

Gartner for Sales

**Sales Enablement's  
Response to the  
Developing COVID-19  
Crisis: Week Ending  
3 April 2020**

7 April 2020

# Sales Enablement's Response to the Developing COVID-19 Crisis: Week Ending 3 April 2020

Published 7 April 2020 - ID G00725016 - 4 min read

By Analysts Sales Research Team

Initiatives: Sales Effectiveness and Enablement **and 1 more**

Learn how a group of 90+ sales enablement leaders are responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact. Issues addressed include management of sales teams' productivity, virtual customer engagement and ongoing training of sellers in the wake of the crisis.

## Quick Answer

**What are the top priorities of sales enablement leaders as they support sellers through the COVID-19 crisis?**

- **Productivity of Sales Teams:** Recalibrating workforce deployment to manage demand shifts in product mix while equipping sellers for a post crisis recovery.
- **Virtual Customer Engagement:** Crafting customer messaging to reinforce existing relationships and creating focused interactions with customer stakeholders instead of overwhelming them with undifferentiated COVID-19 content.
- **Ongoing Seller Training:** Rethinking existing structure and content of trainings to be virtual-first and contextualizing them for the current environment.

## More Detail

### Key Take-Aways on Current Outlook and Productivity of Sales Teams

- While estimates of declining customer demand vary, most sales organizations serving multiple industries are experiencing a shift in demand in their product mix due to an asymmetrical impact of the crisis across industries. This creates an imbalance in workforce requirements for sales organizations and pushes them to recalibrate how they deploy sellers across products.
- While sales enablement leaders anticipate a slowdown in the near term, many are focusing on a future rebound. They are equipping their sellers to target existing white spaces by encouraging them to structure customer conversations around post crisis recovery.
- Sales enablement leaders are rethinking the ways they engage with their employees and their customers. Many are trying to make internal and external interactions more fun and interesting through gamification. Some common approaches include conducting a contest to see who

generates the highest number of meetings and maintaining a health and wellness website for employees to have fun events, learn about mental health or share feedback.

- Many sales enablement leaders also view this time as an opportunity to accelerate their digital-first strategies. The current crisis has forced sellers to sell virtually. Enablement leaders are observing high levels of collaboration and engagement, and some agree this could be the new normal.

## Key Take-Aways on Engaging Customers Virtually

- Sales enablement leaders are crafting messages for sellers that reinforce customer relationships in this time of economic uncertainty. Enablement leaders agree that messaging needs to be empathetic and sensitive to the present situation and not be perceived as promotional in nature. Some organizations are specifically focusing these efforts on key customers. One company reported providing conversation playbooks to sellers that highlight work done together with key customers over the past year to help facilitate these conversations.
- With the disruption in customers' businesses, organizations seek to achieve customer loyalty by trying to help customers manage the crisis. While well-intentioned, the increased focus on customer engagement results in customers being inundated with COVID-19-specific content and webinar requests. While customer engagement and empathetic messaging are crucial, engagement requests need to be managed carefully so as to not overwhelm customers with similar, undifferentiated content.
  - Some organizations have started focusing on one-on-one interactions and are trying to create personalized content for customers.
  - It is recommended that organizations create focused interactions with the right stakeholders to ensure better use of the customer's time.

## Key Take-Aways on Ongoing Training in the COVID-19 Crisis

- The COVID-19 crisis is making organizations rethink the content, structure and delivery channels for their training strategies. As the demand for virtual training grows, sales enablement leaders are devoting resources to ensure all existing trainings are available virtually and trainers are equipped to conduct these trainings virtually, too.
- Sales enablement leaders need to identify and prioritize trainings suitable for immediate consumption through virtual channels. Many have agreed that not all trainings are suitable for virtual consumption. In one instance, employees have placed a request to retake a training in-person after the crisis passes, due to its interactive format and personalized content.
- While existing trainings are being repurposed for virtual consumption, sales enablement leaders also acknowledge the need for contextualizing trainings for the current environment. Adapting

the training to current requirements will ensure sellers are equipped to navigate the current complexities and are prepared for the upcoming rebound.

