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SPECIAL REPORT //////////////////////////////////////

EMERGING FROM THE PANDEMIC

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Foreword

As we tentatively emerge from the pandemic, the consensus is that selling has moved on significantly – and not just in the most immediately apparent ways like the switch to the hybrid selling world of virtual and in-person engagement and the accompanying transition from field sales to inside sales. Such changes will be persistent, despite some shortcomings (such as issues with understanding the nuances of body language and other cues during virtual calls and a lack of creative interaction while we work from home), not least because there are significant efficiency gains to be enjoyed – the ability to conduct meetings on six continents in a day and the substantial cost and environmental savings to be made by eliminating unnecessary business travel.

But there are deeper, more subtle changes growing out of the interplay of various trends in technology, demographics, education, and of course around wider societal concerns such as sustainability, the environment, and the search for purpose and well-being. It's not just Covid, or indeed the technology revolution, shaping future trends.

Endemic problem

As strategy consultancy McKinsey says in a recent briefing note, "We can still dream about putting the COVID-19 genie back in the bottle, but the more likely reality is that the virus will become an endemic problem we just have to get used to. Climate change is similar in some ways: a difficulty we have to plan for, deal with, and overcome every day."

Throw into this melting pot concerns around talent availability



On the cover:
Emerging from the pandemic

(amplified by the "Great Resignation" and demographic trends ageing the sales workforce), growing economic and geopolitical volatility, and supply-chain disruption, and it soon becomes clear that sales leaders have some serious thinking to do. Tomorrow's focus is on growth, inclusion and sustainability, requiring new strategies and GTM models.

This special report looks at some of these issues through the eyes of various sales leadership and sales enablement experts, representing the different facets of the sales universe: academics, consultants, practitioners, professional organisations, and technologists. I am grateful to all of them for taking time to make a contribution, and hope that you find these thoughts useful as we start to look beyond the pandemic.

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No going back

Bob Apollo

What should B2B sales leaders be prioritising in 2022?

As we head towards 2022, sales organisations are emerging from a tumultuous two years. Across many markets and industries, the sales function has had to cope with transformational changes that have been compressed into a short period of time.

Inevitably, some sales organisations have managed to adapt better than others. They have embraced virtual working and are now trying to understand what the "new normal" is going to look like – almost inevitably some sort of hybrid model that combines digital, virtual and on-site selling.

Just as inevitably, some salespeople have managed to

“We need the salesperson of the future to be digitally adept, to be comfortable with hybrid selling and to make effective use of technology. But we also need them to be agile, adaptable, and have an always-be-learning attitude.”

adapt better than others. The best and brightest have embraced new ways of working, mastered new skills and refocused their energies on redefining, identifying and engaging their most promising sales opportunities.

And let's not forget the customer in this picture. Changes in B2B buying behaviour that were already underway have been accelerated. Customer expectations have changed, and they have become increasingly comfortable with the idea that – even

for complex buying decisions – an increasing amount of vendor interaction would best be handled through digital and self-service channels.

Regardless of what traditionalists might wish for, and even if a hybrid model of selling becomes the norm, it's clear that there is no going back to the "good old pre-pandemic days" (which were in reality not that great, anyway).

So, if we accept that we face a world of continuing and potentially somewhat unpredictable change, what should B2B sales leaders be prioritising in 2022?

Start with your people

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins shared this timeless advice for leaders: "If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we'll figure out how to take it someplace great." This is as true today as it was when the book was first published in 2001.

The skills, experience and attitudes we need may have changed over time, but the fundamental principle remains the same. In complex B2B sales, no matter how much technology assists and enables them, we're still going to need great salespeople.

But the competencies we expect them to master have evolved. Some of the changes are obvious. We need the salesperson of the future to be digitally adept, to be comfortable with hybrid selling and to make effective use of technology. But we also need them to be agile, adaptable, and have an always-be-learning attitude.

I don't think this is age-related; it is mindset-related. We need to assess whether our existing salespeople and the people we plan to hire have the necessary DNA. We can't achieve this through observation and interview alone. I believe sales leaders need to formally assess their current and potential sales organisation against the competencies they are going to need to succeed.

Adapting to the "everywhere customer"

In its recent research report, *The Future of B2B Sales*¹, Gartner identified that sales organisations need to embrace their existing and potential customer's preference for what I'll

¹ See Snapshot on page 9 summarising Gartner's "Future of Sales 2025: Deliver the Digital Options B2B Buyers Demand".

call hybrid buying: a combination of digital, self-service and personal interaction.

Sales leaders need to work with their marketing colleagues to ensure that customers are able to get the information they need, in the way and at the time they want to consume it. One of the obvious implications is that sales leaders need to ensure that this information is consistent, no matter how each customer chooses to consume it (and different customers will clearly have different preferences).

This also means that the old model in which marketing and sales “owned” the top and the bottom of the funnel respectively is utterly inappropriate to today’s buying behaviour. Marketing and sales now need to collaborate throughout the buying journey.

The salesperson as buying facilitator

One of the reasons why we need the right salespeople in the right seats on our sales bus (and heading in the right direction) is that B2B salespeople increasingly need to act not just as promoters of their so-called “solutions” but also as facilitators of their prospect’s buying-decision process.

Gartner’s research has shown that one of the factors that stops an apparently promising sales opportunity turning into a sale is the customer’s buying decision group’s lack of confidence in the decision they are being expected to make – something that has been amplified by the increasing number of stakeholders in most complex buying decisions.

Rather than primarily being sources of information, salespeople increasingly need to demonstrate the ability to help their prospective customers cut through the clutter, to make sense of what might seem to be an overwhelming amount of potentially confusing and conflicting information, and to become confident in both the need for change, and in the choice of their preferred option.

This is particularly important where the project is a discretionary rather than an inevitable purchase, and where the buying group is on unfamiliar rather than familiar territory (for example, when they are trying to buy something they have little previous experience of).

A digitally competent salesforce

The past two years have been a “sink or swim” experience for many salespeople who had been used to working in a largely face-to-face selling environment. Many of those with no appetite or talent for this virtual selling landscape have already moved on (or been moved on).

I don’t believe that salespeople need to be digitally native – in fact, if that’s all they are good at, they will struggle in a hybrid selling world – but I am convinced that they need to be digitally competent. They need to be as effective in managing a virtual meeting as they are when face to face with a prospect.

They need to make smart use of the tools that are available, whilst being cautious about trying to automate tasks that are still best done with some level of intelligent and sentient human involvement. They need to take advantage of digital platforms to collaborate with both their customers and their colleagues.

Laying the foundation for future technologies

Let’s be clear; artificial intelligence will inevitably have an increasingly important role in the B2B sales process, when properly and thoughtfully applied. It can already help to identify patterns that can help salespeople to make smarter, better-informed decisions.

AI will increasingly power transactional sales (and make many transactional salespeople redundant). Rather

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I believe sales leaders need to formally assess their current and potential sales organisation against the competencies they are going to need to succeed.

than automating salespeople out of complex B2B sales environments, I see AI as progressively supporting the sales process, perhaps in ways that we cannot currently anticipate or imagine.

But it is not a magic wand. The thoughtless application of AI and machine learning has – regrettably – made it easier for less intelligent salespeople and the organisations they work for to do stupid things far faster than they could have done previously.

I believe that 2022 will be a year of thoughtful experimentation and application of appropriate AI technologies. Sales organisations that take this approach will inevitably find themselves on an accelerated learning curve that will prepare them to take full advantage of these new technologies as they mature.

Making your salespeople more effective

As you’ll gather from the above, I believe 2022 is a year in which enlightened sales organisations will ensure that they get the most out of their sales talent by equipping them to relate more effectively to the buyer’s changing priorities – and as a result, to both make 2022 a resounding success as well as laying a solid foundation for the future. What do you think?



About the author

Bob Apollo is the founder of UK-based Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners, the B2B sales effectiveness experts. Following a successful career spanning start-ups, scale-ups and corporates, Bob now spends his time as a coach and advisor to growth-phase technology-based businesses, equipping them to adopt the principles of Outcome-Centric Selling.

This time it’s personal!

✍️ Iain Masson



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What behaviour do sales leaders need to be considered trustworthy? Above all, they need emotional intelligence, empathy and good communication skills.

In the bold new world of sales, a mental shift is required.

The pandemic turned the whole world upside down: it made us shift our priorities away from things that we once thought were important to new ways of working and living. As people switch careers and re-evaluate how they spend their time, naturally their behaviours have fundamentally changed. In the world of sales, this is no different.

The rapid shift to digital has meant many have adopted new sales methods by necessity, without the training required to utilise these innovative technologies effectively. According to Showpad’s 2021 [Modern Selling Study](#), the biggest sales readiness challenge that sellers are facing is not having enough training to be successful. We have seen a rapid shift to video calling as a way of reaching potential buyers, which in some cases has resulted in so-called “Zoom burnout”. In the world of sales, we need to pivot to technologies that facilitate the process of reaching prospective buyers and ensure a frictionless experience for everyone involved.

In the past, the most effective way of reaching prospects might have been over the phone, or maybe even in person.

But now, people have less time to spend on the phone making calls. Business travel has also been significantly reduced, and according to a recent Showpad poll, the majority of B2B sellers anticipate this will not resume anytime soon. In this modern selling environment, the option of developing in-person relationships with prospective buyers has been trimmed away, which some may consider a significant roadblock.

