interactions across marketing and sales systems is the golden thread.”
4. Hyper-focus: Double down with highly focused pipeline and relationship building

Waiting out the crisis and hoping for some semblance of the status quo is not an option. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, every organization needs to double down and move forward – whether they are lucky enough to be exploiting advantages the post-COVID economy gives them, defending customer relationships, or pivoting to become part of the solution. Short term demand may become scarcer but getting the attention of work at home buyers represents an opportunity. Buyers will remember who steps up in the crisis when things are bad. Surviving in the short term and succeeding in the next normal will require extremely productive and focused relationship and pipeline building for the third and fourth quarter to make the best use of time and attention right now.

To a sales leader and line manager, “doubling down” means:

1. Hyper focusing precious sales time and efforts on shrinking bullseye of viable opportunities, accounts and prospects;
2. Trying to double the return on growth technology assets - existing data, CRM, and the marketing technology - by connecting the dots with advanced analytics;
3. Looking to double productivity and engagement to either protect, pivot or capitalize on opportunities created by the crisis.

“Sales leaders need to be much more disciplined and focused in how they respond to the crisis,” advises Stanley McChrystal, in a recent webinar on leading remote teams in a crisis.

Data and insights will play a major role in achieving this level of hyper-focus with limited resources and reduced selling budgets. “You cannot afford to waste precious sales time on the wrong leads, customers and prospects in this environment,” warns Michael Smith. “Sellers need to focus their limited time on opportunities that can actually close, and sustaining relationships with key customers and the most valuable prospects. Achieving this hyper-focus will require information that supports trusted advisor interactions and much more scientific management of accounts. This means using sales AI to better qualify leads based on real engagement data and support schedules that assign accounts with greater specificity based on actions required or real revenue potential. This is going to force sales operations to shift the focus of their sales technology stacks and systems from reporting on workflow to driving workflow.”
5. Create a new playbook for virtual selling

The dramatic pivot to remote selling will bring the growing disconnect between tried and true "old school" field selling practices and "new school" digital buying to a flash point. Sales managers and sales effectiveness leaders will have their work cut out for them over the next several months, according to Bob Kelly. "They will be forced to adapt their organizations to unaccustomed modes of selling, learning, and collaborating," predicts Kelly. "Sales managers will have to redesign sales process and selling messages, restructure sales roles, replace suddenly obsolete activity models, incentives, and territory assignments. They will retrain the salespeople who must make sense of these changes, then retrain them again as fluid strategies evolve."

Michael Smith agrees that sales leaders need to write a new playbook for virtual selling based on experience coaching over 80 leadership teams how to adapt to virtual selling since the pandemic began. "Veteran/ traditional field sellers will not be immediately comfortable with virtual selling as the tools of the trade change. Many will struggle to quickly shift from face-to-face relationship building and advice over time, to using digital communication channels and virtual, video and collaboration platforms to deliver answers to new school digital clients who want answers in minutes or hours instead of days or weeks," according to Smith. "This will force sales organizations to update or create new sales playbooks to be specific about what is expected of everyone in their new virtual sales roles – including activity expectations, scripts, and time allocation." These new plays will ensure traditional field sellers are comfortable with video skills and the presentations, videos, demos, and content they will need to be effective in a remote environment.

Sales leaders should take the pulse of their sales teams and examine their customer journey map to create a new suite of plays that:

1. Bridge the disconnect between "old school" reps comfortable with face to face selling and "new school" buyers who rely on virtual communications channels;

2. Repair "hot spots" in the buying journey where face-to-face selling must be replaced by a virtual interaction;

3. Replace obsolete activity models based on face-to-face engagement

4. Redesign roles by releasing geography, territory, and functional constraints to improve response

“Veteran/ traditional field sellers will not be immediately comfortable with virtual selling as the tools of the trade change. Many will struggle to quickly shift from face-to-face relationship building and advice over time, to using digital communication channels and virtual,”
Repairing "hot spots" in the buying journey where face-to-face selling must be replaced by a virtual interaction and replacing obsolete "offline" activity models based on face-to-face engagement with more digitally responsive approaches are fundamental to improving remote selling performance. "A big change will be adapting to selling without the benefit of face-to-face interaction in sales meetings or the many sales conferences, events, or trade shows in the industries we serve" shares Ed Keller, the CMO of Guidehouse. "In particular our relationship leaders are facing challenging times when forced to work remotely because they rely heavily on in-person buyer engagement to build the trust needed to acquire net new client relationships."

