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Benchmarks on Sales Enablements' Response to COVID-19: Update for Week of 27 April

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Learn how a group of over 50 sales enablement leaders is responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact. Issues addressed include cost optimization, preparation for the future, organizational cash flow and sales force training.

Quick Answer

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

- **Driving Cost Optimization:** Collaborating with finance to conduct scenario-based planning and jointly formulating different cost optimization strategies that might be necessary based on the severity and duration of the crisis
- **Increasing Organizational Cash Flow:** Aligning seller compensation and incentives with customer payments to improve the organization's liquidity challenges
- **Training the Sales Force:** Working with L&D to create microtraining or bitesize training that promotes higher knowledge consumption and retention among sellers
- **Preparing for the Future:** Reimagining the role of sales enablement as a function in a post-COVID-19 future and building resilience into operations by anticipating and preparing for potential long-term disruptions from the ongoing crisis

More Detail

Key Take-Aways on Cost Optimization Strategies

- While sales leaders have been focused on reducing costs using tactics such as hiring freezes, salary increase deferrals and furloughs, they are now working closely with finance to **conduct scenario-based planning** and identify the different cost optimization strategies that might be necessary based on the severity and duration of the crisis. Cost optimization plans should be based the following considerations:
 - **Execution** – The relative ease of executing the cost reduction plan
 - **Immediacy** – The speed of cost reduction benefit to the organization

- **Disruption** – The level of risk or disturbance caused by executing the cost reduction plan
- **Recovery** – The impact of challenges faced when the organization returns to its normal state of operation
- Sales enablement, as a function, is now facing increased pressure to drive higher productivity and redistribute cost savings from training and virtual selling. As organizations are moving toward zero-based budgeting, it is critical for sales to **work with finance to mutually agree upon cost optimization strategies.**

Key Take-Aways on Increasing Organizational Cash Flow

- With organizations in every industry facing liquidity challenges and struggling to maintain cash at hand, the **pressure is on sellers to collect on bills and persuade customers to release payments.** This, combined with possible cuts in training budgets, is posing a challenge for sales enablement leaders as they continue working toward their goals of maintaining seller productivity.
- Sales enablement leaders are now **evaluating sales compensation plans and incentives** for the new selling environment. As the pressure for faster release of customer payments is increasing, some organizations are considering linking seller compensation plans to customer payments. Organizations we talked to are considering paying 50% commission on signing and the remaining 50% on payment. Another idea is to pay commission on shipments but retract the commission if the customer doesn't pay on time. Sellers also face claw-backs when customers cancel an order before delivery.

Key Take-Aways on Training the Sales Force

- As sales enablement leaders continue contextualizing existing training for virtual consumption, there is a need to understand sellers' e-learning consumption patterns as well as interest levels. Leaders are working with sales managers and L&D to create **microtraining or bitesize training that increases training consumption and retention** among sellers and makes it easier for sales managers to coach sellers.
- To help sellers navigate the challenging selling environment, key training focus areas organizations have identified include guidance on virtual engagement with customers, COVID-19 related sales playbooks and soft-skill development for digital selling.

Key Take-Aways on Preparing for a Post-COVID-19 Future

- Organizations are **rethinking the focus of sales enablement as a function** and anticipate that the economic fallout from the ongoing crisis will have long-term implications for sales enablement. As pressure on businesses rises, increased scrutiny of sales enablement budget

outlays is an expected outcome, and this will have an impact on how sales enablement functions support selling activities in the medium and long term.

- To build resilience during this economic disruption and prepare for a post-crisis future, it is recommended that sales enablement leaders start considering the following strategies:
 - **Limit sales tools and collateral investments** — Optimize sales enablement strategy by prioritizing the collateral, tools and technology needed to sell more efficiently and effectively in the current business environment.
 - **Support noncommercial customer engagement** — Build stronger relationships with customers by assimilating market information and sharing back strategies that would enable customers to operate their businesses better.
 - **Provide virtual onboarding for sellers** — Experiment with ways to onboard talent virtually without compromising on time to productivity.

Recommended by the Authors

“Benchmarks on Sales Enablements’ Response to COVID-19: Update for Week of 20 April”

Use this document to learn how a group of over 50 sales enablement leaders is responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact in the week of 20 April.

“Sales Operations Leaders’ Response to the COVID-19 Crisis: Week Ending 03 April 2020”

Use this document to learn how a group of over 50 sales enablement leaders is responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact in the week of 3 April.

“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 among 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.

Recommended For You

Benchmarks on Sales Enablements’ Response to COVID-19: Update for Week of 20 April

Sales Enablement’s Response to the Developing COVID-19 Crisis: Week Ending 27 March 2020

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

Key Actions for Sales Enablement Leaders Responding to the COVID-19 Disruption

Sales Enablement RACI Matrix

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