Opportunities

But there are also significant opportunities in the world of modern selling. How can we harness what we have learned about changing buyer preferences, and incorporate what is really important to them into our sales strategies? Simply adapting to new technologies is not enough; a real mental shift is required to achieve a seamless transition to the new virtual selling environment. Attitudes and behaviours must be adapted – this is the only way the needs of the modern buyer can be met.

There is strong evidence that buyers value different things than they used to: they want to deal with sellers who are empathetic to their needs, and value authentic interactions with people who understand their preferences. Impersonal sales

interactions are a thing of the past, as new technologies allow for a degree of personalisation that enables a tailored customer experience unlike anything we have seen before.

The modern selling brain

The past 18 months have created chaos in many people's lives: care is now one of the greatest commodities. In the shift to digital that inevitably occurred as a result of the pandemic, some personal relationships with customers have been lost, but this is something that we can change through modern selling technology.

It is more likely for a potential buyer to buy from those they trust, and of course this was true even before the pandemic. According to the LinkedIn [Global State of Sales Report](#) in 2020, 88 percent of B2B buyers stated they would only purchase from someone they trust. But what behaviour do sales leaders need to be considered trustworthy? Above all, they need emotional intelligence, empathy and good communication skills.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and understand the needs and emotions of others, and then to be able to act accordingly. This goes hand in hand with empathy, which is the willingness and ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. In sales, both of these traits help to better understand the needs, problems and preferences of customers. This allows for a higher calibre of customer service and personalisation than you might otherwise have.

Good communication skills are what really sets one seller apart from another: they need to be a genuine person. Empathy, emotional intelligence and good communication skills are hard to teach, but if all of these competencies come together, you have the recipe for a strong post-pandemic sales leader with the power to convey to the customer that they are being understood and listened to.

In addition to an empathetic mind, salespeople must shift their focus to cultivating true, authentic interactions with their prospective buyers. Empathy is the foundation of authenticity. What is the relationship between the two and why is this important for sales?

Prospective buyers want to speak to a real person, on their own terms. To be authentic, sellers have to demonstrate that they are being honest and true to their own personality and values. Buyers have a preference for dealing with people who have a unique personality, not impersonal interactions with strangers whom they perceive as having the sole motivation of making a sale.

Modern buyers consume much more media than ever before – whether that be games, social media or video – and they can spot someone who is lacking in authenticity. To cultivate authentic interactions in the digital world, modern sellers have to be able to utilise modern sales techniques and platforms.

Personalisation is fundamental

Gone is the era of impersonal sales interactions, and along with that comes a need for a high degree of personalisation. Buyers have high expectations for what they expect from sellers, so we must adapt to meet those needs.

Innovative new technologies have come about in recent years that enable us to strive for unique, personalised experiences for each buyer. To meet this need, 84% of organisations were forced to undergo some component of significant digital transformation since the pandemic began. This includes sales-enablement technology, the increased use of video in sales interactions, as well as the development of AI and machine learning in sales.

Sales-enablement platforms are an important way to keep

remote sales teams productive and successful. The main aim of sales enablement is to help sales teams sell better, through ongoing training and monitoring to highlight what sellers need to know and how to execute sales strategies. Specifically, sales-enablement platforms make it easy to deliver engaging experiences and personalise sales conversations, as well as providing useful insights on how the buyer interacts with that content.

Video in sales will also be a strong tool to personalise messages and avoid the miscommunication that can occur in written communication. Being able to record and deliver video messages to prospective buyers will help take away the stress of live video calls and make everyone feel more in control of the interaction. This also helps negate the "Zoom burnout" feeling that many have begun to experience.

The bold new world of sales

Customers of today expect sellers with high levels of empathy, authenticity and emotional intelligence. They expect unique, personalised experiences in the B2B space (not just B2C) and this requires a mental change. New technology must be utilised to provide trustworthy and engaging virtual sales experiences, and sellers need to be equipped with the skills to use this technology effectively.

If one thing is certain, it's that the era of modern selling is here to stay. The pandemic has been a journey for us all. A fundamental shift in thinking and behaviour is needed to meet some of the same objectives that we had before, as well as deal with new challenges that have come our way. There is no more room to take anything for granted, and every decision must be informed by the latest trends and insights into human behaviour. This will be the key differential between sellers of the past and future.



About the author

Iain Masson is Showpad's RVP UK & Nordics. With 15 years of experience in data-led marketing technologies, Iain joined Showpad to lead the expansion into new and emerging markets. Prior to joining Showpad, Masson was the VP EMEA at True Fit and scaled the business across Europe. Other notable roles including bringing Oracle's Social Marketing platform to EMEA as well as leading growth teams at Experian. He is a proponent of big data and personalisation across marketing and sales functions.

The Academics

Dr Frank Cespedes, senior lecturer, Harvard Business School; Professor Mark Johnston, Professor of Marketing and Ethics, Rollins College; Professor Nick Lee, Warwick Business School; Dr Colin Mackenzie, specialist lecturer, Edinburgh Napier University; Dr Javier Marcos, Associate Professor, Strategic Sales Management and Negotiation, Cranfield School of Management; Dr Beth Rogers, Visiting Fellow, Cranfield School of Management

Q: What will be the top-three agenda items for sales leaders as businesses emerge from the pandemic?

FC: 1) Customer Selection and Prioritizing Sales

Focus. The pandemic was not an equal-opportunity plague. It damaged (and continues to damage) some sectors much more than others. An important issue in accelerating growth will be focusing sales efforts on those sectors (verticals, type of customer, and so on) where buying is more likely to happen. In turn, this means reviewing, refining, and often substantially revising segmentation criteria.

2) **Managing multiple channels.** The pandemic accelerated omnichannel buying. For most firms, the choice between in-person and online is not either/or: they are complements and the role of channel partners in dealing with multi-channel selling requirements is growing. But this means for many firms a significant change in the scope of sales leaders' responsibilities.

3) **Pricing.** The supply-chain shocks created by the pandemic have raised input costs and provided a core rationale for price increases in many industries. But sales leaders should also see this as both an opportunity and requirement for a) revisiting and making sure they are articulating the value proposition as it relates to customers today, not yesterday; b) also making sure that their salespeople can do this in framing value and price with the right people at their target accounts.

MJ: 1) Staffing challenges. Many companies are facing critical personnel shortages including in sales. 2) **Redefined customer relationships.** The pandemic radically altered established customer relationships. Salespeople need to learn how to manage customer relationships in new ways using technology. 3) **Supply-chain shortages.** Supply chains have been severely disrupted for a variety of reasons. This has created a great deal of pressure to maintain existing customer relationships while hitting sales targets.

NL: 1) Gaining a feel for how persistent are the changes that have been caused by the pandemic. Is this a "new normal", or will things return to broadly how they were pre-pandemic?

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Can AI replace salespeople? Not in many cases, but it can help make all salespeople and sales leaders more effective.

And if so, how quickly? 2) Making certain that salespeople are "ok". Do they need support to get back to their regular tasks? Are they struggling, for example, to go back to face-to-face contact? 3) Is remote working (including customer interaction) actually adding value, and in what way?

CM: 1) Credit and affordability. It would be reasonable to expect pressure to continue on margins; customers may not be willing to pay more, but business, having increased costs will have to persuade customers that they still represent value. What needs to be taken into the mix is whether or not customers can now be afforded the credit they once had as many will have used their reserves. Sales volume versus risk is not often a focus of salespeople but suppliers need to reappraise their customers.

2) **Finding new customers.** Many businesses will find that a proportion of their customers will have evaporated and it may take time, research and hard work to replace them. This will be harder as the usual, face-to-face meeting opportunities such as conferences and coffees may be more limited.

3) **Managing remote sales teams.** As someone who still caught Covid, despite two vaccinations, and then had to isolate, it may be longer than we think before normal working can be resumed. It is likely that it may be safer, or perhaps the only option, to have some staff members working remotely. Managing people at a distance is not as easy without the "office small talk" that is often important in developing internal relationships. Leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory of leadership has a volume of supportive research that talks about "in-groups" and "out-groups". Effective working relationships

▼ Dr Frank Cespedes, senior lecturer, Harvard Business School



▼ Professor Mark Johnston, Professor of Marketing and Ethics, Rollins College



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are about maintaining people in the “in-group”. It goes without saying it is harder to do this remotely. Effective salespeople are hard to find, so if they feel they are in the “out group”, they may be tempted to jump ship.

JM: Three agenda items all starting with T.... 1) **Technology.** New ways of working have emerged as a result of the pandemic. Likewise, customers have started to consider and be comfortable with new forms of engagement with their suppliers. Underpinning these are digital technologies. Therefore, sales leaders will have to develop compelling technology roadmaps to equip their teams and organisations for new ways of selling and relating to customers. 2) **Talent.** The “war for talent” will increase as a result of the pandemic. Jobs have been destroyed, resulting in people migrating from one sector to another. 3) **Transformation.** Customers’ expectations have shifted, meaning that there is a growing need for adapting methods and practices, and even mindsets to the new realities.

BR: In some ways, the pandemic hangover has been over-shadowed by supply-chain issues. So where we are now, I think the issues are: 1) Working with key accounts to manage shortages and price increases; 2) Balancing sales resources – as pre-pandemic field selling switches to post-pandemic inside sales; 3) Working out where the next few pockets of growth are coming from (as they may be few and far between).