Bridging the growing disconnect between "old school" reps who are used to travel and relationship building with "new school" virtual communications channels should be a core focus of playbook development. "To meet the needs of modern buyers, virtual sales reps will need to rely more heavily on digital communication channels and virtual, video and collaboration platforms to deliver in minutes or hours what traditional sellers often take days or weeks to deliver," according to Michael Smith, Managing Director of Blue Ridge Partners, who is coaching dozens of organizations through the fundamentals of shifting to a virtual sales model. "This will force many sales organizations to update or create new sales playbooks to be specific about what is expected of everyone in their new virtual sales roles – including activity expectations, scripts, time allocation. This will ensure field sellers are comfortable with video skills and the presentations, videos, demos, and content they will need to be effective in digital channels and on video calls."

“Bridging the growing disconnect between “old school” reps who are used to travel and relationship building with “new school” virtual communications channels should be a core focus of playbook development.”
Perhaps the biggest way shifting to virtual selling can boost sales performance is it gives sales managers much more flexibility to redefine the role of the sales rep in ways that better address rising buyer expectations for fast and complete access to expertise, support, information and advice. This will accelerate the trend towards a more unified sales approach that spans silos to deliver a more seamless customer experience.

Jeff McKittrick emphasizes that the absence of physical limitations allows you to expand coverage beyond traditional geographic, territory and functional constraints and put the best resources in the best spot to advance a deal. “Expertise within a sales organization is often siloed and not broadly available or leveraged across teams,” states McKittrick. “In traditional selling models, these experts are accessed via inefficient methods like email lists and various messaging apps within an organization. When an expert provides the answer to a question, it is usually provided only to the person who asked the question vs. a central, searchable repository where it can be leveraged by the entire organization. Digital selling platforms can break down these walls by taking advantage of technologies that facilitate information sharing and provide more of a “Google-like” experience to finding experts and information in specific context to a company’s technology and solutions.”

The survey responded identified increased customer demand for highly personalized and relevant content as the top factor that can improve seller productivity. Saurabh Goorha, Senior Fellow at Wharton Customer Analytics Initiative agrees that personalized and immersive video and AR content will become more important as online buyers place a premium on the quality and context of content. “The immersive and digital nature of the content needed to fuel virtual channels creates greater potential for better engagement and conversion because it can be more readily personalized to client needs and mapped to the consumer journey graph using AI and Machine Learning models,” according to Goorha.

“Digital selling platforms can break down these walls by taking advantage of technologies that facilitate information sharing and provide more of a “Google-like” experience to finding experts and information in specific context to a company’s technology and solutions.”
Tools and resources to help you take action

There are three actions every sales leader should be taking to effectively lead, enable and manage remote selling teams today, and into the next normal:

1. **Define and quantify how virtual selling can improve commercial model** – Assess the economic potential to dramatically and measurably improve the coverage, control, customer experience and cost of your commercial model in a Virtual AE Design Sprint.

2. **Get control over four core customer data sources to stop flying blind** – Take steps to double your visibility, engagement, speed, and productivity in 60 days by connecting existing customer activity and engagement data to four fundamental sales planning, decision-making and execution capabilities.

3. **Connect the dots between sales development, enablement and engagement** – Create a more integrated, digital, and accountable sales development approach by connecting sales development with sales playbooks, sales enablement technology, and sales performance measurement.

