

Optimizing Inside Sales During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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The last several months have been tough on businesses and employees alike. Even now, while countries are slowly opening up and companies are trying to get back to some form of normalcy, the Coronavirus pandemic is not over.

If your sales cycle has been disrupted by Covid-19, you're probably hustling to adjust to what many are calling the "New Normal." While some businesses fear the future, those that have been transitioning to inside sales and telesales have an advantage.

Using inside sales is a trend that's been growing for almost a decade. It's estimated that inside sales jobs are growing 15 times faster than outside sales. In addition to lowering costs, it provides a sales force that can work remotely and virtually when

and if required.

Now, the key is to take steps to optimize your inside sales. It's time to look beyond the problem and focus on the opportunities. Here are five areas where you can make a real difference.

1) Escalate Your Transition to Inside Sales

You can accelerate your move to inside sales by:

- Training your outside reps on inside sales techniques. Even if you continue to rely on outside sales after the pandemic, you'll have field reps equipped to do a lot more virtually.
- Expand the roles and responsibilities of your inside sales and telesales reps beyond qualifying and nurturing leads. Let them work the full sales cycle; consider teaming your field reps with telesales reps.
- Consult with an expert on how to train sales reps and build an effective call center.
- Hiring more skilled tele-services professionals that are ready to work from day one. Outsourcing the function is an excellent way to get going rapidly.
- Digitizing traditional sales and demos to support virtual sales.

2) Support Your Reps—Reassure Them That You Are “In It To Win It”

Even an excellent sales force deals with a lot of anxiety these days. Be there for your salespeople, building morale, answering questions, mentoring, training and helping them to cope — even if you have to do it remotely.

Reset quotas to reflect the sales environment. Select metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) that will help you manage an inside sales force when working remotely. Also, you may need new protocols for handing off a customer or prospect should a rep become sick or temporarily unavailable. Consider incentive plans that reward a team effort.

To help your reps get through the transition:

- Make sure they have the tools, technology and bandwidth to work from home.
- Encourage a healthy work-life balance with some flexible hours and time off for

family issues that arise.

- Monitor your reps to make sure they are succeeding and not becoming overwhelmed.

3) Stay in Touch with Everyone

Two-way communication with employees, customers and prospects is more critical than ever.

- Keep your employees informed—individually and as a group. Hold regular sales meetings, in person and online training, one-on-one conferences and even after-hours virtual social events. Keeping them in the loop will lower emotional and mental stress.
- Be proactive. Anticipate problems. And alert executives to reps' concerns.
- Keep customers informed about how your company is coping with Covid-19. Pave the way for your reps by letting customers know how to contact sales and customer service. Reassure them that you put customers first.
- Encourage your inside sales reps to reach out to customers and prospects. Even if sales are down, they can work to build strong, enduring relationships. Help your reps by preparing email templates and discussing call strategies.

4) Invest in Your Pipeline

One of the better ways to optimize your inside sales teams is to keep them working. And the best strategy is to provide reps with a steady stream of good leads. Now is the time to be creative in your lead generation strategies. Here are some ideas:

- Offer exclusive webinars and content to prospects that sign up for more information.
- Give special discounts to customers who buy now.
- Ask for referrals.
- Change your messaging to reflect current pain points and new ways you can bring value.
- Promote products and services that can help other companies in transition and share ideas for making the transition easier.

- Expand your marketing channels to take advantage of virtual platforms. Start a YouTube channel. Offer webinars. Step up your social media postings. Above all, stay visible.
- Pay attention to your images and messaging. Try to come across as considerate, empathic and positive. And don't raise unnecessary fears.

5) Be Prepared with Contingencies

In uncertain times, you need to be prepared for whatever happens. Keeping customer relationship management (CRM) systems current is especially important. If one or more reps become ill, you'll need to transfer the workload. CRM systems enables the rest of the team to pick up new clients and prospects without missing a step.

No one looks forward to a crisis, but they happen. The prepared manager has a better chance of coming out on top. Above all, remember that many companies thrive during difficult times. According to a BCG study, 14% of businesses accelerate growth and profits during economic downturns.

Optimize your inside sales with support, communication and a robust pipeline—and turn this pandemic into opportunity.

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