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# **Build Key Seller Skills for Successful Virtual Selling**

Sales enablement leaders need to ensure their frontline sales talent have the skills to succeed in a virtual selling environment. Use this research to understand the critical virtual selling competencies and behaviors and how to drive them in the salesforce.



## Overview

The 2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey shows that 75% of customers often prefer to learn and engage using digital channels. In the virtual environment, sales enablement leaders must ensure their sellers have appropriate virtual selling competencies.

## Key Findings

- Virtual selling continues to be extremely common despite the gradual return of inperson work.
- Based on the 2022 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey, most B2B purchases were completed using digital commerce.
- Sales enablement leaders can no longer retain their teams' competitive edge unless they reconfigure their frontline talent strategies to meet the demands of a virtual selling environment.
- The 2019 Gartner B2B Buyer Survey found that Sense Making ensures a commercial advantage for sellers in an information-rich virtual environment by increasing customer decision confidence.

## Recommendations

To enable sellers to effectively engage in virtual selling:

- Determine the key competencies and associated skills sellers need to meet changing customer expectations, such as the increased preference for digital channels.
- Promote digital dexterity by showing sellers how to apply new technology to their selling.
- Build data literacy by teaching sellers tactics to find and validate data to share with customers.
- Equip sellers with the skills and tools needed to engage in Sense Making behaviors to increase customer confidence in buying decisions.

## Emerging Seller Competencies for Virtual Selling

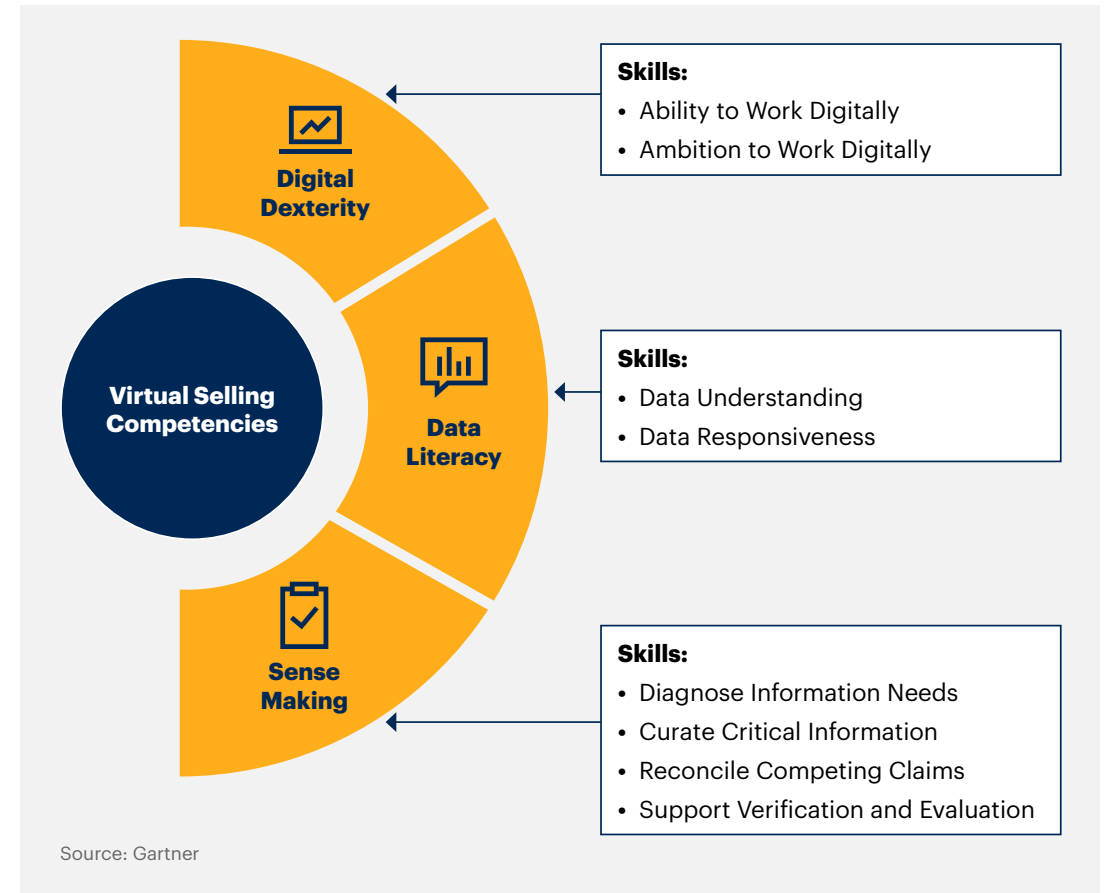
With remote and hybrid work still relatively common, it is no surprise customers are also opting to interact with suppliers virtually. Consequently, 74% of CSOs view improving virtual customer engagement as highly important, and 79% of surveyed CSOs indicate that improving seller digital dexterity is highly important.