These are outlined briefly below. The experts Faculty of the Revenue Enablement Institute can demonstrate practical examples of all three of these actions in practice at best in class organizations in a 30-minute briefing. And if desired, provide a step by step guidance and help in executing them in your organization.
1. Define and quantify how virtual selling can improve commercial model

Assess and quantify the potential to dramatically and measurably improve the coverage, control, customer experience and cost of your commercial model in a Virtual AE Design Sprint

Most sales leaders know they must act to improve visibility, focus, speed, and engagement to sustain and grow sales productivity during and beyond the crisis. Few know exactly what actions to take. No sales leader has ever experienced anything like the unprecedented disruption, dispersion and behavior change brought on by the pandemic.

As a first priority, sales leaders must help their teams adapt to virtual selling in the crisis. This starts with communicating a new plan to displaced revenue teams. It also includes properly equipping their virtual reps with the four basic tools they will need to operate effectively in a remote environment: unified communications, hardware, network access, collaboration, and sales enablement platforms.

Looking towards the recovery leaders should try to define what their commercial model needs to look like and how it must perform to be successful in a post-COVID economy. To establish a strong business case, sales leaders should define how a virtual selling channel can double visibility, speed, engagement, and productivity. Any organization can dramatically improve the coverage, control, and cost effectiveness of their sales channels by incorporating virtual AE’s into their selling model. A well-designed virtual selling model can also offer buyers the speed of response and experiences they demand without sacrificing cost effectiveness.

A smart way to agree on how and where virtual selling can improve the commercial model is a Virtual AE Design Sprint. A Virtual AE design sprint is a highly collaborative education and strategy exercise that helps teams focus and agree on how they will need to adapt their unique selling models to succeed in the new buying reality. Our design process quickly gets your leadership team to isolate and prioritize the channel characteristics that will drive the greatest contribution to growth, profit, and firm value. Our process optimizes the key channel design trade-offs between coverage and control while balancing cost savings with productivity, speed, visibility, and the customer experience.
By the end of the sprint, the entire sales leadership team should have clarity on the five core questions raised by this analysis:

1. Where do I focus to double down on the most important relationships, activities, and opportunities?
2. How do we stop flying blind by getting better visibility into seller activity and buyer engagement?
3. What plays do we need to modify and develop to adapt to digital selling and buying?
4. How can we get faster by accelerating communication flow and response?
5. What tools do our sellers need to be effective in the new buying reality?

The ultimate goal of a design sprint is to gain agreement across your leadership team and clear line of sight on practical ways to improve sales performance at lower costs by incorporating a virtual AE function into their go-to-market model.

Contact us if you want to get management agreement and a clear set of practical ways to get 50% higher engagement, speed of response and productivity from their sales reps at lower costs by incorporating a virtual AE function into your commercial model.
2. Get control over four core customer data sources to stop flying blind

Double your visibility, engagement, speed, and productivity in 60 days by connecting existing customer activity and engagement data to four basic sales planning, decision-making and execution capabilities

The next step is to stop flying blind, by getting better control over your customer engagement and buyer activity data. This will give leadership the visibility they need to better manage, measure, coach and empower remote revenue teams at the edge of the organization. It will also arm sales teams with the information they need to engage customers and make the right decisions faster.

This will require sales and marketing operations teams to rethink their existing sales and marketing technology stack and adjust their revenue enablement roadmap to prioritize – or add – the insights, automation, and sales AI capabilities critical to virtual rep productivity and effectiveness. Specifically, this means demanding an “80% good enough” picture of buyer engagement and seller activity by using advanced analytics and sales AI integrating four core data sources almost every organization already has – CRM profile data, email, calendar, and content.

Most organizations can get an “80% good enough” picture of buyer engagement and seller activity by using advanced analytics and sales AI to integrate four core data sources almost every organization already has – CRM profile data, email, calendar, and content. It is possible to double your visibility, engagement, speed, and productivity in a few months by connecting this readily available customer activity and engagement data to four basic sales planning, decision-making and execution capabilities:

1. Developing measurements, priorities and pipeline reviews based on actual customer engagement data;
2. Prioritizing opportunities based on data about probability, potential, engagement, and response;
3. Quantify buyer intent on a scale of one to ten based on engagement and buying signals;
4. Recommending the right content or sales play based on actual client response data.
These four steps will give leadership and sales teams alike the visibility they need to better manage, measure, coach and empower remote revenue teams at the edge of the organizations with the information they need to engage customers and make the right decisions faster. If your organization has invested in CRM and any form of digital asset management or sales enablement solution – you should be able to accomplish this in a 60 to 90-day window of time.

