

Agility Amidst a Pandemic: How to Pivot and Transform Your Sales



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Navigate an Everchanging Economic Environment

Sales sustainability involves both an ‘art’ as well as a ‘science’ approach, and as such, your formula for success must change based on the economic climate. The global pandemic has shut down businesses, changed methods of selling, and forced leaders to immediately pivot to remain viable. The “new sales normal” isn’t a destination, but it is going to be the “new normal” for the moment: the new sales normal will be constantly changing as the virus ebbs and flows, which forces our businesses and communities facing waves of uncertainty as the economic crisis continues to unfold.

Artful salespeople use their intuition and relationship-building skills to sell a product or service, while client and customer expectations and requirements are changing. Online sales are growing as brick-and-mortar businesses are forced to close, and face-to-face interactions are rare. In order to survive the current recession, — which may become a depression — businesses have to adapt and embrace the fact that they have to let go of the way business was once conducted.

Some companies are thriving because they were able to quickly adapt. For example, a promotional products company worked to help their clients brand personal protective equipment (PPE) and find products to help their employees work from home better. A print shop pivoted to creating stickers and signage for restaurants to ensure their customers understand their social distancing protocols. These are just two of many examples of companies finding ways to fill a void that didn’t even exist a few months ago.

Approach sales also with a scientific lens and work objectively to create a series of data sets to track which efforts make the sales needle move. This detail-oriented process provides a series of tactics to try if one isn’t working. Just like a scientist, sales leaders should create a hypothesis to test as a way to determine if they are marketing to the right clients, following leads, tracking sales stages, and managing the overall sales pipeline.

Once put into place and consistently used, the methods and processes outlined here will lead to increased business, even in the most challenging of economies, giving leaders the ability to be agile and shift on a continuous basis as needed.

Inject an Agile Scientific Strategy to Your Sales Process

- Reevaluate client profiles
- Rethink your processes
- Fine-tune your measurements
- Increase client feedback

Reformulate your Sales Strategy

Some businesses are having their best quarters ever, despite a pandemic and economic downturn, while others are struggling. Whether a business is essential and doing well or if a business has been impacted by the pandemic, leaders still need to think toward a revised recovery or growth strategy.

Without an agile sales strategy, both dollars and time will be wasted. Since neither of these are in abundant supply, develop an effective sales strategy supported by research to effectively reach your audience.

Following are ideas to reformulate a sales strategy within the current economic climate.

Changing Marketing Dynamics. With customers and clients out of work, staying home, or being cautious overall with their spending, it is a challenge to reach new clients. Instead of spending time finding new clients, focus on current or past customers first. Learn from them and see how their needs may be changing. Don't be afraid to call and check in to see what's going on in their worlds. They may realize they need your services again after hearing what you can do to help them through a rough time.

Reconsider Working with Challenging Clients. When business is tight, leaders may accept work from anyone and everyone -- even those who are not necessarily a pleasure to work with. Rethinking who are your ideal clients, during this time, is prudent. Some clients may no longer be the right ones based on where they are in their businesses, or they are cutting their spending habits, etc. When a business is in crisis mode, they are forced to fill up their sales pipeline with whoever they can, but this actually takes energy away from finding the right clientele.

Changing Marketing Dynamics: Add science in the form of processes, structures, and measurement to smooth out the high highs and low lows. Adding scientific structure can easily grow a business by 25-30%.

Reconsider Working with Challenging Clients: Taking on challenging clients is like filling up on junk food. While hunger is eased in the short-term, overall health will suffer in the long-run.



Pivot to New Solutions

Expect Price Pressure. Customers will expect that businesses are in need, leading to price pressure. In a down economy, businesses always face new competitors. Understand how price pressure will impact the overall revenue and sales goals and determine what needs to be adjusted. Leaders can be proactive and resolve to take a short-term hit in order to assist struggling clients. By properly managing these relationships and offering a discount, clients are more likely to be loyal and return for the long-term.

Old Tactics Won't Produce the Same Results. Sales and marketing tactics must be revamped to get business in, because what worked six months ago will not work today. Reconsider your ideal client's current state, market to them where they are, and retrain the sales team to meet their needs.

Ensure Employees Are Okay. As the sales team works remotely, they are far removed from how they are used to doing their jobs. Without face-to-face meetings, they may feel unmotivated and despondent over their inability to be around others. Give them as much as possible to make their unusual remote positions engaging and rethink how best to fuel your team.