Q: Are these the same three agenda items that appear every year?

FC: These items are perennially important issues for sales leaders, but accelerating growth after the pandemic moves them up on the priority list for sales leaders.

MJ: No, these are challenges created by the pandemic.

NL: No, there are pressing needs which sales managers need to take account of that are unique to moving through this immediate post-pandemic phase.

CM: You could argue that the themes of margin, finding new customers, and managing people are normal sales practice; however, the pandemic has brought these three topics into sharper focus. Sales managers may have to find innovative solutions and work just that bit harder. Often in sales the 80/20 rules apply – 80% of sales come from 20% of customers – but what if the customers that have fallen off the shelf are in the 20%? So, whilst the themes of credit and creating a value proposition, researching new business and managing remote employees may not be new, they are areas that need to be specifically re-addressed for sales organisations to be at the top of their game.

JM: Technology has been a constant priority and concern for senior leaders for some years now. The scarcity of talent and the required acceleration in transformation are relatively new phenomena.

BR: No! We are in scary new territory as 2022 begins.

Q: If so, what are the top-three new agenda items that sales leaders will be thinking about for 2022?

MJ: The ones mentioned above will be the primary items sales leaders face in 2022.

NL: The answer to this depends on how persistent the issues caused by the pandemic are. However, in general as sales leaders start to navigate a broadly “normal” environment, I would say their attention would turn towards how to harness the many technological advances that have been hastened by the pandemic. For example, how can we leverage AI, video calls, and other tech to supplement a sales process that is starting to move back towards some level of face-to-face contact.

CM: Sales leaders should think about repositioning or redefining their value proposition. It’s not “business as usual”. They may find their customers have diversified, so they may have to change to match the post-pandemic business needs. It would do no harm for business to closely review their marketing strategy to check that it still aligns with their updated sales strategy – that’s assuming that since the pandemic they have updated/reviewed their sales strategy and not just been fire-fighting.

Business should be focussing on profitability, viability and reliability: in other words, looking at their own cost of sales, and how profitable each customer is to service. Whether the client/customer is viable in terms of credit, perhaps extending credit appropriately and with some protection, and looking at the reliability of their own supply-chain.

JM: For 2022, another new agenda item is the volatility in the marketplace driven by the shortages in commodities, raw materials (eg Silicon) and energy prices.

BR: As above – we are nearly in 2022.

Q: How persistent will changes such as hybrid working be for sales organisations post-pandemic?

MJ: It is clear the nature of the hybrid work environment has dramatically impacted sales organizations and the customer relationship. While there will eventually be a return to more traditional work environments, the shift toward hybrid workspaces is permanent. Indeed, this trend had started before the pandemic but was accelerated as a result of health concerns.

NL: Probably less than people thought. There is a reason that firms have been organized as they were (ie physical proximity), and it is not completely inertia and “this is how it always was”. There are advantages to being in physical co-location with employees, and also for organizations to be co-located. These advantages have not disappeared. So, in the end, the key task is to maintain any positive effects of pandemic working habits, but not lose the benefits of physical location.

CM: There is a push by many companies to get people back into the office. However, this may be resisted in certain areas, where employees realise that it is preferable to work with a quiet dog in the background, rather than crush onto a commuter train for a long sticky journey into town. Pre-pandemic there was a move to home-working; this shift has been accelerated, with many now choosing to live and work in the country.

However, the loss of communication probably hurts companies in ways we just don’t think about. One business lady told me that, in their office, everyone used to listen to all the business conversations and matters were less likely to be lost. No matter how good your CRM is, not everything said is written down or noted. If team camaraderie becomes unglued, then staff retention could also be a hazard. People don’t work for money; they want and need more, and a feeling of belonging is harder to foster when working remotely.

Business needs to recognise that the tension can also be with the individual, some wanting to work in a group but for obvious reasons are suffering anguish. Mental health problems are real, and business needs to adjust its working environment to support employees especially during these unusual times.

There should be clear conversation and friendly communication between organisations wanting people back into the office and those employees resistant to the old status-quo. It is unlikely that train companies will offer part-time season tickets for hybrid commuters.

JM: There is consensus that new forms of work that became the norm during the pandemic will continue after the pandemic. There are two main reasons for this: financially, remote working is advantageous for a number of companies; secondly, employees are increasingly demanding flexible work arrangements with a preference to spend part of the working week working from home.

BR: It will persist. Customers want more self-service or quick online interactions for more categories of purchase. Also, there is a cost-advantage with at-home working – less travel, and so on.

Q: How are supply-chain issues affecting sales organisations?

MJ: Supply chain issues are having a significant impact on sales organisations, and this will continue into 2022. There are

LOOKING TO 2025



WAY AHEAD

50% OF CHIEF SALES OFFICERS WILL SHIFT FOCUS FROM BEING LEADERS OF SELLERS TO LEADERS OF SELLING.

SELLERS WILL PIVOT FROM BEING THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION TO HELPING CUSTOMERS INTERPRET INFORMATION, IRRESPECTIVE OF SOURCE.

SHIFT TO DIGITAL

*** B2B BUYERS SPEND ONLY 17% OF ENTIRE PURCHASE JOURNEY WITH SALESPeOPLE.**

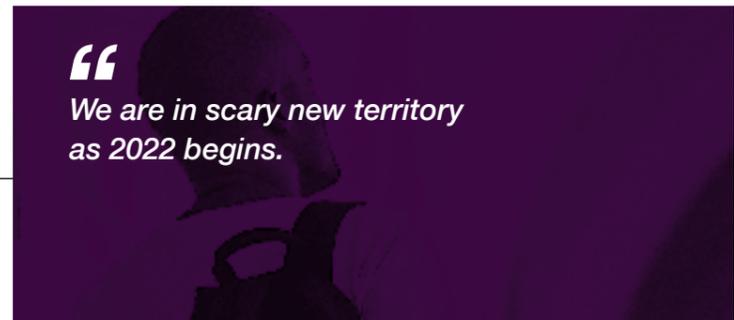
*** DUE TO DEAL COMPLEXITY WITH MULTIPLE SUPPLIERS, SALESPerson GETS ABOUT 5% OF CUSTOMER’S TOTAL PURCHASE TIME.**

*** 44% OF MILLENNIALS PREFER NO SALES REP INTERACTION AT ALL IN A B2B SETTING.**

UNCERTAINTY

UNCERTAINTY LEADS TO A 30% DECLINE IN CUSTOMERS’ ABILITY TO REACH A PURCHASE DECISION AT ALL, AND A 42% REDUCTION IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF PURCHASING A PREMIUM PRODUCT.

For more information, see: “Future of Sales 2025: Deliver the Digital Options B2B Buyers Demand”, Gartner, <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/future-of-sales-2025-deliver-the-digital-options-b2b-buyers-demand>.



shortages in major components like computer chips that will continue to impact the ability of companies to deliver products to customers on time and at quoted prices.

CM: Sales forecasting has never been an exact science. In some cases, it is production-led; in some cases, customer-led. However, when you have uncertain supply-chain issues, whether it is a shortage of HGV drivers or essential components, this causes more complications for everyone involved in sales. It doesn't just impact on sales output but also on how you maintain trust and relationships with your customers. It put stress on sales organisations to maintain or improve their external communication.

Many business that I know are having to reappraise their stock levels and their own supply chains. In some cases, they are looking to find local suppliers to minimise interruption. This offers an opportunity for salespeople to target customers closer to home. Where there are problems, there are opportunities.

JM: Significantly. To start with, the cost base of many manufacturers has dramatically increased. Therefore, if they wish to maintain margins, and are unable to achieve efficiency gains, they will have to translate to the market the increased costs via higher prices. This will, on a number of occasions, result in lost revenues. Second, the uncertainty of supply will mean account managers and salespeople won't be able to fulfil customer orders, therefore failing to deliver on "promises" made. Lastly, security of supply will become a premium feature of manufacturers' value propositions.

BR: It seems inevitable that the operations side of the business will have to switch back to some local sourcing, which will have price implications. Sales professionals will have to manage the messaging to customers. Value co-creation might be focused on doing more with less, eg de-engineering products.

Q: What are the top-three technology trends that will be on sales leaders' agendas for 2023?

JM: 1) Artificial intelligence and machine learning, enabling smarter and more efficient processing of structured and unstructured data. 2) Virtualization – both augmented reality and virtual reality will provide new ways to present, unengaged with customers. 3) Advanced systems, enabling the capture of customer interactions (both written and verbal) in real time.

BR: 1) Which is the best online platform for encouraging creativity in meetings with colleagues and customers, or what can be done with existing platforms? 2) Can the Internet of Things provide analytics to identify new sales potential? 3) Can some kind of AI (eg analytics-driven chatbots) enable self-service and/or engagement with customers online?

Q: What's the current situation with respect to AI in sales?

FC: AI is a very elastic term, and that's a problem: sales leaders must first clarify what is meant here if they are to make use of new technologies, increased data, and better communication tools. But if by "AI", we basically mean more/faster/deeper data analytics, then I see the following as the places where AI is most likely to have a significant impact on sales leadership and sales organization in the next few years....

