

Sales Leader's Guide *to* Virtual Selling

Key Virtual Selling Techniques to Enable Your Sales Team



ABSTRACT

Virtual selling is not new—and is here to stay. Even before the pandemic, there was already an upward trending adoption of selling moving to digital channels. But the "new normal" caused by COVID-19 has pushed even field sales teams to adapt to selling virtually. A recent Gartner study expects that by 2025, 80% of B2B sales interactions will occur in digital channels.

We created this guide because making the shift from in-person to virtual selling **is more than just moving your meetings online**. For example, some buyers are only comfortable buying in-person. It's harder to keep a prospect's attention on a virtual meeting, which is a more distracting environment.

To thrive selling remotely, your sales team must master a new set of skills to connect and build relationships with customers—and keep them engaged virtually! In this guide, you'll find our top virtual selling techniques your sales team needs to know to master selling in a virtual environment.

THE END OF THE HANDSHAKE

Something as simple and subtle as a handshake has gone away, maybe for good. Today, the idea of sharing the same air and possibly sharing germs through contact with strangers has become something we are advised to avoid. Selling is different right now, and we don't have a choice but to adapt.

In a (pre-COVID) study, management experts at the [University of Iowa](#) declared handshakes "more important than agreeableness, conscientiousness, or emotional stability" when analyzing interactions during job interviews. Countless other studies have shown that a handshake can improve the quality of an interaction, producing "a higher degree of intimacy and trust within a matter of seconds." This conclusion applies to sales as well.

So how do you replicate something as subtle and ubiquitous as a handshake when you can't meet in person?

To increase your chances of success, in addition to all of the traditional selling skills you must perfect, you need to focus on the 4 E's of connecting virtually: environment, energy, engagement, and empathy.

ENVIRONMENT: CREATING THE PERFECT VIRTUAL SALES EXPERIENCE

Managing a virtual environment requires thoughtful design, preparation, and the right toolset. As important as the virtual environment is for connecting with customers and prospects these days, it's often left up to chance and trial and error. You don't need to create an expensive broadcasting studio at home, but here are six best practices that will help your sales team build the perfect virtual sales environment.

Meeting Platform

First and foremost, every sales rep needs to be highly proficient using their virtual meeting platform. They should have a clear understanding of the tool's features and settings and making sure they have a strong internet connection to avoid interruptions. Before each call, reps need to have all their materials ready and conduct testing to ensure everything is working. We also encourage reps to log in early and have the participant's log-in information handy if anybody has trouble joining the call.

Attire

While most of us are still working from home, first impressions matter; you should look professional and avoid busy patterns as these can get distorted on video calls. Choose your

attire to match your prospect as they would typically dress in their office work setting, regardless of their current situation.

Background

Take the time to clear the space around you to minimize distractions. Your video background should complement your clean appearance. Most meeting software also includes virtual backgrounds. These work best if you have good lighting—and even better if you have a green screen. A simple, clean, grey, or white wall behind you makes an excellent background for video meetings and recordings.

Lighting

To achieve the most flattering lighting, make sure to direct the light source to your face and avoid side and backlighting. Consider using a ring or clip-on light for best results and to minimize glare and reflection on glasses. These are inexpensive upgrades that can improve your virtual appearance.

WebCam

Your webcam is your new suit. Many laptops, even the latest models, still come with low-quality webcams. Investing in high-definition webcams will drastically improve the quality of your on-camera appearance.

Camera Placement

When it comes to camera placement, for best results, use the rule of thirds. Place your eyes/focus in the top third of the viewing window. This setup will create a perfect balance between you and your background. Ensure that when you're looking at your webcam lens – which will give prospects the impression that you're making eye contact with them.

Audio Quality

Audio is as important as video in terms of making a great impression and a quality virtual meeting. When jumping on a call, take appropriate measures to reduce background noise. Besides other people talking, consider turning fans off, closing the windows to prevent outside noise, and turning off sound notifications from all your devices. In situations where you can't avoid background noise, use the mute button when not talking. Finally, test your headset's volume so that it's not too low or loud, and consider investing in a high-quality headset for the best audio quality.

ENERGY: PRIMING YOUR MIND AND BODY TO MASTER YOUR DELIVERY

Zoom fatigue (and virtual meeting fatigue in general) is real. A [Harvard Business Review article, How to Combat Zoom Fatigue](#), suggests that being constantly on camera, focusing directly on the other person, and being forced to be "always on" can be emotionally and mentally draining. Yet we're doing more virtual meetings than ever.

