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# Post-COVID Sales Success

## Four steps to sales transformation in 2021

By Jim Peduto

If 2020 was a year of disruption, then 2021 is a year of transition — a bridge between the pre- and post-COVID-19 worlds. Many see the changes as an opportunity for tremendous growth. Surprisingly, we're seeing leaders sit on the fence and hope business reverts to 2019. It won't. COVID-19 may be waning, but the changes that it precipitated are here to stay.

Most business leaders expect unprecedented economic growth in 2021. They have already pivoted from defense (cost-cutting/maintaining customers) to offense (sales investment/new customers). As firms return to a growth mindset, they find that their sales capabilities have not kept up with the changes in the markets they serve. Leadership is questioning whether a pre-COVID-19 sales organization can successfully navigate the post-COVID-19 world.

Success in the post-COVID-19 world requires understanding how selling has changed and a laserlike focus on four strategic initiatives:

**1. Acquire New Customers:** During the pandemic, businesses hunkered down and focused on customer retention. Now we are seeing a marked shift towards new customer acquisition.

Most organizations struggle to bring in new customers for two reasons. First, they fail to maintain full pipelines. Second, their inability to sell business outcomes makes it very difficult to differentiate from incumbents.

**2. Increase Investment:** Businesses are aggressively investing in transforming their sales capability in three ways:

- **Sales leadership:** Transformational sales leadership is the foundation for sales success. The benchmark coach-

ing commitment is one half-hour per day for each salesperson. Given how little coaching occurs, that may sound like a lot. Still, it's the difference between an elite and mediocre sales force.

- **Sales talent:** Research confirms the axiom that "there is no substitute for



talent." Strong sales DNA and selling competencies beat product knowledge every time. Product jockeys are on their last lap. The future belongs to salespeople that can have great business conversations.

- **Sales structure:** Customers have changed the way that they buy and how they want to be sold. The best sales organizations

have adapted by moving to a hybrid selling model with specialized selling roles.

**3. Embrace Virtual Selling:**

Three out of five business leaders expect that, even in the post-vaccine world, face-to-face selling time will decrease and that virtual selling is now a permanent fixture. That does not mean that face-to-face selling is dead. Face-to-face selling will still be necessary but it will be more targeted. Think more extended periods between face-to-face visits with virtual visits filling in the gaps.

**4. Build Inside Sales Capability:**

The lines between field sales and inside sales have blurred. It is more cost-effective and has been successfully deployed in industrial sales. The best organizations realize that inside sales play an increasingly important role. It's no wonder that B2B businesses are heavily investing in inside selling.

Selling has always been a zero-sum game and post-COVID-19 customers are more demanding than ever. They have no tolerance for mediocrity. Sales organizations must either be elite or be gone.

This is a wonderful time to be in sales. It's also a challenging time. As we learned in the movie Moneyball, everyone has a choice, "adapt or die." **SM**