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Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis - Challenges

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Introduction

How hard has it been for your company to sustain sales during the Covid crisis? The year 2020 will go down in history as a time of immense challenge for businesses globally. We tapped into the collective wisdom of our client base across Asia Pacific to understand just how companies are coping in sales management. Words like uncertainty, volatility and pressure are commonplace, but it is not all doom and gloom. Companies are responding with actions oriented towards resilience, adaptability and preparedness.

At the very core of every enterprise is the question of how to sustain sales. However, even at the height of this crisis (and we have no way of knowing if we have yet even hit that point) nimble organisations are finding new ways to drive revenue, grow market share and reach new customers.



This series of thought leadership articles examines the challenges faced by companies in Hong Kong and across Asia Pacific at the time of the global Covid pandemic. We will share best practice solutions that can help your business meet short-term revenue goals, whilst ensuring longer-term strategies are in place to emerge successfully from the crisis. These articles rely on input from our extensive industry outreach across diverse lines of business, including technology, financial services, real estate, manufacturing and retail.

Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis Series covers:

- 1. Challenges**
- 2. Strategies**
- 3. Processes**
- 4. People**
- 5. Actions**

We are very thankful for the collaboration of our clients in providing insights for these articles. Such collaboration is important, as we believe this enables the collective discussions necessary for robust responses to the Covid crisis. If you would like to share your experience, please contact us. All conversations are treated in confidence.

This series: **Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis** has been developed by GXS Partners and Sales Dragon Consulting. We have combined our extensive experience in sales management and business transformation to highlight key insights, in collaboration with senior executives across the region.

Challenges

Inviting business leaders to share their unique insights into the sales management related challenges they are facing in 2020 elicited a tsunami of responses. Organisations are stretched and feeling increasingly fatigued. Keeping a stiff upper lip and being thankful for small mercies is indeed wearying in the face of wide-spread revenue reduction, cost cutting and layoffs.

However, the degree of impact has not affected all businesses equally. How well companies are responding depends largely on their industry sector and exposure, geographical location, pre-existing company norms with regard to virtual working and digitalisation and, importantly, the capability of sales teams to perform under changing market conditions.

For ease of presentation, we have organised the insights into the challenges businesses are experiencing because of Covid into three broad categories: revenue pressures; managing predominantly virtual ways of working; and maintaining marketplace connectivity.

Revenue Challenges in the Time of Covid



We found some companies, for example those involved in e-commerce, last-mile logistics and healthcare, were better positioned to capitalise on rapidly changing customer needs. Some of these businesses have actually increased their revenues as a result of the Covid crisis. For so many others, however, revenues are flat or significantly down as a result of the shifts in the economy. Here are some of the major challenges interviewees shared with us:



Declining revenue: Nearly every organisation we spoke with reported that revenues were down, but the degree of decline varied from gradual to effectively “falling off a cliff.” Lower revenues are necessitating cost management measures that reduce administrative and sales support staff. In short, salespeople have to sell more with less. At the same time, deferred buying decisions and longer decision-making timelines have lengthened sales cycles. One respondent reported that his firm’s traditional 45-60 day sales cycle has now stretched to 90-120 days, further increasing uncertainty and risk.



Focusing on the short term: Over 60 percent of respondents informed us that their focus has shifted from achieving longer-term objectives to meeting short-term sales goals as a result of Covid. Typically, that means just getting through 2020. Executives reported teams are “chasing smaller deals” that they “previously wouldn’t have cared about.” Similar levels of effort, therefore, are being expended to sell increasingly smaller deals. In addition, offering discounts to secure short-term work resulted in concerns about how some businesses might reverse the downward trend in pricing.



Shifting channel opportunities: Many companies we spoke to have begun selling into channels they had not previously utilised. Interviewees reported significant challenges in adapting their sales model and processes to efficiently cope with differing channel requirements. For example, some companies that had previously exclusively operated a B2B model designed to handle large, complex accounts, but with potentially fewer single large orders, are now finding they must adopt a different set of skills and capabilities to deliver vastly more numerous, smaller B2C orders. This is, amongst other things, significantly increasing processing time and the cost of sales.



Distancing and Isolation

Distance-working arrangements are nothing new for sales organisations. Seventy-five percent of the organisations we surveyed had some form of remote working options in place before the crisis. However, most respondents indicated that pre-Covid, these were generally under-utilised. Now, in moving to predominantly distance-working, companies are experiencing the following consequences:



Less cohesiveness and collaboration within the organisation: The twin themes of cohesiveness and collaboration emerged as important to the companies we interviewed. Over 60 percent of respondents indicated that their sales teams are becoming more fragmented and less supportive. Distance also reinforces the silos within organisations; 70 percent of respondents felt that collaboration between the sales team and the rest of the organisation has decreased since the virus's outbreak. This impacts service delivery due to increasingly complex and coordinated responses across different functions within the organisation. The lack of regular in-person, informal interactions is viewed as primarily to blame. "Zoom fatigue" as well as the loss of company rituals, such as "water cooler chats" and morning meetings designed to motivate sales teams for the day ahead, are eroding team bonding and impacting morale.



