

ARTICLE

SALES IS NEVER GOING BACK

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“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old but building the new.”

Lori Harmon | Board Advisor | Strategic Global Cloud Sales Leader | Author and Speaker
as quoted at [XANT NEXT2020](#)

Sales will never be the same. This may sound extreme on the surface—but in reality, sales will never return to the way it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is a good thing. Many of the needed sales process changes were forced upon us as we adjusted to selling from home. And now we will keep the best of those changes going forward. Those who cling to the old ways will be left behind.

A quick characterization of these changes is “digital transformation”. In place of in-person meetings—video meetings. In place of fully synchronous communication—asynchronous communication. In place of “management by walking around”—digital tools, instrumentation, and metrics.

The digital transformation that many in sales half-heartedly embraced is now mandatory. CRM—not optional. Remote presentations—not optional. Screen sharing, email, documentation, call recordings, sales engagement cadences—all not optional. Technologies many “senior” salespeople viewed as tools for their younger counterparts are now required to succeed: [LinkedIn Sales Navigator](#), [ZoomInfo](#), [XANT Playbooks](#), [Chorus](#), [Vidyard](#), [Sendoso](#), [Outreach](#)... these are no longer novelties, but necessities for doing business in a digitally revolutionized world.

And these changes are not temporary. [Bob Summers](#), Managing Partner of [Vertical](#)

[Relevance](#), points out that although some may be ready to get back to face-to-face meetings, customers may not be. He estimates financial services business development professionals will not be able to get face to face with their customers well into 2021, indicating that building new remote selling habits and adopting new technologies and processes will be required.

“Companies must adapt to a digital-first mindset from both a product development and an organizational perspective. Helping companies get there is a core part of what Vertical Relevance helps large-scale sales organizations achieve.”

Inside Sales Teams are Already Digital

We’ve known digital transformation was coming for a long time; many have already transformed their sales development and inside sales teams. These teams are younger, digitally native, and open to change. If you examine a typical inside team, you will see clear aspects of the future. A good sales development rep pivots effortlessly between email, LinkedIn, XANT, Vidyard... She leverages technology for remote and asynchronous interactions at unprecedented speed. She’s often more comfortable in [WhatsApp](#) than she is on the phone—which works because so are her target customers.



50% of the global workforce are now of the millennial age or younger.

B2B Customers are Already Digital

As of 2020, 50% of the global workforce are now of the millennial age or younger. This includes, of course, B2B buyers. These B2B buyers can complete 62% of their buying process without ever talking to a salesperson ([Forrester Research](#)). They have access to unprecedented amounts of information about products, vendors, competitors, and peers. More and more, they are not interested in in-person lunches and in-person meetings. They know what they know, they know what they need to find out, and they would like a salesperson to help them learn in an efficient manner. For today's buyers, a link to an online resource is perfectly adequate—when they need a voiceover they ask for it. A quick text exchange to answer a question is respectful and efficient. Of course the buyer will need to rally their own buying committee and orchestrate larger conversations to make big purchases, but these are meetings that can be done just as easily over video conference.

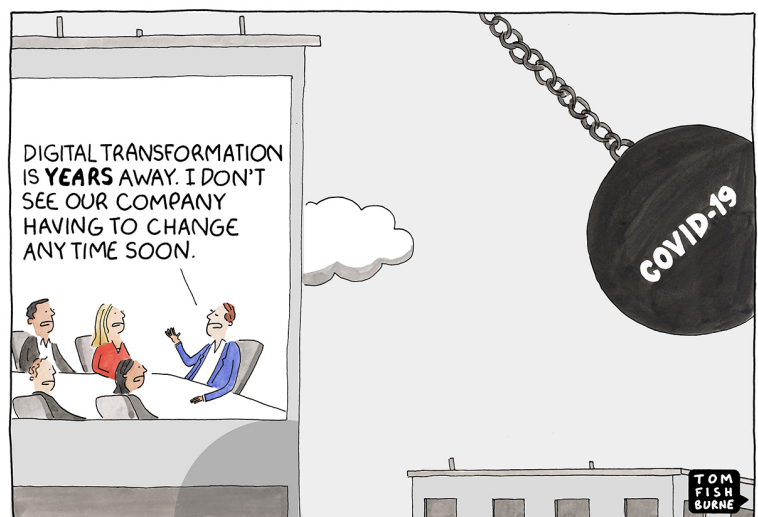
For Enterprise Sales, Digital Transformation is Here

Very few of us have gone so far as to suppose our seasoned enterprise reps want or need new digital tools to get their

jobs done. Often our reps have been on their own—lone wolves more or less—executing a personal playbook they have perfected over years or decades of experience. They have their own personal formula for success. Management might wonder, but rarely question, how they organize their time or plan their work. The field rep shows up on forecast calls, QBRs, and enters minimal details about deals into CRM so they can get paid. Very little else about their job is standardized or automated. They may use a personal cell phone to follow up on customers and prospects. They may travel to pay a visit to a prospect for a formal or informal meeting. They may ask for help from one of the company's expert resources in a meeting they organized. Highly visible in-person meetings punctuate this cadence, where the rep's manager, selling team, and often C-level executives show up on site to meet with the deal's exec sponsor and key influencers. These meetings are important on both sides of the deal as they focus energy and commitment and force preparation and progress toward alignment.

All these efforts culminate in a "gut feel" forecast that gets reported on the weekly calls.

All this has changed with the disruption that is COVID-19—all field reps are now inside reps.