Increasing selling time. The data vary by industry and company, but most salespeople spend the bulk of their time on non-selling activities and much less than 50% of their time interacting with customers. AI analytics – informed by managerial know-how – can blend virtual and traditional sales processes to increase selling time in many organizations. Think

about the impact in a business if smart use of digital tools can offload other activities and increase selling time by an incremental 10-20%. In most businesses, that represents a very significant gain. Further, when improvements lower the total cost of selling activities, prospects that were not profitable enough to target become worth it, increasing the addressable market.

Monitoring online/offline interactions. As a multi-channel combination of online and personal selling becomes the norm in sales models, digital tools become important in measuring and evaluating where, when, and how to deploy online and offline efforts. New analytical tools can shed light on what does and does not spur initial adoption, the features that retain customers, and the offers that are more and less likely to be effective. These tools are also important for understanding where in-person selling efforts have the biggest impact and where they are not necessary.

NL: There is a huge explosion now in the potential of AI to help in sales coaching in real time, as well as in other areas. The key is to use AI to do things it is suited to, but not for things that it is not good for. AI is not a cure-all or silver bullet, and the best firms will supplement AI with human resource (and vice versa), not "throw AI at anything", and expect it to work effectively. The pandemic has helped AI develop in this sense, because the massive growth of digital interactions has led to massive data increases, which helps AI develop. Can AI replace salespeople? Not in many cases, but it can help make all salespeople and sales leaders more effective.

JM: In B2C, it has seen an explosion; in B2B, a wide range applications are still in their infancy.

Q: What are the key talent issues for sales leaders post-pandemic: recruitment, development, retention?

MJ: There are several significant talent challenges facing sales leaders post-pandemic. First, simply finding qualified (in some cases even unqualified) candidates is proving to be a challenge. Second, job candidates have many opportunities (a seller's market) which is driving up the cost of hiring qualified candidates. Finally, many candidates may lack essential skills (for example specific product knowledge) and require additional training.

CM: Recent research (Mackenzie & Bauer, *ijOST*, 7.4 2021) identified that many sales managers and salespeople do not feel valued. Development of salespeople is often haphazard and without regular review. Sales leaders should consider the provision of organised continuous professional development of their sales managers and team. Sales is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude, and these can all be "brushed-up" to impact positively on the bottom line.

If your team members are not willing to develop, then you have to ask yourself whether you have the right people in place. It always amazes me how many sales managers are promoted because they are the last person standing, not because they can manage. Development of sales managers is not simply about putting them on a management course; it's about developing their thinking, their ability to mentor, to coach and support others in developing essential skills.

In essence it is important to recruit people who want to improve, rather than have basic skills. It is important to develop people for themselves and for the business and, if you want retention, give them a reason to stay.

JM: The main issues as I see them are: 1) High levels of turnover, with all the associated costs. For instance, in the US it is estimated that 27% turnover exists in many industries. 2) The skill sets for sustained performance in sales have changed in such a way that educational institutions will take time to catch

up and create the needed human capital. 3) To fill sales jobs.

BR: Re-thinking the resourcing model – use of third parties, employees working from home, technical skill sets for key account managers.

Q: Have you noticed a change in the skill sets required for salespeople, since the onset of the pandemic?

CM: My business contacts tell me how much harder they have to work to get to see the right people. My son owns a specialist retail business, and he is doing well, but he has had to improve the verbal telephone skills of his people and offer new services to cope with distance selling. My daughter owns a recruitment company, and she says the skills set that her salespeople have had to manage is managing working from home. I also teach sales, and students have had to learn how to sell using video conferencing, beset that it is with technical problems. Learning how to present yourself via video needs some thought around positioning, background and trying hard to work out body language and eye contact. How long will it be before we are comfortable shaking hands again?

JM: Yes resilience, ability to work in virtual environments, systematic preparation of customer interactions have brought about significant changes in how we sell.

BR: Online sales activity requires much more homework and planning – the time with the customer has to be tightly structured.

Q: What are the key skills for a) salespeople and b) sales leaders going forward?

FC: a) **Salespeople.** Online media make product and price comparisons a click or two away in most markets, and access to decision-makers is getting harder and more time constrained. The days of salespeople as, primarily, human versions of product literature are fast disappearing, because customers often have this information, in detail, before they meet with reps. Hence, there is more necessity for reps to add value when they do interact with prospects and customers. Similarly, sales tasks in more industries are becoming more data-intensive, because the customer has more data. This is a significant training issue.

b) **Sales leaders.** Technologies and the data revolution in organizations are increasing the cross-functional interactions required of sales leaders, and especially with their colleagues in finance who now get more granular data about sales activities (as well as revenue outcomes) and ask sales leaders questions about those activities. Both financial-literacy requirements and business acumen are increasingly important competencies for someone seeking to build a career in sales management.

MJ: There are three essential skills for **salespeople** going forward. First, salespeople need to understand the customers' business using technology to educate themselves and their customers. Second, as always, salespeople must be able to communicate the value proposition clearly and succinctly to the customer. As technology replaces face-to-face meetings, the communication skills of the salesperson must evolve. Finally, the salesperson must be able to manage customer expectations given the current challenges in the supply chain. For **sales leaders**, the world has changed, and they must learn to manage in an environment with personnel challenges, supply-chain shortages, demanding customers and shrinking margins.

NL: I don't see any differences here post-pandemic, and, the core skills (from my perspective) are broadly similar, because to me the most important skills are better thought of as "meta skills": things like learning ability, flexibility, comfort



Salesperson welfare has never been more important. The health and welfare of the salesforce is critical for the long-term success of the company. In the current environment the salesperson's welfare is a top priority.

with change, and the like. Obviously, I think sales leaders probably need a strong emphasis on empathy and softer skills at the moment, and recognition of unique circumstances and challenges that their employees have faced, and may continue to do so.

CM: The key skills essentially don't change over the years: those of listening, understanding needs, building trust. However, those key skills have never been more important than now. **Sales leaders** need a high level of strategic thinking and also to develop a strong, authentic ethical compass to prevent reputational mishaps derailing sales growth. The key to all of this is communication – internal and external. Dumping information in emails doesn't do it for me; sales leaders need to be more inventive and original to not just get their message out to customers but also to their teams.

JM: For **salespeople** the required skill sets are a combination of four dimensions: business acumen, cognitive abilities, relational competence, and functional expertise. For **sales leaders**, they will have to develop new approaches to managing performance, and the same if not a higher degree of adaptability than their sales forces.

BR: a) **Salespeople.** As ever, in-depth customer knowledge and the application of company capabilities to help customers succeed. That doesn't change; what has changed is that has to be done over a different medium. Given the supply-chain shortages, co-creation of value switches to doing more with less product (eg in category management) or de-engineering.

b) **Sales leaders.** The challenge of applying resources to opportunity will be different, so sales leaders need to be open-minded and may have to research new ways of doing things. Remote management, which was always there to some degree, has become the norm. Engagement with staff will become more focused, with less opportunities for informal discussions and social events.

Q: How much of a priority is salespeople's welfare?

MJ: Salesperson welfare has never been more important. The health and welfare of the salesforce is critical for the long-term success of the company. In the current environment the salesperson's welfare is a top priority.

NL: Obviously, it SHOULD be the most important priority.

CM: Anyone responsible for a team needs to have them as a priority. Sales leaders should always be thinking: "What's it like for the team member? Will this action make them feel valued and supported?" As comedian Billy Connolly once said, "If you walk a hundred miles in someone's shoes, then you've probably got away with stealing their shoes." By all means try walking in their shoes, but remember it's ethical to return them.

JM: Crucial – particularly given that younger generations place a strong emphasis on wellbeing and work-life balance.

BR: Much more so than pre-pandemic. Business leaders have focused on teamwork, motivation and engagement, and showing empathy to employees.

The Consultants

Mark Davies, Founder, Segment Pulse Limited, Visiting Fellow, Centre for Strategic Marketing and Sales, Cranfield School of Management, and The Advanced Services Group, Aston Business School; Dr Mark Hollyoake, Director, Customer Attuned and Associate Lecturer, University of the West of England; Tim Riesterer, Chief Strategy Officer, Corporate Visions; Dr Philip Squire, CEO, Consalia; Philip Styrlund, CEO, The Summit Group

Introductory thoughts from Mark Davies

Following insights gathered from recent conversations with Cranfield KAM Forum Strategy Group members (team meeting) as well as individual discussions with members and private consulting clients, there is a general feeling that things are not back to normal.

Some organisations can see customers “face to face” but it is patchy and there can still be trepidation. The result is that meetings with senior people can occur, but with an allocated 30-minute Zoom slot you must be very precise, develop pre-read and have a good reason to be seen. This has always been

the case, but post-Covid, suppliers can find it difficult to get airtime.

Additionally, whilst relationships that were formed pre-Covid (before 2019) can still be robust, if these executives in key posts have changed, it is hard to form new relationships without meeting people (not impossible but it is more challenging). Generally, suppliers are keen to see a return to normal but fully accept that the use of technology (Zoom) is here to stay – a positive but also an adaptation is required in order to form relationships.

Q: What will be the top-three agenda items for sales leaders as businesses emerge from the pandemic?

MD: 1) Gaining a common understanding with large complex global customers is a challenge. With access to customers being more complicated (due to restrictions meeting customers) it can be difficult to have a holistic view that is validated by the customer. Increasingly, customers do not have this clarity themselves anyway (quite often they can find themselves firefighting as supply chains remain fractured by post-Covid challenges).