The increasing technology use required by virtual selling creates significant opportunities for data-literate sellers to extract value from the available data, whether to develop competitive selling strategies or share relevant insights with customers. For instance, tools that capture customers' digital body language and turn the findings into insights can help create a more tailored and high-value sales experience.

To elevate sales performance in the virtual environment, add these three key seller competencies to your seller competency profiles (see Figure 1):

- Digital dexterity
- Data literacy
- Sense Making

Figure 1: Virtual Selling Competencies for Sellers

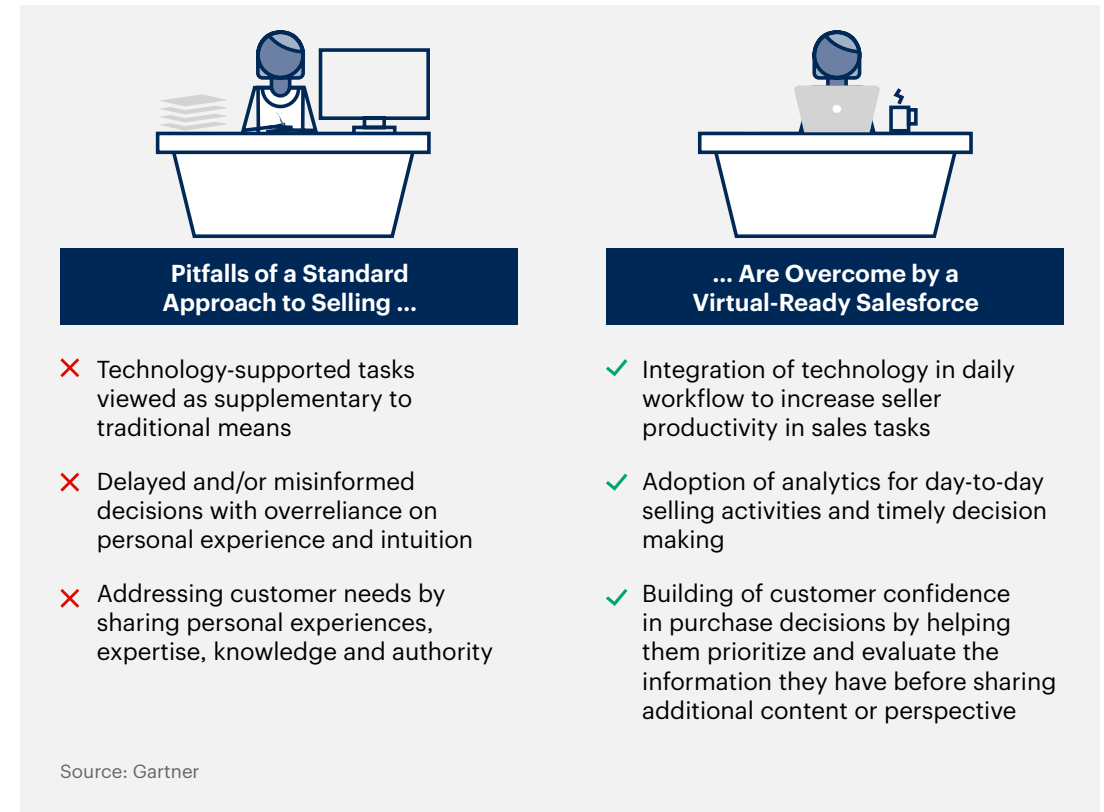


Before introducing or developing training for virtual selling competencies, align with sales leadership to determine the need to update seller competency profiles. This alignment will ensure the urgency for updating selling skills becomes a sales organizationwide priority and supports the company's long- and short-term strategic objectives. Ask the following questions to help initiate these discussions among leadership:

- What are our current business and related talent objectives? Does our current competency framework continue to support these objectives?
- What do our sellers need to know about how their customers' buying process has evolved, and how should this knowledge affect how our sellers engage with their customers?
- What can enablement and other organizational resources provide to help promote and develop these virtual selling competencies?