Onboarding and training challenges: Some companies have still needed to hire new staff during Covid and the reduction of face-to-face communication has been particularly difficult to ensure effective onboarding. Generally speaking, respondents highlighted a reduction in new hire effectiveness, which was attributed to a lack of interaction between the new hires and experienced staff. One senior executive further emphasised that knowledge transfer, mentoring and training have all decreased since moving to remote working. He noted that at the beginning of the crisis people made an effort to be more sociable online, attending "Zoom Happy Hours" for example, but they have become less responsive as the situation has dragged on.



Protracted internal decision making: Over 60 percent of executives reported that decisions are taking longer now than prior to the crisis. Management is increasingly called upon to spend time approving smaller, unusual customer offers that deviate from normal practice in order to secure short-term wins. And, management frequently has to intervene to fill in gaps in organisational models that are ill-equipped to address post-Covid complexities, such as rapid decision-making on local issues, as the situation on the ground may now vary substantively between locations. New situations and problems are requiring increased management / sales force interactions that ultimately reduce the time given to frontline sales teams to engage with clients. Sales team interaction is further complicated where online schedules are now more highly regimented and key team members do not have the flexibility to respond as effectively as before, particularly with emerging opportunities.

Marketplace Connectivity



Organisations are using a variety of online tools and techniques, such as surveys and questionnaires, to remain connected to the marketplace. However, respondents reported that these methods are all less robust than direct interactions and they all felt that the loss of face-to-face client interactions has adversely impacted their business. Retaining meaningful connectivity to their customer base has resulted in the following trends:



Loss of direct interactions with clients: Though some businesses we spoke to had already established on-line sales channels pre-Covid, many still rely on direct interactions with their clients to win deals. This is especially true for more complex products and services. Even where dialogue can be started, remote engagement is decreasing the likelihood of a successful sale. In some incidents, prospective clients are opting to hold off on remote conversations and are waiting instead until Covid restrictions ease and face-to-face meetings can resume.



Focus on existing and past clients: Many organisations told us they were “doubling down” on existing clients, seeking opportunities to cross-sell and up-sell while they “wait out the crisis.” However, as the pandemic continues, over two thirds of interviewees say that this strategy is increasingly untenable. Existing clients are typically under increasing financial pressures themselves, demanding more for less, and becoming more reluctant to place new orders.



Increased reliance on local personnel: Due to Covid travel restrictions, numerous regional or functional heads are increasing their reliance on local personnel. This has sometimes proved positive where local personnel have obtained market insights previously unavailable to visiting regional heads, or where they are able to still make face-to-face contact with prospects and clients. However, in companies where regional sales teams and management are centrally located, Covid-related restrictions have meant that their most influential sales assets are not physically meeting clients and prospects.



Responding to the challenges

This article has focused on some of the sales management challenges companies have been facing because of the Covid crisis. In response, many sales organisations are already considering significant changes in their approach to the way they work. From our interviews, companies are focusing their responses in three key areas:

- Strategies
- Processes
- People

Our next article examines how companies are responding strategically to the crisis.

We are grateful for the input to these articles from our friends across a broad range of industries. You can also contribute to the discussion by contacting any of the authors or, if you would like to discuss how best to steer your business through the Covid crisis and beyond, we would be happy to talk to you.

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This series: **Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis** has been developed by GXS Partners and Sales Dragon Consulting. We have combined our extensive experience in sales management and business transformation to highlight key insights in collaboration with senior executives across the region.

This article is the second in a series of reports on how companies in the Asia Pacific region are facing up to the Covid crisis. Based on in-depth interviews with our clients across a broad range of industries, and having outlined the challenges they are facing in part one of this series (found here at [GXS Partners](#) or [Sales Dragon Consulting](#)), we now turn to look at some of the strategic best practices that are helping companies through this period. Executives emphasised the need to update their understanding of the market, adjust how they position their product or service’s value in light of market shifts and align the organisation around the new strategy.