- Understand the science behind pricing and the value of services/products and embed structures to ensure profits are met.
- If it feels like you can't win despite doing everything right, it's time to look deep into your sales strategy to find out where you're going wrong.
- Find new ways to motivate and fuel an energetic sales team that can't meet with prospects in person.



Transformation is Hard, But Failure is Harder

When a company can't or won't pivot, failure is almost guaranteed. Clarity, measurement, and adjustments are the scientific methods backing up a sales plan — especially in a turbulent economic climate.

Develop clarity on company goals and what the market is demanding. Create a client profile to ensure that only the specific, targeted clients are sought after. Client profiles outline your targeted demographics, which include gender, years in business, age, industry, and more. Technographics are also outlined in the client profile and include how your targeted client uses technology. Psychographics, including buying behaviors, hobbies, beliefs, and values, are also an essential part of the client profile and are still integral and relevant in 2020.



Selectively Target

- **Develop a client profile to determine who to target based on your business' needs.**
- **Determine how to target these clients through penetration tactics. If you find you're spending a lot on marketing but not reaping the results, it's likely that your client profile is wrong.**



Measure Data to Swiftly Pivot

Quantify your efforts to gain clarity into what is and isn't working. Ensure tactics are more tightly controlled and measured than usual; when clients change their buying habits, businesses must change their marketing and sales tactics. It's also important to determine which channels your leads are coming from in order to shift your efforts as needed.

Next, look at ratios of how many proposals are sent out vs. how many are closing and winning. Aim to win somewhere between 30% and 45% of those you propose to. If you're selling more than that ratio, maybe your price is too low and it's time to increase it. If you're selling less than that, consider lowering your price or determining the quality of the lead -- if it's mediocre and doesn't fit into your client profile, then you're setting yourself up for failure.

Utilize the accordion approach to tracking. If you're unable to convert leads to proposals, open up your accordion and track other activities, including follow-up calls, meetings, days to close, or days from negotiation to close. Once these types of details are tweaked, close up the accordion again and resume tracking only the major categories.



Tweak, Improve

- Create a quantity of goals to track specific tasks in-depth. Don't track only the amount of sales made. Measure the efforts of your team throughout the sales process to see where you can improve.
- Ratio management will help you determine if you need to change your pricing, improve the quality of your product/service, or improve the quality of your leads.
- The accordion approach forces you to analyze every detail to see what can be fixed to improve closing leads.



Make Decisions 90 Days at a Time

Adjusting your strategy, skill set, and processes are essential when sales begin to lag. Rather than giving a strategy time to work itself out or not noticing a problem for a few months, reevaluate every 90 days to find ways to shift more quickly. Our new normal is to adapt to potentially changing course every 90 days. With this shift comes creativity.



Assess, Evolve, Implement

- Treat your sales strategy as a living document and update it accordingly.
- Assess every 90 days.
- Get creative.



Solutions to Implement Science into Sales

Injecting science into your sales strategy is not as daunting as it may seem. To recap, here are some of the major areas that should be reviewed:

- 1. Obtain Feedback and Reviews from Clients.** Sometimes, what you think is the problem actually isn't once you speak with your clients and review your processes through their eyes.
- 2. Determine Target Clients.** Identify the top 10 clients you love working with and analyze them via the psychographic, demographic, and technographic tools. Then, do the same thing with the top 10 clients you don't want to work with. The traits you favor and dislike will quickly become clear, and you're on your way to creating an ideal client profile.
- 3. Stay Agile.** Be prepared to pivot, shift, and overhaul as needed. For some, it could be changing the definition of roles within your team, and for others it could mean changing specific tactics in the sales strategy.
- 4. Make Adjustments Quickly.** Whether it's a simple Excel spreadsheet or a Customer Relationship Management tool (CRM), measurement is essential to determining the strength of your sales strategy. Track the details of what's happening with your sales leads. Identify KPIs, which are metrics used to gauge the pulse of the business at any given time. KPIs will alert leaders when an investigation into certain aspects of the business are needed.





The Bottom Line

Business owners have been working harder than ever on each aspect of their business at the same time. This is in tandem with health fears, educating and caring for children, and overall anxiety in their personal lives. Now more than ever, leaders must maintain the energy to constantly adapt. Leaders may be working harder than ever, but that is what is required to survive a crisis.