To demonstrate how virtual selling competencies are relevant to the seller workflow and drive adoption, highlight the obstacles these competencies help overcome (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Business Need for Virtual Selling Competencies



## Digital Dexterity

Digital dexterity is the combination of a seller's ambition and ability to effectively apply technology to improve business outcomes.

A seller's digital dexterity can take various forms. It includes basic behaviors, such as using digital tools to effectively collaborate with remote colleagues. It also includes higher-order activities, such as leveraging an organization's artificial intelligence (AI) and predictive modeling capabilities to decide the next selling motion.

### The Markers of Effective Digital Dexterity

Use the examples listed in Table 1 to understand what to prioritize while developing enablement tools and training for sellers, and to assess and address seller skills gaps.

Table 1: Sample Effective and Ineffective Seller Behaviors for Digital Dexterity

Skill	Skill Description	Effective Behaviors	Ineffective Behaviors
<b>Ambition to Work Digitally</b>	Supports digitalization of personal tasks	Willingly inquires about and attempts to use digital tools in daily workflow	Treats tool use as a "checklist" exercise
<b>Ambition to Work Digitally</b>	Leverages technology for collaboration and shares best practices	Anticipates the need for and invites experts from other geographies to join virtual customer meetings	Primarily builds customer engagement strategies independently, relying solely on personal or immediate team's knowledge
<b>Ability to Work Digitally</b>	Ensures interactivity of virtual customer conversations	Uses different technologies, such as polling questions, to increase engagement during virtual meetings	Uses collaboration tools to only passively present supplier information and solutions
<b>Ability to Work Digitally</b>	Consults digital platforms for customer understanding	Consistently uses digital systems (various channels, tools, etc.) to build a comprehensive view of customer information	Relies solely on customer interactions to source relevant information
<b>Ability to Work Digitally</b>	Selects best-fit communication channel and strategy	Selects the most appropriate content and formats it according to the communication medium	Determines the communication medium without considering customer preferences and the purpose of the communication

Source: Gartner

## Assessment Criteria for Identifying Digital Dexterity Gaps

The next step in building virtual selling competencies is to periodically assess seller progress to evaluate digital dexterity levels. Equip sales managers with the questions listed below to diagnose gaps in sellers' digital dexterity levels. The answers to these questions can be subjective assessments of proficiency (e.g., a noted discomfort with a specific behavior), or more objective (e.g., completing regular tests to demonstrate competency). Sales enablement can then address consistent skills gaps at scale through training and communication.

### Use of Digital Tools to Develop a Comprehensive Customer Understanding:

- How often does the seller use the platforms that provide customer information?
- How well does the seller navigate the customer's digital landscape, using digital capabilities such as microsites, to understand the customer's business priorities and challenges?

### Selection of Best-Fit Communication Channel:

- How often does the seller consider the communication channel that will match the customer's communication preferences?
- How well does the seller use the available organizational guidance to assess the need for a digital tool versus seller-facilitated customer interaction?

### Interaction in Virtual Conversations:

- How familiar is the seller with possible solutions to proactively engage customers who are minimally participating in meetings?
- How well does the seller use technologies to make virtual conversations interactive with the customer?

### Remote Collaboration:

- How often does the seller successfully involve experts from remote geographies as needed?
- How well can the seller use tools that allow real-time collaboration with peers and clients in various locations?

### Digitalization of Daily/Regular/Redundant Tasks:

- To what extent does the seller leverage existing networks to learn about technology that can improve their efficiency and productivity?
- How well can the seller integrate digital tools in their daily workflow?

## Data Literacy

Data literacy is a seller's ability to read, write and communicate sales data in context.

Data literacy captures sellers' ability to understand relevant data and create insights to inform next steps in a sales interaction.

Nearly one in four respondents to Gartner's 2022 Chief Data Officer Agenda Survey (23%) rated poor data literacy as a Top 3 roadblock to the success of their data and analytics initiatives. (See [CDAOs Must Engage Their Stakeholders to Foster Data Literacy and Deliver the Value of Data and Analytics.](#)) In 2022, most surveyed CSOs (74%) viewed improving digital literacy among sellers as highly important.