2) Collaborative innovation was a trend before Covid. It is still an urgent requirement, but forming teams with customers and establishing conversations around new innovative collaborations can be difficult. KAM is shifting into this area of partnering and working to respond to changing competitive

environments. The intent to do this is considered important and an opportunity by both parties, but with limited time working together it can be a challenge to progress.

3) Environmental (Carbon Neutral) supply positions is becoming more essential than an add-on request. This is a different shift in perspective, not necessarily related to Covid. Key account managers are the bridge between suppliers and customers; they need to have environmental aspects built into customer value propositions.

4) Maybe something that is **unique to KAM**, but some of the information that is offered by platforms providing critical business information is out of sync with what is required. KAM planning templates are often unique (for each organisation) – standard CRM systems quite often do not align. This is a challenge that has been around for a while and is not linked to Covid.

TR: 1) Enabling their teams to deliver more effective virtual, digital, inside selling conversations and presentations.

2) Moving from “technology-optional” to “technology-essential”, especially engagement tools that ensure consistency and persistency across the customer journey. 3) Driving more deliberate integration with marketing and customer success for a singular commercial process that optimizes the customer experience.

PSq: 1) Building trusted relationships with customers – connected versus connecting. 2) Coaching sales teams. 3) Rebounding and scaling sales activity.

PSt: 1) Without question, the top issue that we’ve observed that has emerged as a result of Covid (and will also remain as a result of Covid) is talent attraction and retention. The simple truth is this: people no longer need to move locations to move jobs. So now it is much easier than ever to recruit and move people. So, it will be increasingly important to proactively attract and retain talent in ways that have never been focused upon before. This includes focusing on both soft currency and hard currency. It’s not just about money; it’s about companies that provide meaning, purpose and respect.

2) The second issue is around the shifting customer engagement models and coverage models. As the world shifts to a more blended/virtual-selling model it’s now been shown that people don’t always need to be face to face.

3) The third issue is to have meaningful and relevant interaction.

What are the new skills required? It is simple... to be relevant. What hasn’t changed from before Covid (whether an interaction is live or virtual) is, if you’re not relevant, you’re not going to make a difference for your customer.

The next skillset is around your own company. The key will not so much be the customer, but how sales professionals can keep and increase the agility of their own company’s responsiveness to customers’ needs. Companies that continue to remain product-focused instead of market and customer-focused will flounder. Companies that listen, that innovate, and then adapt will be the winners in the future period. So, it has never been more important that sales professionals elevate their skills of structured storytelling in conveying the voice of their customer to the minds of their senior leadership of their own company.

Q: Are these the same three agenda items that appear every year?

TR: These are emerging trends that instantly became necessary in transformation, and will soon become the operating norm. Sales leaders will find they are not in control of this shift. It is happening to them with customers realizing there are better ways to engage, buy and re-buy. The pandemic

forced everyone to reckon with the digitization of selling versus the holdout and stiff-arm position many sales leaders had assumed.

Q: If so, what are the top-three new agenda items that sales leaders will be thinking about for 2022?

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Your values are now ultimately your value proposition. So, the culture and character of your company is now ultimately the value that you bring to your customer.

MD: 1) Environmental issues take centre stage. 2) Managing fragile supply chains (helping and advising customers across the entire supply chain. 3) Developing relationships via a mix of communication channels (digital and direct). 4) The need for KAM (and building a single view of complex customers) is seen as very important – especially developing this single view in a complex/shifting environment.

TR: We are working with companies running field trials trying to answer questions for them like: “Can we move from local, branch field offices to inside sales? Can we move from indirect, channel to inside sales? Can we penetrate new markets with inside sales versus adding expensive field sales resources.” The purpose being to validate the new inside sales motion by testing and certifying a play that can be applied to a transformational investment in non-field selling strategies.

PSq: 1) Leading with purpose. 2) Attrition rates and recruitment of salespeople. 3) Data- driven sales operations. 4) “Emocracy”.

Q: How persistent will changes such as hybrid working be for sales organisations post-pandemic?

MD: We see that hybrid working is here to stay. It can be efficient, and you can access global customers easily. There is also a growing strong desire to have face-to-face meetings, conferences and gatherings with a level of safety. (Some organisations have customers that are still hesitant to operate outside the digital on-line methods of communication.)

TR: The lowest estimate I’ve seen is that 75% of customer interactions will be virtual. These changes are absolutely persistent. (See my response above about the kinds of tests we are running with organizations... These are companies looking to shift billions of dollars in sales from outside options to inside options.)

PSq: Pre-pandemic working from home was somewhat frowned upon. During the pandemic it was proven that we can

operate productively from home. Now we’re seeing a greater flexibility which employees expect from their employers. The hybrid way of working may change the use of the office of the future.

PS: We believe that the future will be a hybrid blended model, roughly two-thirds virtual, one-third live depending upon industry. It is key to have live interactions to establish relationships and then use virtual interactions to sustain relationships.

Q: How are supply-chain issues affecting sales organisations?

MD: Supply-chain Issues are critical (worse in some industries than others). With inflation starting to creep into the economic picture, there can be pressure placed on suppliers to absorb these price increases (that are often outside their control). Handling and advising on inflation as either temporary or more permanent in the supply chain is something key account managers are having to discuss with customers.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Whilst fragile supply chains and resulting economic issues are challenges, they also present huge opportunities for KAMs. If they can work with customers and provide solutions to these issues, they have a reason to be

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The real opportunity lies in the reality that times of adversity are often the best times to build relationships. This is an opportunity to align senior leadership of your company and your customers, and to sit down in a collaborative manner.

listened to. As always, good salespeople will get a seat at the customer’s table if they are willing to find value-based solutions to critical problems. A good recession and economic shock can be good for business!

PSq: Our customers are feeling the effects of supply-chain issues. Costs are increasing; lead-times are increasing; transportation of goods/logistics are affecting the propensity to purchase.

PS: Hugely. Many salespeople are now in a state of permanent apology mode, constantly apologizing for delivery delays and dysfunction within the supply chain. However, the real opportunity lies in the reality that times of adversity are often the best times to build relationships. This is an opportunity to align senior leadership of your company and your customers, and to sit down in a collaborative manner. Determine what can be done to improve supply-chain issues. One of the most valuable questions that salespeople can ask

customers is, what are other suppliers doing?

Q: What are the top-three technology trends that will be on sales leaders’ agendas for 2023?

MD: 1) CRM systems aligned to KAM. 2) Using technology in the value proposition (especially as part of servitisation offers. 3) Value-capture technology.

PSq: Predictive analytics for operations and technology that can help measure the relationship structure and relationship quality.

Q: What’s the current situation with respect to AI in sales?

PSq: Currently, I would say its embryonic but sense we are at a cusp where AI will begin to play a bigger role in low-end transactional sales processes.

Q: What are the key talent issues for sales leaders post-pandemic: recruitment, development, retention?

MD: This is an area that we see increasing in importance. With the pace of change being so rapid, attracting the right level of person to operate at strategic/ key levels is vital. This has been the case for several years, since organisations are seeing a greater saturation of business opportunity in a smaller footprint of customers.

Attracting, developing, and retaining this talent is crucial (and very difficult). I have no data or insights whether this has become more complicated post-Covid. My gut feeling is that the need to innovate and respond to severe challenges has increased, and this puts a strain on suppliers to have talented people who can form and implement a response. Never easy, and probably more intense now.

PSq: There is significant challenge to recruit good talent at the moment – supply is behind demand. We will see the growth of sales apprenticeships as a means of properly training and retaining sales teams.

Q: Have you noticed a change in the skill sets required for salespeople, since the onset of the pandemic?

TR: 1) Digital interaction first mindset; need to get excellent at virtual interactions both synchronous and asynchronous. 2) Harnessing technology to improve digital engagement; where it was once an option to use it is now the core of selling activity. 3) Understanding data that can be used to prioritize and more effectively engage, as well as using data to provide benchmark-type insights to prospects and customers.

PSq: 1) Reflective practice. 2) Emotional intelligence with their customers. 3) Agility and responsiveness to customer needs.

PS: 1) Clearly, we have shifted from a level of strategic selling at layer one, to trusted advisor at layer two, to now trusted strategist. This involves the ability to provide strategic direction and insight to your customer. This is the highest form of value creation and co-creation. It involves transcending product, and now providing



◀ Mark Davies, Founder, Segment Pulse Limited, Visiting Fellow, Centre for Strategic Marketing and Sales, Cranfield School of Management, and The Advanced Services Group, Aston Business School.



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Whilst fragile supply chains and resulting economic issues are challenges, they also present huge opportunities for KAMs. If they can work with customers and provide solutions to these issues, they have a reason to be listened to. As always, good salespeople will get a seat at the customer's table if they are willing to find value-based solutions to critical problems. A good recession and economic shock can be good for business!

direction as the ultimate form of value, which pulls through products and solutions.

Q: What are the key skills for a) salespeople and b) sales leaders going forward?

PSq: 1) Of course, we will say a positive sales mindset: client centricity, tactful audacity, authenticity, proactive creativity. 2) Values and purpose within the role. 3) Self-awareness – listening and being aware to the pressures on the individual. 4) Coaching.