Market Strategies

Covid is causing fundamental shifts in global markets in terms of demand, sales channels and customer bases. Ensuring a holistic understanding of the target market and optimising services or products to meet shifting needs is vital for success moving beyond the Covid-era. Here are some strategies adopted by executives we spoke to:

Market Segmentation

For some companies, one unexpected consequence of Covid has been that it is forcing managers to re-evaluate their market strategies, including region, segment, channel, and product type. In pre-Covid times, some organisations still neglected taking enough time to purposefully think about what clients value, which segments to target, how to leverage existing businesses, and to set both immediate and longer-term goals. Overall, though a shock to the system, some respondents expressed the view that a Covid-enforced strategic re-evaluation has been very beneficial for business.

Channels

Some businesses have found that their established sales channels did not serve them well in a crisis. Many ongoing shifts, such as the increasing prevalence of e-commerce, were accelerated during the crisis. While many companies reported that research into available alternatives and determining which channels prove more effective at delivering goods and services to clients is ongoing, certain actions – such as pivots from B2B to B2C or adopting diversified versus highly focused sales channel approaches – are becoming increasingly well-established as the crisis continues.

Research

Some executives we spoke to said decision-making has been challenging during Covid because they were unable to rely on accurate market data. In response, many have re-thought their demand forecasting approach. Many have taken it upon themselves to ask their clients for help in communicating their changing needs. Some managers told us they actively assessed how their competitors were responding and held regular meetings with their sales team to communicate updates in order to ensure the right market insights were available to promote holistic awareness.



Our clients told us that the priorities of their customers have shifted because of Covid, particularly on how they prioritise “value.” Price, place of production and perceived hygiene have all rapidly and unexpectedly shifted upwards in relative importance. In response, some companies are re-aligning their sales strategies to clearly emphasise the inherent value of products or services. For example:

Business to Business

In the B2B arena, companies are becoming very focused on collaborative cross-departmental approaches to retain key accounts and win new high-value business. For existing clients, targets are set for increased conversations and needs discovery with key accounts to maximise the perceived value clients have of existing relationships. Repeatedly, executives spoke about reducing churn rates and looking at potential additional cross-selling or up-selling opportunities. With pressure on price in the short-term, companies are responding by offering improved long-term pricing to secure deals, increase renewal incentives, and identify and address accounts that are at risk. For both new and existing business, companies reported success using approaches such as account-based management with involvement across different sales and marketing functions that can provide customers with highly personalised, targeted, one-to-one experiences.

Business to Consumer

Our B2C clients have also said that they are spending more time talking to their customers to find out how their preferences have shifted. Some then re-evaluated how their products’ value can contribute to their customers’ desired outcomes. For example, one sports supplies company explained how a major advantage of their home gym equipment is that it offers safety from crowds. Pre-Covid, this would not have been a key selling point. Now, it is very important.

Sales Approach Diversification

As we discussed in our earlier article, sales forces reported facing the challenge of driving revenue with existing clients while simultaneously winning new business even as resources diminish in a rapidly shifting environment. Many executives reported that returning to fundamentals and restructuring key roles around different types of sales activities has been helpful in addressing this issue. For example, one executive we spoke to chose to divide his sales force into specialist “farmer” (account manager) and “hunter” (prospector) roles, with farmers focusing on growing the organisation’s value with existing clients while “hunters” stay more focused on understanding changes in the market to prospect new business.



Organisational Alignment to Strategy

Companies focusing on “agile” strategy during the Covid crisis have found that they need to have appropriate structures in place to quickly respond to challenges or new opportunities. Frustrations arose where plans fell flat because the existing structure of the organisation resulted in a slow response. Here are some ways companies are overcoming that problem:

Organisational Structure

Given the changes brought on by Covid, both in physical work environments and travel limitations, many companies reported exploring different formal structures for the sales organisation. Executives told us that one of the key considerations was to ensure that the sales organisation has the right balance of functional versus localised management, allowing for quick adaptation to the broader sales function. Matrix structures which incorporate individual reporting to more than one supervisor depending on the situation were reported as one successful approach to allow for multiple stakeholder inputs, as long as clarity of reporting lines is in place and the model is fit for purpose given the specific market dynamics.

Interdepartmental Collaboration

All interviewees emphasized the need to quickly flex, change and pivot to new sales opportunity areas or respond to challenges in response to Covid. Some businesses told us that they have established multi-disciplinary crisis teams in response to Covid, with appropriate remit to identify and implement changes. While these teams may have been formulated to deal with immediate impacts of the crisis, many have evolved into integrated planning hubs for working inter-departmentally. This is assisting in communication, identifying problems, brainstorming solutions and putting action plans into effect as efficiently as possible. While anyone within the organisation can identify potential areas to pivot towards or responses to a crisis, it typically takes multiple departments to successfully execute changes in sales strategy. It is important that each business function understands its interconnected role and how it contributes to the overall strategy in order to respond effectively.