Closing this data literacy gap is important since sellers must be data literate to draw relevant, actionable insights from data for improved sales decision making, such as next steps in a sales interaction.

### The Markers of Effective Data Literacy

Use the examples listed in Table 2 to understand the markers of data literacy.

Table 2: Sample Effective vs. Ineffective Seller Behaviors for Data Literacy

Skill	Skill Description	Effective Behaviors	Ineffective Behaviors
<b>Data Understanding</b>	Comprehends foundational data concepts	Selects the right data and appropriately matches it to changing customer context and needs.	Selects metrics based on easily available data and uses his or her own interpretation of data concepts.
<b>Data Responsiveness</b>	Contextualizes and leverages data	Validates data findings through offered self-service tools to share new insights with customers.	Relies on customers to contextualize data-based conclusions for their own business.
<b>Data Responsiveness</b>	Deploys analytics and related tools	Prioritizes next-best seller actions based on sales analytics and fieldlevel observations of how customers buy.	Resists the use of simple analytical tools in daily activities and gravitates toward traditional, gut-based decision making instead.

Source: Gartner

## Assessment Criteria for Identifying Data Literacy Gaps

Equip managers with the following questions to help assess skills gaps among sellers and then close those gaps with training and coaching campaigns:

### Comprehension of Foundational Data Concepts:

- To what extent does the seller understand basic data concepts, such as key performance metrics?
- How well can the seller apply these concepts to select relevant data for applicable sales tasks?

### Contextualization of Data Findings:

- To what extent does the seller communicate and contextualize data findings based on the customer's specific context and needs?
- How well can the seller contextualize these findings to address specific customer needs during their purchase journey?

### Deployment of Analytics and Related Tools:

- How often does the seller use the analytics provided by sales operations for sales tasks?
- How well can the seller use analytics tools like dashboards to understand their organization's focus and/or measure their own performance?



