

5 SALES TRENDS TO EMBRACE AFTER COVID-19

By, Troy Harrison

Experts tell us that if there is to be a recovery, it's to be a V-shaped recovery. We are at or near the bottom of the V. That leaves us no place to go but up. Well, let's start going up. There are certain aspects of our profession that will be changed both in the short term and permanently. These changes are not bad, if we embrace them.

1. **Video substituting for phone and in-person activity.** Right now, if you're selling, I'd almost guarantee that you're doing a lot of it by video conference – Zoom, Teams, Skype, or other platforms. You might think this will be a temporary substitute for “real” selling. You will find that some of your customers prefer this type of interaction over face-to-face or phone sales calls. This doesn't have to be a bad thing. Alan Weiss likes to say, “email is one-dimensional; phone is two-dimensional; face to face is three-dimensional.” Let's call a video conference two and a half dimensions; it's somewhere in between phone and in-person.

It's true that when it substitutes for face to face, you lose half a dimension. But – *when you sub a video call for a phone call, you GAIN half a dimension!* And if you can sub video calls for more phone calls (appointments) than you do for face to face calls, you can have a net gain in your sales activity. This is a good thing – so get good at video conferencing. This trend will definitely influence, if not create, the next trend.

2. **More efficient sales calls.** One side effect of the above trend is that your sales calls will become more compressed. Sales dialogues are typically shorter because a lot of the “fluff” of conversations goes away when you're on phone or video – you won't talk as much about the weather, the game last night, or other extraneous “stuff.” Instead, your customer will want you to focus on the matter at hand. You'll find yourself covering the same, or more, ground in 30 minutes (or less) than you used to cover in an hour. One positive result of this could be more sales calls; if more of your appointments are video appointments, they will both be shorter and you won't have to spend time driving between them. Hence, more appointments per day.

What that also means is that, if you're not good at the meat of sales calls (asking great questions and making great presentations, you need to GET good at it. If you don't, you won't get customer time. And speaking of customer time and efficiency, if you're not tracking and recording your customer time, you're going to lose to people who are. To do that, you need to consider the next trend mandatory (too many don't).

3. **CRM.** Don't get me wrong; CRM has been out there for decades – but I'm still shocked at how many companies aren't using it, or aren't using it well. It's time. Actually, it's past time – but if you haven't yet, do it now. CRM facilitates communication among all the people in-house that can affect the customer experience, and if you are dependent upon in-person communication to make the experience a positive one, you're in trouble right now. Your customer information is the most critical and valuable asset you have – beyond your products and even beyond your people.

The key is to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I see even small companies spend months or even a year or more finding “the right” CRM; in the process, you’re losing customer data. There are many systems out there that are cheap or even free that will allow you to be up and running with all your salespeople within days. I use HubSpot. It’s free, online, and it has a really nice mobile app. You don’t have to use it – but you should use SOMETHING. If you decide to switch later, you can always port your data over. But if you don’t have any data, you’re losing sales to sales teams that do. Falling behind is going to be bad for you, because the speed of the sales world is picking up – which accentuates another trend that has been going for awhile:

4. **The end of the Good Time Charlie.** There are salespeople out there – I call them “Good Time Charlies” – whose sales technique consists of telling jokes, laughing, and buying things like lunches, football tickets, etc. Those salespeople are handcuffed right now – it’s hard to buy lunch when you can’t get face to face with your customers. Tickets to sporting events don’t matter much when you can’t GO to sporting events.

The truth is that sales has been pivoting toward more substantive and value-based selling for years, and the “Good Time Charlies” have been losing ground for awhile now – but now, they’re stranded in the water. If you’re one of them, or you employ one of them, it’s time to change. And speaking of change – embrace it. That requires the next trend:

5. **Agility.** Know what? I do think the above four trends will be evergreen after Covid-19. There’s also the possibility that I could be wrong; that one or more of the trends will change (I don’t see it, however). Or, it could be possible that new trends or tech emerges. So – the most important trend going forward is agility. Don’t get locked into a single approach; one of the great things about selling is the constant change.

It’s going to be a Brave New World of selling after we come out of this. The key is to be brave and embrace the new.

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