Core Competency Boundaries

Managers reported the importance of crafting clear strategic priorities to guide any brainstorming around potential pivots in sales focus. This helps to reduce time executives spend in exploring unrealistic tangents in the short term, and to better evaluate what is required for sustainable major shifts. One manager emphasised the importance of understanding the limits of the organisation’s capabilities when evaluating new directions to move toward profitability, in particular to ensure that suggestions were either adjacent to or building upon what is already possible. This would allow for the company to more confidently and quickly make any shifts.

This article has focused on some of the strategies companies have been using to help them survive, or even thrive, during the Covid crisis. Our next article, focuses on how companies are modifying processes and using technology to good effect as they move through the Covid era and beyond.

We are grateful for the input to these articles from our friends across a broad range of industries. You can also contribute to the discussion by contacting any of the authors or, if you would like to discuss how best to steer your business through the Covid crisis and beyond, we would be happy to talk to you.

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This article is the third in a series on how companies in the Asia Pacific region are responding to the Covid crisis. You can catch up with the story so far in the preceding reports on the problems senior executives have shared with us and strategies that are working – available at [GXS Partners](#) and also at [Sales Dragon Consulting](#). Now we turn attention to effective sales processes that support strategy and drive revenue. Executives reported the importance of considering new methods of engagement as well as paying attention to sales pipeline management. Critical to both is having the appropriate supporting technology.



Sales Process Design

From our conversations with clients across a broad range of industries, we see that sales people in companies which have clearly defined sales processes are better able to consistently and effectively advance opportunities to the next step in the sales cycle. This also assists with engaging and involving support across the organisation. For some companies, Covid has highlighted the need to align processes, not only with client-facing activities, but behind the scenes as well. Here are some further points to consider:

Adopt New Methods of Engagement

With fewer face-to-face meetings, companies noticed that their salespeople were less able to rely on a “winning personality” to develop and manage client relationships and secure business. Alternative methods that take Covid-related restrictions into account and engage with clients are being brainstormed and tried out. How companies are doing this varies. Many clients interviewed have increased the use of “insight selling” techniques, providing valuable information to clients, often supported by webinars, thought leadership and social media posts. Other companies are investing in account-based marketing (ABM) techniques to provide the sales team with qualified leads.

Sales Pipeline Management

The Covid crisis has really forced some companies to examine their structures and protocols with regards to the sales cycle. One manager told us that he had introduced strict reporting of key indicators at each step of the sales process from lead generation to deal closing so that employees across the organisation could get a good understanding of where the deals were in the sales cycle. Furthermore, inter-stage metrics were calculated and maintained to highlight bottlenecks and areas requiring additional training and support. In a Covid-era environment of fewer opportunities and longer sales cycles, enhancing pipeline management effectiveness is key to improving win rates and increasing sales. The value being improved visibility and ensuring appropriate allocation of scarce resources.

Commercial Management

Executives reported the increased importance of ensuring sales teams have clear targets and the know-how to evaluate deal profitability. This is especially important to ensure enough insight to evaluate where to invest more effort in profitable segments and clients. Some respondents hinted that yet more training was needed in this area. Having clear targets aligned to cash flow objectives helps to communicate priorities to sales staff, especially in light of reduced administrative support. Though these measures were in some cases already in place before Covid, for some it has taken this crisis to become focused on making the most of the benefits.



Technology



Can you imagine going through the Covid crisis without social media platforms, Google and Zoom? Technology can be an incredibly powerful enabler, helping organisations close sales quickly and efficiently. For most of the people we interviewed, technology has really helped sales teams and wider organisations to keep functioning. Though some, such as one education provider, described a steep learning curve to move their service to an online format, the experience has ultimately left them able to offer a broader range of courses than ever before.