The relative ease of booking a virtual meeting and the growing popularity of online calendaring applications make it too easy for our colleagues, clients, and prospects to book us into back-to-back meetings—often not even allowing for a break between calls. As sales professionals, the need to show up like you're there in person is even more critical now—even if you've been on six hours of virtual meetings with no breaks

So how do you show up with energy?

Here are six recommendations to prime your mind and body for your virtual sales calls.

#1 Take back your schedule: Block out transition time. Don't allow your calendar to be booked back-to-back with essential meetings. Quality over quantity will win every time with online meetings.

#2 Take a break: Use that 15 minutes between minutes to step outside, get some fresh air and sunshine, breathe. Time away from the screen will help you stay more alert when you are in front of it.

#3 Move around before important meetings: My colleague has a mini-trampoline and has been known to bounce aggressively before a video shoot or important virtual meeting. It gets the blood flowing, increases energy, and changes how you show up. A set of air squats, pushups, or jumping jacks can do the same thing.

#4 Stand for important meetings: According to the *Forbes* article [Why You Shouldn't Give A Presentation Sitting Down](#), you do think better on your feet—and you present better too.

According to the article, students focus better and longer when they stand. This conclusion also goes for salespeople, even though you may not be physically in the room with your customer, standing to present changes, your physiology, mindset, and posture.

#5 Practice smiling: Turn on your camera and practice smiling. Smiling is a choice; it's contagious, and it demonstrates interest and energy. Look at yourself in the mirror (webcam) and ask whether you look engaging and like somebody you'd buy something from.

#6 Take care of your health: Get a good night's rest, hydrate, and eat regularly. Mostly when such a large portion of sales professionals now work from home, it's easy to work too much and

forget to take care of yourself. Your routine is incredibly important to remain focused and energized.

EMPATHY: UNDERSTANDING YOUR BUYERS SIDE OF THE TABLE

Making a point to build a more personal relationship with a customer or prospect, even over a virtual call, is extremely important. Understanding where the person is coming from—literally and figuratively—can help you make that connection. Spending time before a meeting to familiarize yourself with their background, their company, and their potential challenges and opportunities can go a long way toward helping you connect more deeply.

Empathy is about trying to see things from the other person's perspective. How has the pandemic affected their company and them personally? Can you ascertain how they've been impacted by the loss of access to customers or the shutdown of certain areas of the economy? The pandemic affects people and companies very differently. Having some perspective of how they may have been impacted can improve how you show up, ask questions and listen, and how sensitive you are to their situation.

How have their needs changed from before the pandemic? What can you do to meet those needs?

Looking at them in the eye, asking questions, practicing active listening, and attempting to understand their perspective will help you build a relationship with that individual and ultimately put you in a better position to help them in the future.

Selling in a virtual world presents some new challenges, but the skills highlighted above are applicable in the current and post-COVID-19 world. Just like improving your selling skills should remain a continuous goal, you should commit to learning and maximizing your virtual expertise.

The virtual world is continuously changing, and there are new techniques and technologies to leverage all the time. It's difficult to predict how the sales landscape will change over the coming months and years, but showing up with energy, engaging your customer, and demonstrating empathy will serve you well and never go out of style.

ENGAGEMENT: KEEPING YOUR PROSPECTS ATTENTION

Engaging a customer or prospect in a virtual meeting poses unique challenges. People's tendency to multitask and get distracted makes it particularly challenging to keep the meeting focused—especially when you can't always read the audience.

Whenever possible, turn on your video camera and encourage customers to do the same. They may decline, but our experience is that if you turn your camera on, most of the time, customers will do the same.

The good news is that people are much more comfortable in virtual meetings and on video than they were even a few months ago. Having an open dialogue on two-way video is the next best thing to being there in person.

Once you've got your video camera turned on, ensure you know where your camera lens is located on your computer. Looking into the camera gives the person on the other end the impression that you're looking directly at them.

On the other hand, looking at your second monitor or even looking at the thumbnail image of the person you're talking to may make it appear like you're distracted or not paying attention to them. Turn your camera on before the meeting, either in the meeting application or by simply typing "Webcam" into your start menu. This way, you can test your camera, lighting, background, and overall image before engaging with your customer. The basics still apply: Join the meeting on time (if you're hosting, ideally log-in early) and be prepared. **Making a great first impression is as essential in a virtual world as it is in person.**

In a virtual world, you need to work even harder to create meaningful engagement opportunities with your customer. Asking open-ended questions helps assess whether you are meeting the mark.