PSt: 1) To be the great listener. This involves two central attributes: first, listening for what your customers care about; and not just what they care about, but why their issues are priorities – in essence, listening for root-cause analysis period. Secondly, is to pay attention: pay attention to what your customers aren't saying. Do they have blind spots? What don't they know that they don't know? That's where you can bring the greatest value. I summarize all this under a notion of being a professional noticer. It's beyond listening.

2) Elevate your virtual quotient. We have IQ, EQ, and now I believe there's a third element that I would describe as VQ – your ability to project and convey and be relevant in a virtual world. I believe much of the "Q" has to do with the ability to use time in a very precise and concise manner.

3) For **salespeople**, success in the future will lie in being a sense-maker to help your customer make sense of information, market trends, insights and generally bring simplicity and clarity to their tsunami of complexity. From a **leadership** standpoint, I go back to my focus that talent attraction and retention is

everything. Every product and solution today have become a commodity. The only thing that can't be commoditized is your culture. That comes from leadership. And I believe leadership is about character. Leaders with high character will attract talent with high character, which will create unusual business and financial results. In essence, who you are now matters as much as or more than what you do.

Q: How much of a priority is salespeople's welfare?

MD: KAM welfare is recognised as critical. Performance drops if they are working flat out. Organisations are recognising that "working from home" is hard and long hours (working in isolation) can be stressful and damaging to health. Again, the formal response to this is not clear – but it is a challenge.

PSq: It is a key priority not just of salespeople but to be aware of everyone's welfare within your sphere of influence. Part of the attrition problem mentioned above is due to welfare issues. This will help focus the mind.

PSt: Very significant. You can't give away what you don't have. If you are not a grounded, centred person, how can you help other people? Your values are now ultimately your value proposition. So, the culture and character of your company is now ultimately the value that you bring to your customer. If a company has a toxic culture, top talent will leave, and leave rapidly. No talent, no future.

Dr Mark Hollyoake's overview

The last 18 months have created circumstances that many would never have imagined. It has required leaders to make decisions that challenged their agility and decision-making ability. As many leaders navigate their way out of the changes the pandemic imposed on the organisation, the focus appears to be on: "what's rights for our people" – not only in the way we reorientate work but also for people's mental health and wellbeing.

This has led to the lens being swivelled and focused internally, more than may have been the case in the last few years. This introspection has been compounded as businesses try and "knit fog" to plan and understand the full implications of Brexit.

While this has been going on, your customer management, sales and customer service functions have been dealing with the customer interface. Many have been coping with virtual interaction, while at the same time juggling working from home. So, now as we start to renavigate the way we interact with our customers, what will this look like? Will your customers be happy with you coming to the office for a monthly meeting? They may have become used to short yet frequent virtual interactions: do they need to change?

Ask your customers

We suggest the first step in the process would be to ask what your customers' needs are and how they are accommodating new ways of working. Once you are armed with this information you can replan your contact strategy accordingly.

- However, it is worth considering a couple of factors:
- How has the customer fared through the last two years and how is their business holding up going forward?
 - Where is the relationship at the moment? Is it in the early stages, where we are still trying to get to know one another or do we operate like old friends across numerous contacts and touch points against a shared plan or way of working?

Both of these will have a bearing on your customer and contact strategy as we move out to reorientate our relationships, in order to meet new requirements and ways of working. So, what could you do?

If you have a relatively new relationship or an established relationship with new people in place, then the focus needs to be on rekindling the emotional elements of relationship development. Approximately, 70% of the time you spend should be focused on social interaction in order to get to know one another: face-to-face meetings, meeting up at trade events or conferences, doing something social. Keep up the virtual interactions, but make time for the informal and social. Don't forget the rational elements: approximately 30% of time allocated to virtual or face-to-face business review or planning meetings, coming together to collaborate or co-create, focused

on sense-making a way forward out of the current uncertainty or "peeking through the fog".

If you have long-established relationships where most of the key contacts know each other quite well, you need to try to rekindle the social side of the relationship to catch up on the personal ups and downs that have taken place over the last two years. Allocate around 30% of time on the development of opportunities to capture "what we did well" and "how we overcame adversity" – these are our relationship "war stories". They build and embed trust.

Then, about 70% of efforts are focused on baselining and evaluating "where we are" or re-setting after the last couple of years of turbulence. Come together, preferably face to face, to collaborate on making sense of the way forward and what lies ahead in the next three, six and nine months – using this as a platform to co-create mutual value for the relationship going forward.

Our suggestion would be the development of a short-term agile relationship plan that you come together to steer and develop, so that going forward the customer management teams have a sense of what they can do to kick-start new relationships and rekindle established bonds, while ensuring a more hybrid approach is developed that takes account of the last 18 months.



MODERN SELLING

92% THINK THAT **REMOTE WORKFORCES WILL REMAIN THE NORM.**

85% EXPECT **LEANER TEAMS.**

59% OF US RESPONDENTS SAY MAJORITY OF SALES TRAINING NOW VIRTUAL.

SINCE THE PANDEMIC, **75%** SAY THEY HAVE AN **ENABLEMENT PROGRAMME IN PLACE**, UP FROM **64%**.

SALES CONTENT MANAGEMENT

82% SAY THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THE REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY, BUT **DON'T** HAVE ACCESS TO THE RIGHT CONTENT.

ONLY **40%** HAVE **ENABLEMENT CONTENT SOLUTIONS** IN PLACE.

THE **NUMBER ONE** MODERN SELLING **CHALLENGE** IS **INACCESSIBLE CONTENT.**

BUYER ENGAGEMENT

84% OF ORGANIZATIONS SAID THEY WERE FORCED TO UNDERGO **SIGNIFICANT DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** SINCE THE PANDEMIC.

57% OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE SHIFTED MORE THAN **50%** OF THEIR **SALES CALLS** TO REMOTE-ONLY.

MEASURING ENGAGEMENT ON REMOTE CALLS **INCREASED** IN DIFFICULTY BY **9%**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE SHOWPAD'S 2021 MODERN SELLING STUDY, [HTTPS://WWW.SHOWPAD.COM/LP/SHOWPADS-2021-MODERN-SELLING-STUDY/](https://www.showpad.com/lp/showpads-2021-modern-selling-study/).

winning the *four value* conversations



▶ science-backed strategies to win your most critical sales conversations

Asking your prospects and customers what they want doesn't make you an effective seller—it makes you a tape recorder.

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The Practitioners

Waldemar Adams, Global Senior Vice President, SAP Customer Success COO Office; Grant Van Ulbrich, Director, Sales Transformation – International, Royal Caribbean International

Q: What will be the top-three agenda items for sales leaders as businesses emerge from the pandemic?

WA: 1) Ensure customer success. 2) Budget achievement and growth plans. 3) Manage their teams successfully, with empathy.

GVU: Our focus is keenly on selling digitally in a new landscape where the retail travel partners and the high street have gone virtual or are working from home. We're supporting this by also educating our sales force on "What is Digital Marketing and Selling" so that we can help our B2B customers evolve their own business platforms into the digital world. We're focusing on rightsizing the sales organization to service the changed landscape and match our B2B customers and their needs. And we continue to develop our internal sales force throughout the pandemic through education on "Selling Transformed": transitioning to a deliberate focus on the customers wants, needs, business strategy, goals and visions versus leading from a supplier perspective.

Q: Are these the same three agenda items that appear every year?

WA: Partially – the core business priorities remain the same: deliver budget and ensure customer success. Managing the team now has a new spin, as of the virtual and remote collaboration both with the team and with the customers.

GVU: No – our focus comes from new knowledge through our partnership with Consalia Sales Business School. An awakening of the positive mindsets versus the negative ones we live in daily as well as learning how to master "The Winning Value Proposition" and new ways to work within account management from Consalia.

▼ Waldemar Adams, Global Senior Vice President, SAP Customer Success COO Office

▼ Grant Van Ulbrich, Director, Sales Transformation – International, Royal Caribbean International



Q: If so, what are the top-three new agenda items that sales leaders will be thinking about for 2022?

WA: At SAP we started "FlexWork", which was anyhow in scope but very much accelerated by the Covid situation. This will give our staff better flexibility to decide what will be their preferred mix of working from home or from the office. It is interesting to see that there is no general rule, and the perception where and how to work varies a lot in the different countries and continents.

A second topic is "digital demand" as, again, a lot of the customer interaction will start virtually.

The third item is to "drive change". In our company we start the year with GTM (go-to-market) changes to learn from the past and to optimize our setup. This can be evolution or revolution and it always requires special attention to make those changes work and be successfully applied across the organization.

Q: How persistent will changes such as hybrid working be for sales organisations post-pandemic?

WA: Very much – that is why it influenced and accelerated the "FlexWork" we had anyhow created. The new environment that we are all in also requires new answers and greater flexibility. As a consequence, it also requires smart management, clear and constant communication, and empathy. >

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Flexible working: it is interesting to see that there is no general rule; the perception where and how to work varies a lot in the different countries and continents.



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We are expanding our Sales Force AI enablement platform globally. We're also expanding the Power BI systems and we've developed our own applications to sit on top of Salesforce and Power BI that enables our account-management team to present and share with our customers in a much more customer-centric methodology.

GVU: For Royal Caribbean International we have been returning to offices from October 2021. Some have already in various locations, but not all of our B2B customers have. We will continue to support them both virtually and in person wherever possible.