Contact us if you want to see an integrated sales development system in action and to learn how you can connect the dots to double visibility, speed, and productivity.
3. Connect the dots between sales development, enablement, and engagement

Create a more integrated, digital, and more accountable sales development approach by connecting sales development with sales playbooks, sales enablement technology, and sales performance measurement.

The research makes it clear that sales leaders are going to have to find fast and effective ways to deliver new skills and a new playbook for digital selling across the organization. They are under pressure to move quickly and adapt to a new, more virtual selling model. This involves training dozens, hundreds, or thousands of remote reps quickly to adapt your selling approach and get new skills in place. Unfortunately, sales leaders lack the luxury of time or even the possibility of pulling large sales teams out of the line and into a classroom environment for traditional training, skill development and role playing as they would in the past.

To retool their sales organizations quickly and enforce the behaviors in execution – sales leaders must look to advanced analytics as a better way to deliver more speed, productivity, and accountability from their revenue teams. This is a big opportunity because most organizations buy and deploy the systems and assets that underlie sales development in a fragmented, siloed and even tribal fashion. Learning management systems are disconnected from the digital asset management and sales enablement systems where playbooks reside. And both are not taking advantage of sales analytics for grading, coaching, enforcement, and performance measurement.

This is because sales training is bought separately from the learning management tools and is disconnected from the systems that store the plays and any measurement of sales performance, adoption, and behavior. Compounding the problem, the sales playbooks, methodologies, and content assets that fuel this system are often developed and deployed independent of these systems by agencies and consulting partners.

There is no good business or technical reason for these systems – which are in common use across most sales organizations – to be separate and disintegrated. They exist in silos purely because they are bought as separate parts from separate vendors by functional experts who lack a strong financial incentive to connect the dots. The dramatic shift to virtual selling will change that dynamic. Sales organizations can no longer afford to automate only “part of the training and development” process. The urgency of remote selling requires these to act as one system that gives sales leaders, managers, and effectiveness executives an end-to-end approach to building skills that can measurably lead to sales and profit outcomes.
The pressure to adapt to crisis is an excellent opportunity to insist that these expensive and important growth asset work together. And work effectively.

For sales development to move at the speed of the market, organizations are going to have to find ways to connect the dots across these systems to make them faster, more “virtual”, and accountable. It is possible to connect the different elements of your sales training, development, and enablement systems to create a more integrated and digitally driven sales development approach by connecting sales development with sales playbooks, sales enablement technology, and sales performance measurement.

By connecting these dots sales leaders can create an integrated sales development approach that is both highly efficient and “closed loop” because it connects training to behavior to performance.

- Training and skill development can be executed virtually by taking advantage of pitch management systems where reps practice and develop role play and presentation videos for evaluation by their peers and managers.
- These videos can be cataloged and connected to a master content library of plays and best practices that can be targeted by process stage, persona, product, industry, or pain point.
● These plays can be targeted and deployed using advanced AI and guided selling tools that recommend the next best sales play, or most relevant content, based on buyer engagement and response data and prior experience.

● Managers can track and measure how this effort and training translate into actual customer engagement and account success by building data-driven KPI that quantify outcomes based on actual seller activity, customer engagement and success.

● The entire process should fuel a feedback loop that continually refines plays, adapts to customer needs, and tightens the connection between training and results.

Contact us if you want to see an integrated sales development system in action and to learn how you can connect the dots to integrate sales development with execution and engagement.
Appendix

1. Primary Research Data
2. Citations: Interviews and Source Materials
3. About the Revenue Enablement Institute
Primary Research Data

Survey Description

The Revenue Enablement Institute executed the Remote Sales Productivity Study to better understand how sales leaders are adapting to the new buying reality and learn ways to improve the productivity and effectiveness of remote selling teams in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Working in partnership with the Sales Management Association, our Faculty of academics and experts conducted over 150 quantitative and qualitative interviews with sales leader, managers and effectiveness professionals in April and May of 2020.