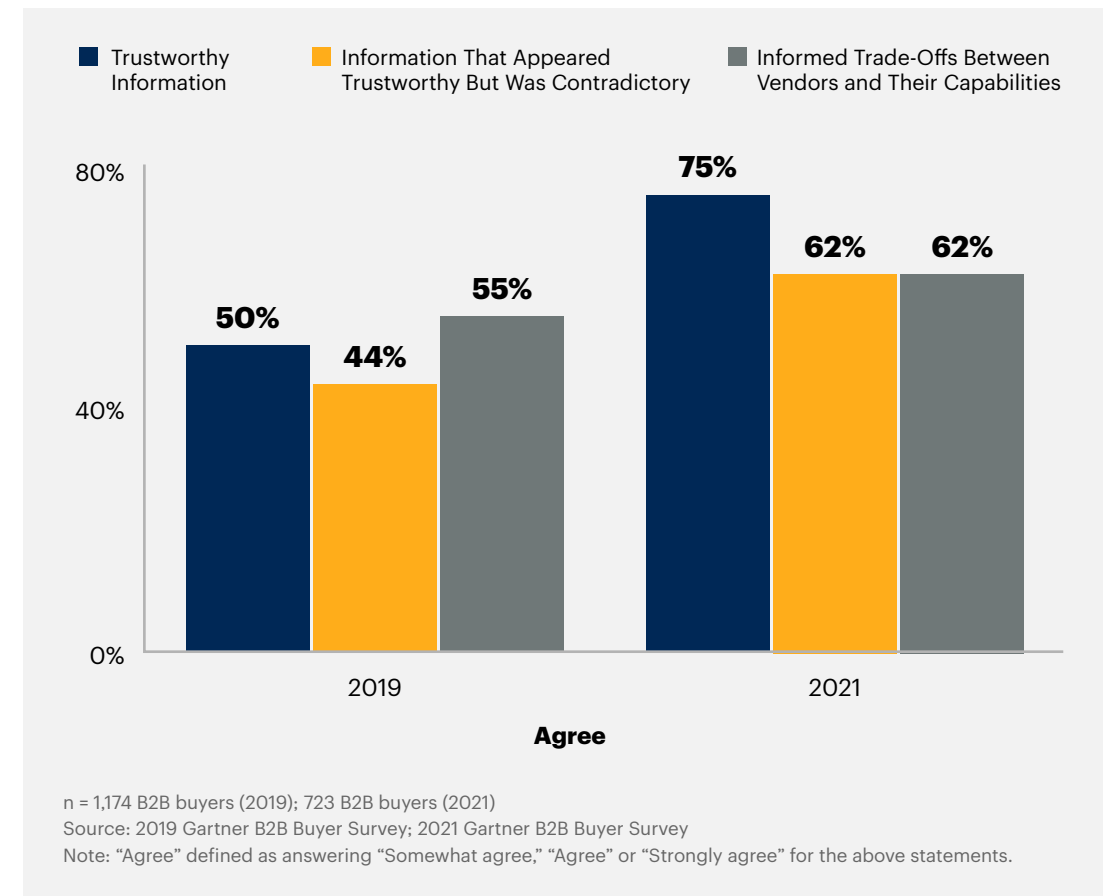
## Sense Making

Sense Making is an information sharing approach that guides buyers toward a clearer, more rationalized view leading to more confident purchase decisions.

In the past few years, buyers have reported a dramatic shift to virtual buying, while also struggling with the difficulty of making a purchase decision in an information-saturated environment (see Figure 3). Sense Making, helping customers make sense of the information they've encountered to make confident purchase decisions, is a skill to help sellers address this challenge.

Sellers who take a Sense Making approach are likely to be more successful than those who do not, regardless of their sales methodology. Sellers who adopt Sense Making behaviors are able to reduce skepticism and build buyer confidence about the information they're using to make a purchase decision. This translates to a far higher likelihood of closing high-quality, low-regret deals among sellers who use a Sense Making approach compared to those who don't.

Figure 3: Heightened Erosion of Buyer Confidence  
Percentage of Buyers



Use the examples listed in Table 3 to understand Sense Making behaviors.

Table 3: Example Effective vs. Ineffective Seller Behaviors for Sense Making

Skill	Skill Description	Effective Behaviors	Ineffective Behaviors
<b>Diagnose</b>	Diagnose information needs	Develops hypotheses about customer job completion before engaging customer; asks questions to quickly prove or disprove hypotheses	Prioritizes actions with customers that satisfy sales processes over confidence-building measures
<b>Connect</b>	Curate critical information	Prescriptively guides the customer to the key points within each information source	Provides more information than is necessary to satisfy customer needs
<b>Clarify</b>	Clarify critical information	Uses questions to guide the customer to their own judgment	Offers opinion to resolve conflict between sources
<b>Simplify</b>	Reconcile competing information	Helps customers understand how various pieces of information relate to each other	Substitutes opinions based on experience and personal knowledge for actual synthesis
<b>Collaborate</b>	Support verification and evaluation	Offers guidance on how the customer should verify and validate information	Offers opinion and judgment based on unverifiable experience or knowledge

Source: Gartner

## Assessment Criteria for Identifying Sense Making Gaps

Equip managers with the following questions to help assess Sense Making gaps among sellers. This can help determine which gaps are best addressed through broad-based talent development measures.

### Identifies Information Needs:

- To what extent does the seller anticipate and proactively bring up customer information challenges?
- Does the seller identify opportunities for teaching information that the customer may have missed or overlooked?

### Curating Information:

- To what extent does the seller strategically teach the customer back to the supplier's unique differentiators?
- To what extent does the seller offer guidance to the customer on how to evaluate information sources?
- Does the seller infer customers' information consumption preferences from social media behavior?

### Clarifying Information:

- To what extent does the seller use questions to guide the customer to their own judgment as to the truth of competing claims?
- How well can the seller help customers understand the root cause of the perceived divergence between two claims?

### Synthesizing Information:

- To what extent does the seller help customers understand how pieces of information relate to each other?
- How well can the seller provide a customer with a framework or tools for understanding a body of information?

### Supporting Verification and Evaluation:

- How often does the seller offer guidance on how the customer should verify and validate information?
- How often does the seller flag untrusted supplier information for internal review?


## Conclusion

To successfully meet the needs of a virtual selling environment, sales organizations must reconfigure their sales talent strategy. Nearly all sellers will meet with prospects and clients virtually at least once during a sales cycle as buyers prefer omnichannel purchase experiences. Sales enablement leaders must ensure sellers are able to meet buyers according to their preferences and capitalize on virtual selling opportunities.

Use the frontline seller competency tool to begin developing a comprehensive seller competency grid comprising foundational, differentiated and virtual selling skills (see Tool: [Frontline Seller Competency Generator](#)).

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