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Sales go online – does it work?

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Kirjoittajat

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In the year 2020, the world experienced a global pandemic, which changed the way we conduct our lives, do business, interact and execute sales.

Even as the world around us changed, sales remain to be the main revenue stream for companies. In sales, face-to-face meetings have been the dominant form of interaction, but today it is vital to find out how to conduct successful sales in the times of social distancing.

Online sales in the times of social distancing

A web conference in the morning, a customer telephone call at midday, an online sales meeting in the afternoon: virtual, technology-supported meetings are an indispensable part of today's working world. Especially nowadays, due to the pandemic, personal sales meetings in the business world are mostly replaced by virtual meetings.

All you need for an online sales meeting is a working internet connection, a workable computer and software. Even better if all parties are also equipped with webcams. The effort of the organization and costs are not comparable to conventional business meetings with travel, hotel costs and time allocation.

What used to take hours, can now be completed within minutes through online sales meetings. Since time is money, the option of online meetings can bring enormous cost savings.

Moreover, online sales meetings make it even easier to cooperate internationally across different time zones, bringing the world closer together and to interact globally. The work-life balance improves, since one can be back with their family faster and people's creative side is stimulated to do something a little bit different. At least in theory.

Wherever there are advantages, there will also be disadvantages

It is very easy to organize yourself in a way that you rush from one online meeting to another, forgetting to have a break between a call which ended at 10.58 and the next one starting at 11.00. Connection problems, hardware malfunctions and challenges in interaction, especially without a camera, can make online sales very challenging.

Not to mention the building blocks of trust generation. It is true that video conferences are more personal and trust-building than telephone calls due to the combination of sound and video.

At the same time, non-verbal communication, facial expressions and body language can often be lost or at least not observed as effectively through the computer screen. Sometimes people have the courage to address difficult topics only in direct contact.

Preparing for the future of sales

Since the beginning of the pandemic, most of the sales meeting practicing has been conducted via online ways at Turku University of Applied Sciences. During the practicing, students of the course “Sales Workshop” have experienced a few problems online meetings can have and found out solutions how to overcome them.

Nobody moderates properly, nobody interacts

As a salesperson, you are responsible for finding out the needs of the customer, making things move forward and proposing a benefit-based solution. To accomplish this in an effective way, a seller wants the customer to explain, interact and talk during the meeting and at the same time, make customers feel that you are adapting to them individually.

The seller cannot “read” the customer as well online, especially if you only see a small video picture of them. To overcome this, new approaches and sequences are needed. Instead of lengthy product presentations and beautiful PowerPoints, timing for the interaction needs to be planned and executed.

The seller should not be afraid of giving some space for silence, show with the visible part of their body that they are interested and paying attention. By nodding occasionally and by learning when not to share presentations, interaction can be more effective.

The seller did not sound interesting

After shifting the focus from presentations to a bigger view of the customer, it is important to sound interesting and look like a professional. Without conscious use of the voice or video, you lose the customer in the endless jungle of emails or in the worst case, they are following an interesting series on Netflix, while pretending to be present.

Sound interesting. Through targeted verbal structuring, emphasis and pauses, content and messages can be communicated more clearly and convincingly. Look professional. Even online, it is important to dress for the occasion, meaning a business dress code instead of casual; adjust the camera to show roughly 50% of your face and utilize a background either by settings or physical adjustment, to transfer to a “pro” approach.

I do not feel at all familiar with this company, he/she couldn't convince me

Meeting virtually is easy, maybe too easy. The seller might be tempted to invest less time to prepare or to handle the online sales meeting like a friendly discussion, especially if this meeting is the sixth one of the day.

When meeting online, it is at least as important to prepare, be present and stay focused. It is possible that the buyer has already had a long series of Teams/Zoom/Skype discussions and therefore preparation is still key, paying attention pays off and delivering value through internet ensures the success.

Even if we were to return to times like one year ago, online sales are here to stay. While hardware, software and connection problems can ruin an online sales meeting, the seller should not be the one to do it. Prepare, practice and interact. It might be different than face to face, but it is possible to close the deal online. You just need to find out how.

Timo Holopainen is Principal Lecturer, Sales at Turku UAS and he has lately been utilizing online sales as part of Sales education and Sales competitions extensively during the year 2020.

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