- Collection Date: April 15 – May 31, 2020
- 108 Sales leaders and managers participated in the survey
- Director of Sales, Vice President of Sales and Chief Revenue Officers represent the highest participation by role
- North America and EMEA represent the highest participation by region
- Good sampling of industries with the Technology and Professional Services represent the largest sample
- 39% of the respondents manage a sales org with revenue of $50m to $500mil annual, the other respondents manage reps in firms with revenues of $1b plus, $500m to $1b and less than $50m
- Most respondents manage a B2B sales team (68%) while the remaining managed B to B (11%), B to C (7%) or B to B to C (14%)
- Majority of the respondents manage a team of less than 25 people (45%), 25 to 50 reps (16%), 100 to 500 reps (20%)

Survey Purpose and Objective

Assessing how sales leaders are adapting to the new buying reality and the impact on sales team productivity in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The coronavirus is changing our business reality. Sales organizations and customer success teams are faced with a new challenge as they are being asked to pivot to support more clients remotely. To help organizations succeed, the Revenue Enablement Institute commissioned a study to learn how sales leaders are adapting to the new environment and uncover ways they can successfully enable and empower their remote sales teams in the new normal.
8. How long (in months) do you think the COVID-19 virus will disrupt your market?

97% of participants believe their businesses will be disrupted by on average 16.5 months as they adapt to uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working. Specifically:

- 73% of respondents believe this will disrupt their sales goals for up to 12 months.
- 18% believe it will disrupt it for up to 3 months.

9. To what degree has this changed how you sell?

98% of the respondents feel that this pandemic will change how they sell and will disrupt their sales goals.

10. How long do you expect this disruption to affect your sales goals?

On average, study participants believe their businesses will be disrupted by on average 16.5 months as they adapt to uncertainty, changing buyer behavior, and new ways of working.

11. To what degree will this change your acquisition of new business over the next 6 to 12 months?

New business acquisition - Sales leaders expect a 18% drop in new business acquisition opportunities.
11. To what degree will this change your retention of existing customers over the next 6 to 12 months?

Customer retention – leaders expect a 77% potential decrease in customer retention.

12. To what degree will this change your upsell and cross sells to existing customers over the next 6 to 12 months?

Upsell and cross opportunities - leaders indicated a 42% drop in upsell and cross sell opportunity to existing customers.

13. What are the biggest risks to your revenue plan? Rank in order of importance:

As the new normal begins to emerge, sales leaders are concerned about market demand and the changes they will have to make to their sales process to succeed in the new marketplace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market Demand</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Execution</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Retention</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Generation</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Bandwidth</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand Fulfillment</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score is based on the respondents rank ordering of the 6 options.

Revenue Enablement Institute Survey of 108 sales leaders May 2020

14. Since the COVID-19 crisis, my budget has:

Most organizations have decreased their sales budgets in response to the crisis. 67% of respondents had budget cuts while 31% have held budgets fixed. Only 2% of organizations indicated they had increase in growth funding during the crisis.

15. With my budget change, I have cut or paused spending on:

Most budget cuts not surprisingly came from reductions in travel expenses and physical events and conferences that have been cancelled.
16. How will these changes in customer behavior impact your ability to sell?

Adapting to changing customer expectations and demand for responsiveness is regarded as the top sales productivity challenge by almost three quarters of respondents.
17. Rate how effective your team is at working remotely in the following areas

Managers rated remote working effectiveness as neutral. Not one category was rated as effective.

The areas that were moderately effective included: Customer calls and emails, responding to leads or customers, and collaborating with others

Areas identified as least effective included: Product demonstrations, sales coaching and guidance, and prioritizing and planning opportunities and accounts
18. Rate how effectively your technology infrastructure supports your remote sales team in the following ways:

Sales managers do not feel their technology is effective at supporting their remote selling efforts. Leaders stated leveraging data analytics and AI to gain insight into sales activities will help them better manage their sales team productivity.
19. To what degree has your sales team productivity decreased or increased since working remotely:

Sales team productivity has decreased 20% since the onset of COVID-19 on average.