Q: How are supply-chain issues affecting sales organisations?

WA: I see this less for us as a software company but very much for many of our customers. Therefore, it is within our responsibility to help them with managing this transformation and change to become an “intelligent enterprise”.

GVU: For Royal Caribbean International our “supply issue” is getting our ships back into service. But that is opening up daily and, by the end of this year, we aim to have the majority of our fleet back in service. Selling our product is in full swing!

Q: What are the top-three technology trends that will be on sales leaders' agendas for 2023?

WA: 1) The move to cloud solutions continues and accelerates, which feeds into a demand for distributed cloud and also for a cybersecurity mesh. 2) Sustainability, understanding of the environment: footprint, optimization of supply chains, insights and governance. 3) Also to build a resilient business by applying AI better and also to add hyper-automation.

Q: What's the current situation with respect to AI in sales?

WA: AI remains an important aspect to better understand data, but it still requires human interpretation. AI and ML (machine learning) can definitely help to discover patterns, trends and relationships which have not been seen before. To turn that into an action requires management involvement.

GVU: For Royal Caribbean International it is expanding our Sales Force AI enablement platform globally. We're also expanding the Power BI systems and we've developed our own applications to sit on top of Salesforce and Power BI that enables our account-management team to present and share with our customers in a much more customer-centric methodology. The three elements are: Salesforce, Power BI, and applications over these two systems for better useability and presentation.

Q: What are the key talent issues for sales leaders post-pandemic: recruitment, development, retention?

WA: The battle of brands; need to provide a clear purpose.
GVU: I'm happy to say that we've maintained the health and strength of our sales teams throughout the pandemic. Our primary focus was to our travel partners and we maintained our sales force in place even when we had nothing to sell. We wanted to maintain support for our B2B customers.

Q: Have you noticed a change in the skill sets required for salespeople, since the onset of the pandemic?

WA: Yes, to the extent that it is less “hunters and farmers” like in past decades, but partnership in building and growing the business together.

GVU: We've noticed that some core skillsets needed to be dialled up and these include empathy, compassion, consideration, kindness, and patience – all surrounding the key component of listening. But the main skillset was learning how to manage personal change. People's lives have changed and the change has been constant and unprecedented. I created a new personal change model during my master's programme with Consalia and Middlesex University. We've given that to our internal sales force as well as our B2B customers so they can learn how to think and navigate personal change for themselves. It has been truly positive and well received. You can see and share it for free at www.scaredsowhat.com – “Scared – So What?” was also featured in the article “Igniting a SPARK” in *iloST* edition 6.1 as well as the *Change Management Review* and *The Oxford Review*.

Q: What are the key skills for a) salespeople and b) sales leaders going forward?

WA: Empathy, passion, business ethics and a can-do mindset.

GVU: a) **Salespeople:** Learn patience; begin your conversation with the customer with “What are your goals, vision, needs?” versus starting the conversation with what you have to sell. Practice empathy and compassion. The travel industry is starting over! b) **Sales leaders:** Learn how to lead transformationally versus transactionally. We cannot sell in the way we've always sold. We have to develop our people and lead from within, promoting a culture of intrapreneurship, hermeneutics¹, and transformational leadership with agility. It starts with you and you need to develop the next generation of leaders now.

Q: How much of a priority is salespeople's welfare?

WA: Purpose and a clear “why” have overruled the monetary aspects. (Also, see the hunter-farmer point above.) In a business world with services and sales, money is not a good driver anymore when you have a certain base established.

GVU: TOP CONCERN – burnout has been a real concern. If we don't invest and protect our salesforce, who will?.

¹ Originally the interpretation of biblical texts, hermeneutics more generally today refers to the philosophical study of interpretation. Traditionally, disciplines that rely on hermeneutics include theology, jurisprudence, and medicine, as well as social sciences, and humanities.

The Professional Bodies

Australian Institute of Sales, New Zealand Institute of Sales – Stuart Edmunds, Director; Association of Professional Sales – Andrew Hough, CEO

Q: What will be the top-three agenda items for sales leaders as businesses emerge from the pandemic?

SE: 1) Staffing (retention, attraction, development – with the skills shortage). 2) New-customer acquisition and accelerating pipeline. 3) Increasing virtual/remote selling capabilities.

AH: 1) Understanding that the future salesforce is something to be planned for but that the post-pandemic state has created a talent pool that is consciously not “falling into sales” as a career and choosing careers and professions they feel “matter”. 2) Building sales ecosystems that are FAIR in the way they treat, motivate and reward sellers in a way that puts their feelings at the centre of their efforts and creates great feeling and experience for customers, which ultimately accelerates revenues. 3) Understand that in a position of leadership “hitting the numbers” is not the defining legacy but the changing and motivating of the profession’s future “sellers” and changing the perception of sales is more of a legacy.

Q: Are these the same three agenda items that appear every year?

SE: In some ways, elements of each probably are, just with heightened urgency, intensity and need. The virtual/remote selling factor would be the exception here. This is a relatively new need that has been exponentially accelerated in the past 18 months.

AH: These may not have been consistently prioritised previously, but if sales leaders ignore them going forward, they will be destined to be categorised as a “number chaser” forever and as part of an unsustainable sales ecosystem.

Q: If so, what are the top-three new agenda items that sales leaders will be thinking about for 2022?

AH: 1) Creating the momentum in the country to reinforce sales as a worthy career and profession in order to reverse the looming seller shortage; joining with other companies and the Institute of Sales Professionals to amplify why sales is a great place to be. 2) Make themselves as employers more attractive to sellers, being seen as FAIR both internally and externally. 3) Develop their sellers to be more appealing to buyers, prospects and customers.

Q: How persistent will changes such as hybrid working be for sales organisations post-pandemic?

SE: I think almost all organisations will retain the hybrid working model for their sales organisations post-pandemic. The situation has proven the benefits and opportunities of working in this style from a productivity and efficiency perspective, as well as managing against shocks of potential future lockdowns or single point of risk/failure scenarios by showing that the sales organisations can work and succeed in a hybrid form. Only the doomed will mandate a complete return to the “old way”.

AH: The acceleration to digital interfaces and technologies will be permanent, with sales forces always focusing on digital engagements where possible. Some sales forces have shifted from 25% digital business to 60% during the pandemic, and are looking to have their field and account reps become more consultative, adding more value.

Q: How are supply-chain issues affecting sales organisations?

SE: Critically impacting. New Zealand being at the end of the earth for shipping and supply-chain routes is causing massive headaches for importers and exporters. Astronomical shipping cost increases, empty container glut, internal lockdowns restricting the movement of limited supplies around the country, some (large) freight companies have investigated privately chartered ships but are ultimately faced with all the same competitive pressures faced by everyone else. In summary, supply chain issues in New Zealand are causing massive problems for importing and exporting goods. Not good for a very remote trading nation with a very small population!

AH: Supply chains are being disrupted particularly in FMCG; however, most sales motions are not being affected by this issue. In fact, salespeople are using the issue of supply to encourage customers to order quickly to ensure delivery and avoid increased time to market.

Q: What are the top-three technology trends that will be on sales leaders’ agendas for 2023?

AH: 1) Increased and more accurate use of CRM systems, to ensure retention of information and customer history in a world where sales turnover is set to increase. Attrition or reduced tenure increase risk of knowledge loss (about

▼ Andrew Hough, CEO
Association of Professional
Sales



▼ Stuart Edmunds, Director
Australian Institute of Sales, New
Zealand Institute of Sales



customers) in a world where that places revenue at risk. Keeping accurate knowledge will be vital. 2) Enhanced skills in social platforms and presence in order to ensure sellers are seen as attractive by potential buyers. This is an important skill for sellers, but is going to be increasingly hard to manage properly going forward. 3) Automation of digital omnichannels and use of those channels by customers, eg field sales fulfilling orders via digital online capability whilst consulting on more strategic elements and joint opportunities with customers.

Q: What’s the current situation with respect to AI in sales?

SE: There is a growing awareness of AI and its place in sales. A huge amount of education is needed with many organisations, as most are still lagging in their adoption of a Sales Tech stack, or a digital transformation in any substantive sense. Of course, there are always the leaders (many international companies in this group) which have the advantage of being part of an international company and are driving the introduction, use and value from tools in the AI toolbox. In some cases, this might be through best-of-breed for a tailor-made individual solution, or as part of a best-in-class solution (eg enterprise Salesforce 360 implementation or similar). Overall, the adoption of Sales Tech and AI tools in sales would still be very much in its infancy here.

AH: AI can replicate human traits but it can’t be human, so I don’t envisage it will take over face-to-face or inside-sales activities. However, AI (ie bots) are increasingly being used in sales interactions online.

Q: What are the key talent issues for sales leaders post-pandemic: recruitment, development, retention?

SE: Skill shortages have only been exacerbated post-pandemic along all the same dimensions felt pre-pandemic: recruitment, skills, retention, pressure/need to achieve target, attraction to sales profession.

AH: These are interesting. I have spoken to over 20 sales and business leaders over the past 30 days and not one has said they are finding sellers easily. Post-pandemic, the Gen Z generation are consciously not “falling” into sales. Millennials are just not loyal, and even baby boomers are looking for different lifestyles. So, retaining and developing sellers is crucial, and making yourself attractive to potential sellers is imperative if leaders are to grow. Development has to change to self-directed learning programs with sellers owning (but supported by employers) their own development.