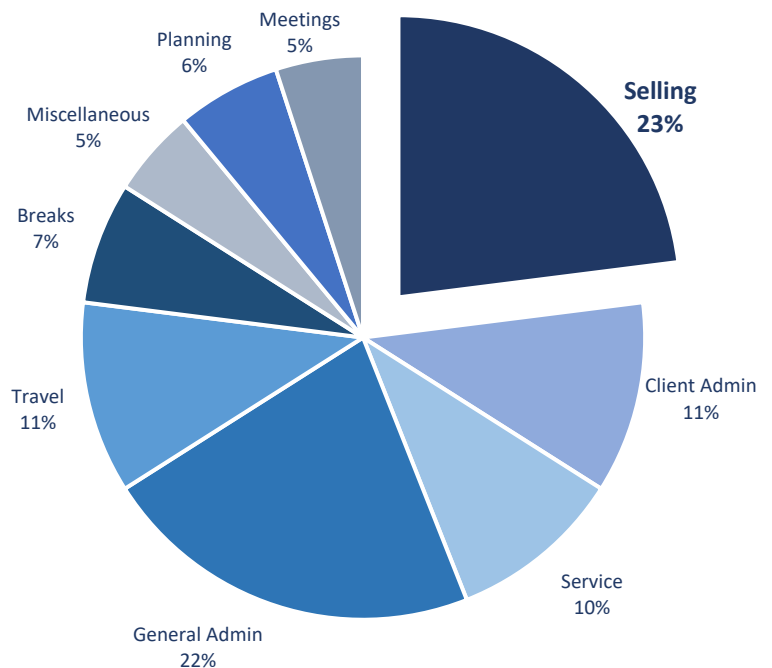
Exploiting Existing Value

Some executives reported initially that Covid had been very disruptive, but that the disruption actually forced them to re-evaluate their systems. *Salesforce.com* indicates that about 70 percent of CRM data “goes bad” or becomes obsolete annually. Companies reported updating CRM data as well as experimenting with automated contact database software to link stale contacts to their new roles. They further advised that the latter has been an incredibly powerful tool which has helped them generate new leads and reduce the time needed to prospect.

Streamlining and Automation

Research indicates that in any given week, sales-focused activities only account for approximately 23 percent of a salespersons' time* (see Figure 1). The rest is spent on internal processes – such as researching prospects, communicating internally, calculating pricing, preparing proposals, etc. Executives reported that, especially in the time of Covid and increasingly scarce administrative and support resources, minimising, streamlining or automating these processes to help free up time for sales-focused and more value-add activities has been a key priority.

Figure 1: Salesperson Time per Week



Focus on Value

Executives reported that in the midst of the seemingly endless options of technology solutions for problems brought on or exacerbated by Covid, it is critical to evaluate and clearly identify precisely what value a solution will add. Before making any investments, executives stressed needing to prioritise investment efforts, only pursuing and implementing what facilitates sales in line with the strategy and goals of the organisation.

* Source: Businesswire (2017)

This report has focused on some of the processes companies have been using to help them survive, or even thrive, during the Covid crisis. Our next article, will examine how companies are deploying their human capital to good effect at this time.

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This article is the fourth in a series on how companies in the Asia Pacific region are responding to the Covid crisis. You can catch up with the story so far in the preceding reports on the problems senior executives have shared with us, the strategies that are working and the processes that are helping to drive revenue, even in difficult times at [GXS Partners](#) or [Sales Dragon Consulting](#). Now we turn attention to how companies are changing their approach to effectively get the most out of their people during the Covid crisis and support them to succeed.

Many of the executives we spoke to reported that their teams expressed gratitude in still having jobs during a period of wide-spread cost cutting and layoffs. They had many a story of people less fortunate than themselves. Executives shared substantial challenges in maintaining morale, but on the positive side some took this time to re-evaluate the needs of the organisation and shared their tips for finding and keeping the best people.



Assessment and Candidate Selection

The skills needed for sales organisations to thrive in the post-Covid environment have shifted. A number of the companies we spoke to said they were still hiring, either because of back-filling to maintain existing sales team sizes or to bring in new capabilities as the crisis had created new opportunities for which they had not yet developed the skills internally.

Assessments and Skills Identification

As described in the preceding articles in this series, many organisations that we spoke to commented that the Covid crisis had forced a re-evaluation of their strategies, processes and systems. It has also made them reconsider the skills that are now needed for roles across the updated organisation. Executives advised that having an up-to-date and dynamic understanding of the capabilities needed in the new world in a structured and consistent format was important. Skills such as virtual selling, prospecting, even more active listening than before and showing resilience were becoming ever more critical for many roles.