Instead of asking typical close-ended check-in questions like "Does that make sense?" or "Do you have any questions?" you should spend even more time planning open-ended questions that really invite dialogue and solicit feedback. "How do you see that working in your environment?" or "What challenges do you see that presenting during implementation?" If you have a larger audience, consider using a poll or chat feature to encourage everyone's participation. Don't be afraid to call on participants by name and ask for their opinion. For example, "So, Bill, what additional questions or concerns does that bring up for you?"

ESTABLISHING YOUR CREDIBILITY ON A VIRTUAL SALES CALL

Whether your selling virtually or in-person, the first minutes of an initial sales call with a new prospect are critical. This phase is when you build rapport with the buyer. The COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed field reps and account executives' ability to build rapport during face-to-face meetings.

In addition to building a relationship with the buyer, your call opening, whether in-person or virtually, is about establishing your credibility.

That's how you help the customer answer the question, "Why should I spend time with this salesperson?" You also increase the customer's confidence that you will solve their problem, making them more likely to be open with you and share information.

Here are three things you can do to establish your credibility on a virtual sales call.

#1 Describe the Customer's Situation

Nothing establishes your credibility quicker with a buyer than when you demonstrate your understanding of their specific situation. That means doing [pre-call research](#) to better understand the customer's organization, recent announcements, competitive situation, and industry. For example, is this customer-facing competitive pricing pressure? Where are they experiencing growth or business challenges? How has COVID-19 impacted their business? Are they facing any technology threats? This posture signals to the buyer that you appreciate the specific challenges faced by the customer, which will quickly differentiate you from most other salespeople.

#2 State a Common Concern

Suppose you don't have any company-specific information to establish your credibility, state a common concern or problem that other companies in the same industry have. For example, you can discuss competitive issues, technological challenges, or regulatory changes. Again, the idea is to demonstrate that "you get it." Of course, it's always impactful to share examples or case studies of how your other customers solved these problems.

#3 Ask a Provocative Question

Another technique you can use to establish your credibility is asking a provocative question that gets the buyer to think about their problems. How does this technology trend impact your business? What are the consequences of...? Or what other issues are you facing as a result of the new competitive environment? When you ask a question that gets the customer to

consider the consequences of their problems, you establish yourself as a problem solver for the customer on the "same side of the table" as the customer, not a self-interested salesperson.

Whether you describe the customer's situation, state a common concern, or ask a provocative question, the end game is to establish your credibility so that the customer will want to continue the call and have a productive sales conversation with you.

VIRTUAL SALES CALL THE VIRTUAL SELLING READINESS CHECKLIST

Virtual selling is more than just adopting new technology. It's about adopting a different mindset, a different skillset, and a different way of showing up for your customers. Nevertheless, many other items can help ensure you're prepared and ready for a virtual sales call. We've put together a short checklist and training program that will guarantee you're prepared for the Virtual Selling world.

CATEGORY	HAVE I:
1. Virtual meeting environment	Tested my connection, video, and audio?
2. Virtual application and tools	Practiced using the virtual meeting application? Tested any tools or programs I'll be using on this call? Provided a test link and instructions to participants who will be joining the meeting?
3. Webcam, lighting and background	Positioned my webcam to focus at eye level? Adjusted my lighting and background to create a positive meeting environment? Limited distractions and background noise?
4. Presentation materials	Prepared any presentation materials and relevant content to share in the virtual application? Where applicable, customized and personalized the materials for the specific customer
5. Audience	Researched the audience, roles, backgrounds and common connections? Identified any shared connections, referrals and any common interests?

6. Company	<p>Researched the company, industry and current news, especially about recent events that may have impacted this company?</p> <p>Brainstormed how my solutions will help this company achieve their objectives?</p>
7. Planning	<p>Created a clear meeting objective, and clarified what I expect the customer to do as a result of this meeting?</p> <p>Shared an agenda with the participants prior to the meeting?</p>
8. Energy	<p>Prepared myself to show up with energy, enthusiasm and a smile?</p>
9. Engagement	<p>Created my virtual engagement strategy, including developing open-ended questions, checkpoints and opportunities for feedback/participation?</p>
10. Empathy	<p>Considered the personal situation and context of the individuals on the call?</p> <p>Prepared to demonstrate active listening and empathy</p>

By considering the components of a great virtual sales call and planning for these before the session, you'll be more likely to accomplish your sales-call objectives.



About Sales Readiness Group

Sales Readiness Group (SRG) is an industry leading sales training company that helps companies develop highly effective sales organizations. Our solutions include comprehensive sales training, sales coaching, and sales management programs that deliver sustainable skills improvement.

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