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

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Learn how a group of over 50 sales enablement leaders are responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its economic impact. Issues addressed include workforce deployment and rightsizing decisions, management of sales teams' productivity, and commercial messaging during the ongoing crisis.

Quick Answer

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

- **Sizing and Structuring the Sales Force:** Rightsizing the sales force after evaluating the criticality of different sales tasks and after gauging the suitability of virtual selling in a postcrisis environment.
- **Sales Force Productivity:** Motivating sellers and keeping them engaged during this period of uncertainty by driving ongoing communication that is transparent, informative and uplifting. Additionally, using gamification techniques to drive healthy competition among sellers and improve sales teams' performance.
- **Commercial Messaging:** Ensuring customer engagement by sharing business intelligence and tailored commercial insights that help customers effectively navigate business complexity during and after the crisis.

More Detail

Key Takeaways on Rightsizing the Sales Force

- Sales enablement leaders recognize the importance of empathy and postcrisis needs in their own decision-making as they **evaluate rightsizing decisions** in their organizations. At present, the majority of the organizations are not considering layoffs but are **furloughing employees** to reduce costs while ensuring preparedness for an economic rebound.
- Rightsizing sales teams by laying off employees is being viewed as an extreme step for now, but some leaders are viewing this as an **opportunity to terminate low-performing reps and permanently resize their sales force** as they anticipate a "new normal" in the post-COVID-19

world. Being forced to sell remotely provides an opportunity for organizations to reevaluate the criticality of different sales tasks and gauge the suitability of virtual selling in a noncrisis environment. In one instance, an organization found that while its sellers were unable to execute certain sales activities due to the virtual nature of current customer interactions, there was no discernable adverse impact on the customer. This has prompted its sales leaders to **consider continuing remote selling even in regular business conditions** and the downstream impact on salesforce deployment and headcount.

Key Takeaways on Managing Workforce Productivity and Focus

- **Rebound readiness is the biggest concern** for sales enablement leaders and companies are wary of losing furloughed employees to competitors. Sales enablement leaders need to evaluate the benefits of short-term cost savings against long-term rebound readiness and **keep furloughed employees engaged so they don't leave quickly when conditions improve.**
- **Keeping sellers motivated and engaged during this period of uncertainty** is challenging for sales enablement leaders. Here are some ways they are addressing this issue:
 - Driving **ongoing communication** with sellers with messaging that is transparent, informative and uplifting.
 - Helping sellers **focus on the future** by looking at incremental sales opportunities and encouraging them to drive future growth by preparing for upcoming sales calls and adapting to virtual selling.
- Sales enablement leaders are using the seller downtime to drive training and coaching initiatives. The focus of these training modules includes, but is not restricted to, effective **virtual selling, managing a team remotely, and tools and technology for effectively conducting meetings.** To ensure rebound readiness, sales enablement leaders are also looking at ways to enable sellers to **"re-think" their approach to selling.**
- **Gamification of sales efforts** is another way sales enablement leaders are driving not just employee engagement but also key business outcomes. In one instance, an organization has set up a point system and is awarding points to the sellers who enter their meetings into CRM and create new opportunities for business. This helps them keep the sales team engaged and excited.

Key Takeaways on Commercial Messaging and Customer Engagement

- A concerted effort exists around developing commercial insights to engage customers. Sales organizations are **relying on cross-functional capabilities**, knowledge of subject matter experts and war-room sessions to share intelligence and develop meaningful insights to drive customer engagement.

- Sellers are being trained on **striking a balance** between helping their clients make sense of the overwhelming amount of information available and sharing commercial insights tied to their offerings.
- Empathetic customer messaging is recommended, but customers are getting overwhelmed with the question *“How can we help?”* The consensus view among sales enablement leaders currently, is that this is perhaps the worst question to ask customers at this time:
 - Given the uncertainty of the current crisis, most customers are not aware of what they need from sales organizations, leading sellers to the trap of commoditization, where customers invariably ask for price discounts or extension of payment cycles.
 - Sales organizations need to use the Challenger approach in generating commercial insights and adapting them to the current crisis. One way of implementing this to **approach the customer with a statement instead of a question: “Here is how we can help.”**
- Here are some steps sales organizations are taking to engage customers during this crisis:
 - **Help customers revisit their long-term strategies** to test assumptions about what changes the customer needs to make, temporarily, or permanently, to succeed in the immediate future while still progressing toward long-term goals.
 - Synthesize market insights and repackage them as **business insights** relevant for the customer, and help them make sense of implications.
 - Collaborate with different functions at the customer organization to understand the current and potential long-term **business impact on the customer.**

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 our 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”](#)

A rising need exists 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 forces.

[“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

[Rationalization Drivers, Objectives, and Benefits Template](#)

[Architectural Impact Assessment Forms \(Discover Financial\)](#)

[Rationalize IT Assets](#)

[Triaging EA Project Engagement \(Baker Hughes\)](#)

[Business Leader's Technology Buyer's Guide \(CareFusion\)](#)

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