Upskilling and Candidate Selection

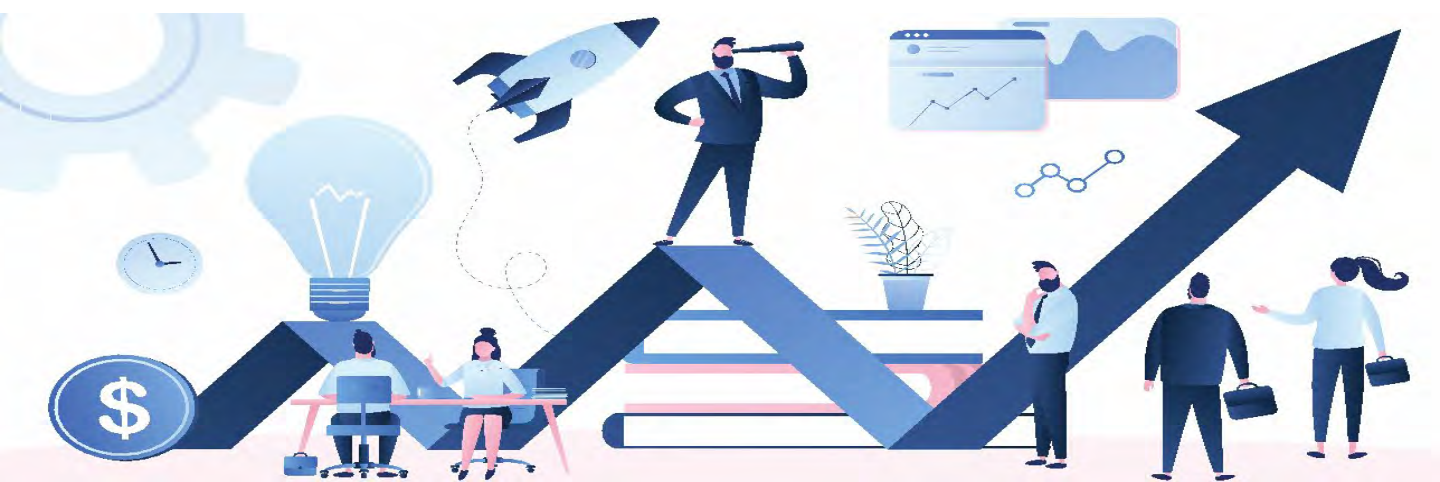
Understanding the capabilities available in the current resource pool within the sales organisation has been highlighted as key. Executives advised that a systematic assessment against needs can ensure individuals are in the roles for which they are best suited and identify where targeted upskilling is needed. Furthermore, understanding where there are capability gaps was instrumental for guiding recruitment. While many organisations reported using various assessment tools, many still reported concern around the challenge to rapidly and comprehensively identify the precise skills needed and where the gaps were.

Training and Induction



Generally speaking, Covid has caused most of the companies we engaged with to tighten their belts. On the other hand, it has been a time of reflection, bringing to light deficiencies in systems and skills. Specifically, companies have been forced to reimagine and invest in training procedures to emphasise the emerging skills required for successful sales personnel and to account for prolonged virtual and distance requirements. Effective training has needed to address not only the necessary hard skills, such as virtual technology and cloud resource use, but also soft skills that are increasingly valuable.

For induction, some companies struggled with bringing new hires up to speed and had to think of how to communicate their expectations with limited face-to-face interaction. Mentoring and virtual shadowing are helping embed new employees. At the same time, employees themselves have been discovering areas in which they need more knowledge and training if they are to be successful through this period and beyond. This has re-orientated some companies towards a training for growth mindset, and the proliferation of virtual sales workshops available is proving valuable.



Motivation

Many organisations we interviewed found that traditional tools and techniques used to effectively motivate sales teams have been disrupted during Covid. They reported having to cancel both formal and informal team events, some of which served as gatherings to bring people together and boost morale. While managers spoke of difficulties in providing support to staff remotely, many of whom were dealing with their own private issues alongside the demands of work, they reported trying various new measures to support teams. For example, specifically allocating time for less formal virtual discussion between remote working colleagues and utilizing external structured coaching or counselling sessions.

Many organisations also reported adjusting targets to reflect the difficulties in the current environment and acknowledge that earlier metrics may no longer be achievable. This might include adjusting monetary incentives, such as commissions and quota bonus structures, to provide people with positive reinforcement and continue to realistically stretch the organisation's targets. Central to success is making these delicate adjustments according to the business's situation; one respondent advised that monthly adjustments are needed while several others reported a preference for quarterly changes.

This report has focused on some of the people strategies companies have been using to help them survive, or even thrive, during the Covid crisis. In our final article of the series, we will share some actions that we have devised and that you can start to use in your organisation to increase efficiency and resilience during this time.

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Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis - Actions

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This is the fifth and final article in our series on how companies in Asia Pacific are responding to the Covid crisis. You can catch up with the story so far in the preceding articles on the challenges senior executives have shared with us, the strategies that are working, the processes that are helping to drive revenue, and tips for people management, even in difficult times – available at [GXS Partners](#) and also at [Sales Dragon Consulting](#).

For this final article, we illustrate how sales organisations can adopt a systematic approach to deliver sustainable improvements to the way they work. Throughout their interviews, our clients shared that successfully confronting the challenges brought on by the pandemic and seizing emerging opportunities relied on evaluating and adjusting their practices in three key areas: strategy, processes and people, each of which has a primary focus that is helpful to keep in mind (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

While it is useful to consider each of these independently, in practice they are inexorably linked. No changes can be made in a silo. For example, a strategy targeting large B2B customers will require personnel who understand how to develop and close opportunities in that environment. That could involve account-based marketing techniques, more complex sales processes and collaboration activities, taking a consultative approach with clients, and understanding how to qualify your services and products, especially for new accounts.