20. What would help you better manage your sales team productivity?

Visibility into seller activity, customer engagement, forecast commitments, and pipeline health were identified as the top 4 ways to better manage remote sales productivity.
21. What are the biggest sales productivity challenges over the next 6 to 12 months?

Changes in customer behavior, expectations and responsiveness will result in the biggest productivity challenge over the next 6 to 12 months.
### The Biggest Productivity Challenges Over the Next 6 to 12 Months

What would help you better manage your sales team productivity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in customer expectations and responsiveness</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower morale and uncertainty</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in in-person communications (i.e., meetings, etc.)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility into sales activity</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility into opportunity progress</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased ability to coach effectively</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility into account health</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to factual data for more accurate forecasting</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to the right content/info to engage buyers</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info sharing/collaboration across departments</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 5 with one having a very negative effect on selling and 5 having a very positive effect on selling.

Revenue Enablement Institute Survey of 108 sales leaders May 2020
Interviews

1. Raja Banerji, Global Head of Strategic Marketing, Tata Consultancy Services
2. Peter Bingaman, CMO North America, Mercer
3. Mo Katibeh, CMO AT&T
4. Jaime Punishill, Lionbridge
5. Stephen SaLoutos, US Bank
6. Ed Keller, CMO, Guidehouse
7. Ton Verlieg, VP of Global Sales Development, DHL
8. Steve Lucas, CEO, iCIMs
10. Joe Galvin, Chief Research Officer, Vistage International
11. General (ret) Stanley McChrystal, CEO, the McChrystal Group
12. Melinda McLaughlin, CMO Extreme Reach
13. Chris Hummel, CMO of United Rentals
Citations


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About the Revenue Enablement Institute

The mission of the Revenue Enablement Institute is to educate and arm a new generation of growth leaders with the state-of-the-art management tools, skills, capabilities, and practices they will need to accelerate revenue growth and adapt to the new buying reality.

Our faculty of academics and experts are actively working with owners, CEOs, and their growth leadership teams to develop research, education and management tools help them transform sales, marketing, and service system into high performing growth teams.

Our efforts focus on the five key enablers of profitable and sustainable growth.

1. **Leadership** – Successful sales and marketing transformation will require new skills and leadership approaches. The next generation of growth leaders must be coaches that find ways to get revenue teams to work together, and find better ways to use data, information, and technology as force multipliers.

2. **Teamwork** – Growth leaders will need new managerial architectures that break down organizational silos and foster teamwork across sales, marketing, and service at scale across the enterprise. Old hierarchical command and control approaches will be too slow, culturally toxic, and introduce too many points of leakage and failures as revenue opportunities move across functions.

3. **Common Incentives** – Revenue teams can only succeed if they have a common purpose. Growth leaders must define a single scorecard for success that will give disparate sales, marketing, and customer success teams the incentives to work together to grow revenue and customer lifetime value. Hierarchical, functional, and waterfall metrics based on linear sales funnels and independent functional roles will fail to either foster teamwork or address current customer behavior.

4. **Insights** – All customer facing employees need a fully transparent, 360-degree, real-time view of the entire buying journey if they are going to play like a team. Revenue teams must act on buying signals, location-based opportunities, or churn triggers in service within minutes instead of hours or days. Sharing information horizontally across the enterprise to inform and support teams from across geographies, business units, and market segments is now the key to growing revenues, profits, competitiveness and share price.

5. **Return on Selling Assets** – Revenue leaders must find ways to use technology as a force multiplier and team enabler if they expect to succeed by dramatically increasing historically low levels of salesperson productivity, technology adoption and return on selling assets – content, technology, data and automation. To do so, they must find ways to use AI-driven sales tools and workflow automation to automatically enforce new sales methodologies into daily practices, input data into CRM profiles, and deploy all the expensive content, thought leadership, and playbooks created by marketing.

We invite transformation minded CXO’s, CMOS, CSOs and CEOs to participate in our research and education program so they can apply what we learn to build higher performing revenue teams.

Contact us

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