- The consensus view is that training content needs to focus on virtual selling and customer empathy. Most trainings pivot on enabling sellers to leverage collaboration tools for external communications. Embedding customer empathy in sales conversations comes at a close second in terms of training focus, as organizations aim for long-term customer loyalty.
- While most sales training is directed toward sellers, an emerging challenge is equipping managers to coach their teams effectively. It is recommended that sales enablement leaders pay attention to providing adequate manager guidance on coaching sellers for handling the current sales environment.
- As the demand and consumption of virtual training grows, sales enablement leaders need to be mindful of using sellers' time wisely. Setting a cadence around live virtual training provides clarity and structure to the set of activities to pursue and helps align training efforts toward short- and midterm outcomes. Sellers are also encouraged to use this time to pursue on-demand upskilling via virtual trainings as they continue with regular selling activities. Some enablement leaders are crafting microlearnings or short-form, just-in-time content.

## Recommended by the Authors

### ["Next Steps for Sales Leaders After the Initial COVID-19 Disruption"](#)

Use this document to help establish strategies for responding to rapidly shifting market dynamics and drive greater confidence into both customers and sellers to own the market narrative with preplanned responses.

### ["Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resource Center"](#)

Visit Gartner's resource center for a growing number of resources to guide executives in sales and all corporate functions in responding to the outbreak.

### ["Remote Work Policies Template for Sales Leaders During Pandemics"](#)

There is a rising need for remote work arrangements, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Heads of sales responsible for strategizing how the sales function operates during pandemics can use this template to operationalize remote work policies for their sales force.

### ["Gartner Peer Connect Sales Community"](#)

Participate in ongoing discussions with chief sales officers, heads of sales operations and sales enablement on topics, including how they are responding to COVID-19 and its related impact on their organizations and customers.

## Recommended For You

6 Critical Changes That Affect the Future of Asset Maintenance

The Importance of OT Integration for Industrie 4.0

Strategic Life Science Regulatory Information Management: From Fragmented to Holistic

Detect and Prevent Internal Fraud With Effective SOD Controls

Finance Business Alignment Tool

© 2020 Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Gartner is a registered trademark of Gartner, Inc. and its affiliates. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed in any form without Gartner's prior written permission. It consists of the opinions of Gartner's research organization, which should not be construed as statements of fact. While the information contained in this publication has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, Gartner disclaims all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. Although Gartner research may address legal and financial issues, Gartner does not provide legal or investment advice and its research should not be construed or used as such. Your access and use of this publication are governed by [Gartner's Usage Policy](#). Gartner prides itself on its reputation for independence and objectivity. Its research is produced independently by its research organization without input or influence from any third party. For further information, see "[Guiding Principles on Independence and Objectivity](#)."

**Learn more: [gartner.com/en/sales/role/sales-enablement](https://gartner.com/en/sales/role/sales-enablement)**

## **Become a Client**

Get access to this level of insight all year long — plus contextualized support for your strategic priorities — by becoming a client.

**[gartner.com/en/become-a-client](https://gartner.com/en/become-a-client)**

**U.S.: 1 800 213 4848**

**International: +44 (0) 3331 306 809**

## **About Gartner**

Gartner, Inc. (NYSE: IT) is the world's leading research and advisory company and a member of the S&P 500. We equip business leaders with indispensable insights, advice and tools to achieve their mission-critical priorities today and build the successful organizations of tomorrow.

Our unmatched combination of expert-led, practitioner-sourced and data-driven research steers clients toward the right decisions on the issues that matter most. We are a trusted advisor and an objective resource for more than 15,000 enterprises in more than 100 countries — across all major functions, in every industry and enterprise size.

To learn more about how we help decision makers fuel the future of business, visit [gartner.com](https://gartner.com).