So for any proposed change in sales approach, you can expect to have to consider the impact in all three of these areas. Given such complex interdependencies, utilising a straightforward three-step process of Diagnose, Design, Deploy can provide clarity and ensure that any and all actions taken support the overall strategy and will bolster competitive advantage in a joined-up way.





Diagnose

Making positive changes within an organisation requires a thorough understanding of where the problems or issues lie. There is no “one-size-fits-all” diagnostic approach that can be applied universally. However, using a structured framework evaluating strategy, process and people can help ensure a holistic view of what may be holding back sales teams from being even more effective, highlight what works well and uncover interdependencies across multiple functions.

This in turn can guide the prioritised use of more targeted diagnostic tools. For example, we can take the question, “how can I know what sales activities are actually driving revenue?” as a starting point. One way to address this broad question is to choose a single area to diagnose, such as the “probability of a win” metric. Many organisations find this metric a key difficulty in sales pipeline management given its frequent lack of transparency. All too often when asked about the chance of winning a specific deal, many salespeople typically pick a number without a clear rationale when challenged, which is not necessarily a good basis for driving sales success. Using a well-structured but practical diagnostic tool allows sales teams to devise an appropriate means to establish what constitutes a certain likelihood of a win. This can help companies quantify this often nebulous number and gain insight into what is driving sales, and even forecast more effectively. One such example is provided below in Figure 2:

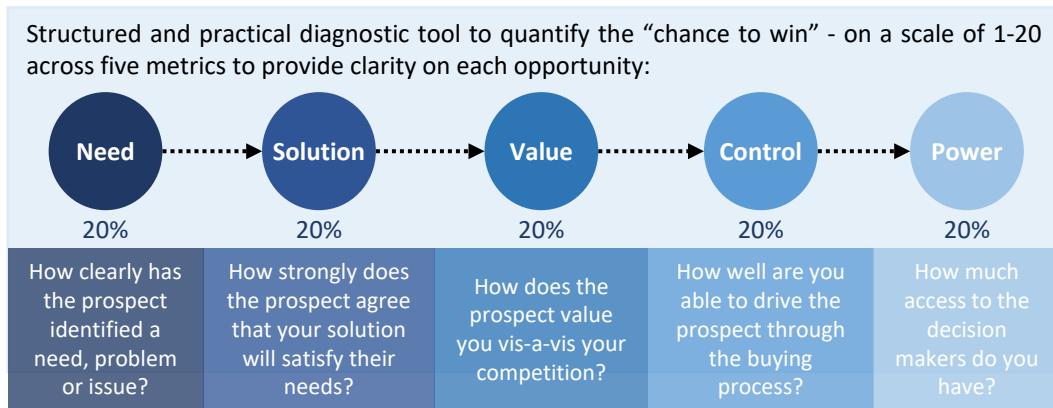


Figure 2

The findings of this initial diagnosis can reveal new areas for exploration. As iterative investigations unfold, an increasingly nuanced answer to the initial question emerges.

Design

Once the problem has been diagnosed, sales organisations can design or select appropriate solutions. Key factors here include ensuring fit-for-purpose solutions (too simple or too sophisticated may not work), solutions clearly addressing the identified rationale in diagnostics, and a suite of solutions that can fit well together and into existing set ups.

To continue our example above, let’s presume that various diagnostics have revealed which activities at different stages of the sales cycle actually drive revenue. In order to better focus on beneficial activities and hence improve pipeline management, one possible solution would be to adopt the principles of transparency and tracking across the sales cycle. With the right level of transparency consistency applied, sales organisations can identify what actually drives prospects to complete specified sales. It is beneficial to formulate clearly defined metrics that are universally understood and reported. This provides organisations with the opportunity to analyse metrics on a regular basis to determine what is working and adjust the sales approach as needed.

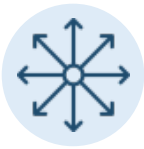
For example, taking a typical sales cycle as below (Figure 3), we can consider some relevant quantitative or qualitative metrics at each stage. These can be tailored to focus on specific issues, or areas of greatest importance to the business.



Figure 3

This model can be complicated or simplified as needed to fit the organisation and harmonise with other solutions. It can go a long way to developing a continuous improvement mindset.