Stuart Edmund’s overview from New Zealand

In reality, we’re probably not a lot different from anywhere else in the world – more of the same, but different, and we’ll have twice what we needed pre-pandemic in the post-pandemic world. Some have done extraordinarily well; others have been devastated. For some, it has been skill; for others, fortunate circumstances; and yet others, through no lack of skill or effort or intentions, just sadly the wrong time/sector/industry/ran out of runway.

Q: Have you noticed a change in the skill sets required for salespeople, since the onset of the pandemic?

SE: Salespeople and companies that were well-positioned and experienced to operate remotely/virtually adapted quickly to capitalise on their operating advantage. Upping the ante with communications skills also stood salespeople in good stead when communicating with customers much more intentionally.

AH: Digital capability and remote relationship management.

Q: What are the key skills for a) salespeople and b) sales leaders going forward?

SE: Salespeople: communications, being able to position and articulate a truly value-based proposition, agility by adapting to opportunities and being more creative in responses and solutions for customers, heightened forward planning and risk-management conversations. **Sales leaders:** coaching and talent development, driving digital transformation and exploiting more value from technology in the sales domain; leadership in deconstructing silos and fiefdoms to take a much more holistic revenue perspective inclusive of marketing, sales, customer success, post-sales support, and so on.

AH: For **sellers**, it’s the skill of self-learning, deliberate practice and adaptability. For **leaders**, it’s empathy, ethics and purposeful growth strategy.

Q: How much of a priority is salespeople’s welfare?

SE: Unsurprisingly, there is a spectrum of views related to salespeople’s welfare. Different industry sectors, company size, the magnitude of business dis/stress because of the past 18 months, and numerous other factors feed into how the company and management treat salespeople. Fortunate and well-positioned companies in prospering industries are thriving and supporting salespeople (and can afford to do so) very well, throwing a lot at their staff. Those companies on the other side of the chasm, more affected by extended lockdowns or in other distressed sectors, seem to be, for the most part, making best endeavours towards supporting salespeople’s welfare, retaining key sales staff; however, in many cases are simply unable to afford or don’t have the degree of latitude and flexibility due to the widespread distressed state their business/sector is operating in.

AH: It will be a top three priority.

Technology

Rod Barthet, CEO, Kyocera Document Solutions UK; Iain Masson, RVP UK & Nordics, Showpad



◀ Iain Masson, RVP UK & Nordics, Showpad

Q: Have you noticed a change in the skill sets required for salespeople, since the onset of the pandemic?

IM: Sales leaders must be more tech savvy than ever before, and they have to be aware of the B2C trends that are capturing the attention of the younger generations. This was true before the pandemic, but since its onset the urgency has increased. **Sellers** need to have an understanding of social media platforms, video and advertising trends. They must also have strong emotional intelligence, empathy and communication skills to demonstrate that they are trustworthy and authentic.

The pandemic has shown the ability of people from different industries, but especially sales, to move mountains in a short period of time. It has shown a true capacity for innovation in the sales field. Moving forward, sales leaders will need to have a firm understanding of new technologies that are used to enable modern selling: from video and sales enablement platforms to AI and machine learning.

Q: What are the key skills for a) salespeople and b) sales leaders going forward?

IM: Selling was already becoming a more digital process before the pandemic, and the pace has continued to rapidly accelerate as the world adapts to new ways of working and living. Showpad's 2021 Modern Selling Study found that 92% of B2B sales and marketing professionals believe that remote workforces will remain the norm, which demonstrates that **salespeople** will need to adapt their communication and selling tactics accordingly. **Sales leaders** need to ensure that sellers have the adequate skills and training to equip them to be successful in the modern selling environment. The most important skills today for salespeople are empathy, focus, and brevity. Both sales leaders and salespeople need to be ahead of the curve, understanding what prospects require early, and delivering a direct sales approach that is personalised to their needs. Buyers are increasingly intolerant of cold outreach and need relevant, comprehensive information fast.

Q: What are the top-three new agenda items that sales leaders will be thinking about for 2022?

IM: Buying behaviours have evolved tremendously throughout the digital age, seeing the most accelerated growth specifically throughout the pandemic, and sellers must rapidly adapt accordingly. Working and living in the same space caused many people to rethink what is important to them, leading to behavioural shifts that must be incorporated into sales strategies.

In the modern selling environment, sales leaders must learn how to attract and retain buyer attention. In order to adapt to these new ways of working and living, sellers have to be conscious that attention is an invaluable commodity – and buyers will not give their time to just anyone. Revenue-enablement platforms, using video messaging to strengthen interactions with buyers and connecting with them on social media are all examples of innovative ways to engage with and capture the attention of prospective buyers.

In 2022, sales leaders must think about how to appeal to buyers' newfound thirst for authenticity. It's crucial for sales professionals to be efficient, informative, and yet empathetic: they must demonstrate to buyers that they are trustworthy and transparent, otherwise they will likely not be successful.

Many organisations have shifted to a virtual-first sales environment, and buyers are more informed than ever before

through independent research. Another item at the top of the agenda for 2022 will be how to differentiate your offerings from the competition in the digital world and create a frictionless buying experience for prospects who are considering your product or service.

Q: What are the top-three technology trends that will be on sales leaders' agendas for 2023?

IM: In 2022, we will see sellers utilising video messaging more frequently to attract the attention of potential buyers. After 18 months of online video conferencing causing widespread "Zoom fatigue," sellers must look for new ways to engage with buyers whilst still maintaining a personal connection. According to findings from Aragon Research, 80% of prospects will open a piece of video content but ignore any other type of content that they receive, suggesting that video is a strong medium to bridge the gap between the inconvenience of live meetings and the potential disconnect of written communication.

We will also see sellers utilising analytics to find trends and get smarter about their sales approaches in 2022. It's increasingly important to predict customer behaviour and actively monitor engagement, in order to grow your business and make the most informed decisions.

Finally, we will see a greater focus on revenue enablement as the pathway to modern selling. The main aim of revenue

enablement is to help revenue teams as a whole do their jobs better and create valuable and lasting connections with potential customers. Revenue teams include sales, marketing, professional services and other revenue-facing parts of the organisation. In order to build a modern selling organisation and culture, it is crucial for these team members to come together to orchestrate meaningful interactions with buyers – as sellers are no longer the first touchpoint for informed customers.

Q: What's the current situation with respect to AI in sales?

IM: Artificial intelligence and machine learning have been spoken about in the sales world for many years, and the pandemic accelerated usage of this technology. Time is a precious commodity and resource. The main value of AI is that it can potentially shorten the sales cycle and automate processes that might be taking salespeople away from reaching out to prospective buyers. To be effective in the world of modern selling, sales leaders must make use of the technology that is available to save time while also targeting prospective buyers more effectively. Even though not all organisations will be investing in automation and machine learning, all sales leaders must stay up to date with current trends and consider how they might incorporate them later down the line to stay competitive.

Having your head in the clouds may be the right approach!

In a rapidly changing world, business leaders must be prepared to leave their comfort zones and embrace new product propositions if they want to remain successful in the months and years to come, according to Japanese manufacturing conglomerate, Kyocera.

Rod Barthet, CEO, Kyocera Document Solutions UK, explains that, for organisations in the technology sector, certain tools and solutions thrived during the pandemic and continue to do so, with video collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom the most prominent examples. Meanwhile, other areas of the industry struggled with the closure of offices, schools and universities, including printer or desktop computer manufacturers. Businesses have had to adapt quickly, as the

way information moves through the organisation has become much more dynamic and multifaceted.

For Barthet, having a diverse range of products and services that cover a variety of different areas is key to surviving in the new working world, and helps future-proof the business against further major disruption down the line.

He told the *Journal*: "The past 18 months have shown that technology organisations can be just as vulnerable as companies in any other sector. The positive we can take from the upheaval of the pandemic is that there are lots of lessons we can learn to ensure we're well-prepared for similar events in future."

"Organisations in all sectors need to increase their digital adoption, transform their processes and find new ways to innovate, and technology companies need to be there to deliver this. With this in mind, technology leaders need to take a long hard look at the services they offer and realise that focusing on a narrow product proposition or service offering means their business isn't as resilient as it could be. In effect, we no longer need change to prosper, we need to evolve to survive."

The shift to permanent hybrid and remote working models has also played a significant role in this need to diversify. It is

expected that by 2023, just under a quarter of the workforce will be working remotely full time.

Barthet continued: "There is a wealth of opportunities in this changed working world for businesses willing to seize them. If, for example, your service has always revolved around hardware (printers, computers, physical storage devices and so on) then now could be the time to consider expanding to software as well, especially with the continued growth of cloud. This is something we have focused on as a business over the last five years, and has been a hugely effective way of anticipating and preparing for the challenges of tomorrow."

"Developing cloud-ready software will allow an organisation to extend its reach, build links with new customers and partners, and open up new revenue streams. It is through this kind of innovative thought and engagement that successful companies will continue to add value and remain relevant to their customers and partners in the long term."

He concluded: "Adaptability is the name of the game in the post-pandemic era. Things are returning to some sort of normality, but much of our working lives won't be the same as before. Make the effort to diversify and leave your comfort zone, and there's every reason to approach the future with optimism."

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