Deploy

Change can be difficult in the best of times. In a crisis many of the challenges associated with calmly trying something new or rolling out a different way of working are compounded given the additional pressures and the need to more rapidly address emerging challenges effectively. Successfully deploying practical solutions in sales management requires both effective project management and a clear focus on the people aspects, such as ensuring stakeholder needs are addressed. Key to overcoming these challenges is thoughtful deployment of any solution – clearly defining what changes are being made, when they are being implemented, who should be involved and where they are occurring. This can be addressed through a straightforward three level approach outlined in Figure 4:

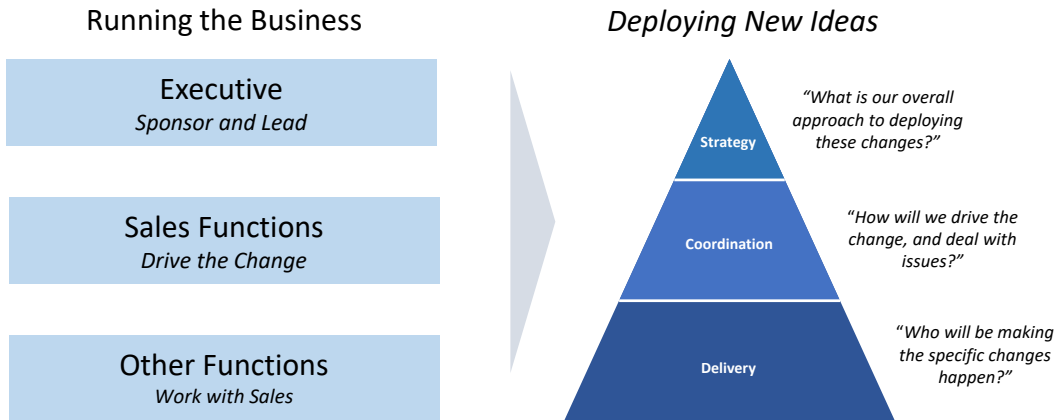
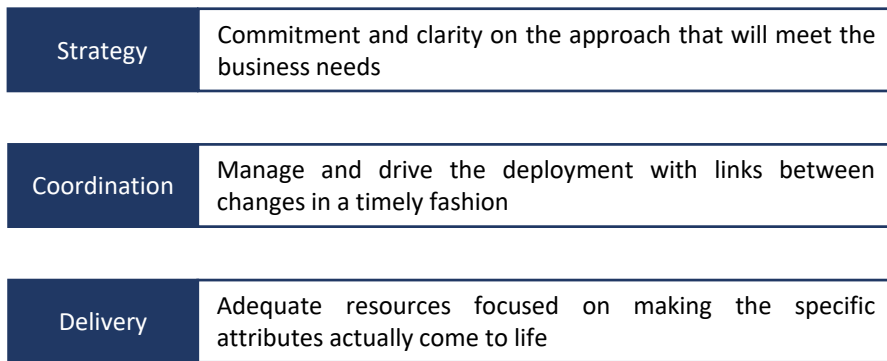


Figure 4

The foundation is making sure that each function understands its interconnected role, and how it contributes to the overall strategy. Our experience shows that is the essence of creating pathways for success across multiple sectors through the use of practical and fit for purpose techniques.

This final article has focused on practical ways to go about implementing changes that will benefit the organisation, both during and after the Covid crisis. In our experience, with a clear understanding of the problems and issues, fit-for purpose solutions and thoughtful deployment strategy, organisations can make value-adding step changes even in the most difficult of times.

We are grateful for the input to these articles from our friends across a broad range of industries. You can also contribute to the discussion by contacting any of the authors or, if you would like to discuss how best to steer your business through the Covid crisis and beyond, we would be happy to talk to you.

GXS Partners is an independent strategic consulting firm specialising in devising effective interventions for competitive advantage.

The name GXS is derived from the Chinese initials of “Gong Xin Shi” or 拱心石, meaning keystone; the element in construction which holds everything together, or in other words, the link between strategy and operations. We are trusted by business owners, directors and senior leaders to define the right strategic priorities and transformative solutions to have them realised.

With an Asia Pacific focus, we combine in-depth understanding of Greater China and the Asia Pacific region with our global experience. We have held senior executive positions ourselves, delivering market growth, running effective operations and transforming organisations to create value. We work with many of the world’s leading organisations in their sectors, as well as high growth enterprises and ambitious innovators.

Sales Dragon Consulting is a sales-focused management consulting and training firm dedicated to helping companies grow.

Sales Dragon Consulting brings 25 years of experience executing and managing sales and business development strategies across APAC. We’ve developed highly effective and proven sales methods working with top-level sales teams and winning thousands of mandates from major corporations throughout the region. We create experts in sales and sales management – we create Sales Dragons!

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