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Now, as Justin Edwards points out:

“100% of meetings are online instead of face-to-face.”

All communication is digital.

Reps and managers have two choices:

1. **Wait for things to get back to normal.** Those making this choice might be working on projects around the house, catching up on Netflix, and waiting to “be able to do their job.”
2. **Work in the new normal.** These people are creating workarounds. They are busier than ever. They are learning new tools and processes. They are leveraging digital and asynchronous communication. They are re-thinking how they interact with their own team and with their customers.

The professionals in camp #2 will have an advantage on the other side of this pandemic. They will have advanced their own “digital transformation” and become that much more in tune with how buyers want to buy. Those in camp #1 will be left behind.

According to Sales Futurist, Justin Michael:

“The role definitions are blending, even going away. Field reps now inside can gain unique competitive advantage by learning to adopt and power-use their existing and future tech stacks. Once technology avoidant, the modernized field becomes one with the stack almost like a Jarvis Iron Man Suit.”

And Sally Duby, Bridge Group Chief Sales Officer:

“Companies that had a great tech stack and were using modern tools and technology before the pandemic are ahead of the curve and should come out of this stronger than the ones scrambling now to get it together. The companies that were already measuring, tracking and reporting their metrics are also ahead of the curve.”

The Future of Sales

The future version of sales, “the new normal,” will have five characteristics that distinguish it from its predecessor versions:



Digital



Fast



Self-Guided Buying



Content-Rich



Instrumented



Digital

[Winning by Design](#), a thought-leading consultancy based out of Silicon Valley, recently studied sales performance data from over 500 SaaS companies and focused specifically on successful SMB reps transitioning to Enterprise.

These reps did between 25-50% of their meetings remotely, even at \$500,000 and above contract values. They leveraged the tools they learned in SMB for prospecting (LinkedIn, ZoomInfo, XANT, etc), as well as [Zoom](#) / [GoToMeeting](#) / [Google Hangouts](#) for remote meetings. They developed specific techniques for replicating an in-person meeting online, including:

- Preparation beforehand (average of 2-8 hours preparing for each meeting)

- Clear agenda
- Engagement of everyone during the call (they assigned someone on their side to actively work the chat window during the meeting)
- Timely notes and follow-ups afterward

In addition to hosting digital, synchronous meetings, these reps were more likely to use asynchronous communication techniques, such as email and pre-recorded video. For instance, best practice when emailing a proposal was to send it with a video-recorded walk-through overlaid (recorded on a platform like Vidyard), which then not only ensures everyone the proposal is forwarded to sees and hears the rationale behind the proposal, but it also allows the seller to track opens, clicks and forwards to see how engaged the buyer is.



Source: Winning By Design, [The impact of remote selling on Enterprise Sales](#)

Notes [Jacco van der Kooij](#), co-CEO of Winning by Design:

“Today’s buyers want to buy impact right now, not 12-18 months from now. Therefore, the speed of the sale is not determined by the speed at which a seller sells, but rather by the speed at which a buyer buys. Digital Selling is an answer to Digital Buying and



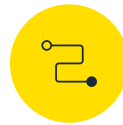
Fast

One of the main characteristics of a modern seller is speed. Part of this is because the modern seller is always on. Time to respond to an email? Minutes or hours (never days). From the buyer’s millennial mindset, a perfect answer a few days from now is not nearly as valuable as a pretty good answer a few minutes from now.

Among other things, the pandemic has increased the importance of sales speed. In *Aligning Strategy and Sales* (Harvard Business Review Press), [Frank Cespedes](#) points out that in most companies the selling cycle is the biggest driver of cash out and cash in. Accounts payable accrue during selling, and accounts receivable are mainly determined by what’s sold at what price and how fast. Consider the impact on your business, now and after the crisis, of shortening selling cycles and accelerating time-to-cash by a week or more.

Iterations, responsiveness, and multi-modality characterize the modern buyer and now the modern seller. It’s easy to find examples of conversations that start on LinkedIn messenger, transition to email, and then transition to text. Some interactions are text, some are video, some are phone. But the common denominator is that the seller is willing and able to set a pace that keeps the buyer moving forward in the process and leaning in. *Winning By Design* defines 3 “speeds:”

- **Speed 1: In-person** (take time to schedule, travel takes time, etc.)
- **Speed 2: Remote synchronous** (saves the travel time)
- **Speed 3: Remote asynchronous** (saves scheduling time and increases ‘touches’)



Self-Guided Buying

One of the major shifts of the past decade is the balance of power between buyer and seller. B2B buyers say they can complete 62% of their selection criteria, including developing a short list of potential vendors, without ever speaking with a sales rep. In that environment, what value does the sales rep add?

Yes... that is the question.

“What value does the sales rep add? We have to have a clear answer to that question every time we engage,”

said [Katie Azuma](#), global VP of Business Development for Infor. Since buyers are largely self-sufficient on the basics, reps need to bring value beyond the basics—consultative skills the buyer can only get from an experienced and studied ‘expert.’



Content-Rich

Sometimes not all the necessary knowledge and skills are in the rep’s head. In that case, she can always broker expertise, but she needs to know how and where to find it so she can curate the right information and get it to her customer in a timely way that supports their self-guided buying journey.

According to a group of senior executives assembled at [XANT NEXT2020](#), the problem is not a lack of information—the problem now is too much information.

“I know the data is out there. I just need someone to tell me what to pay attention to. When I engage with a rep, I need them to add value and save me time,”

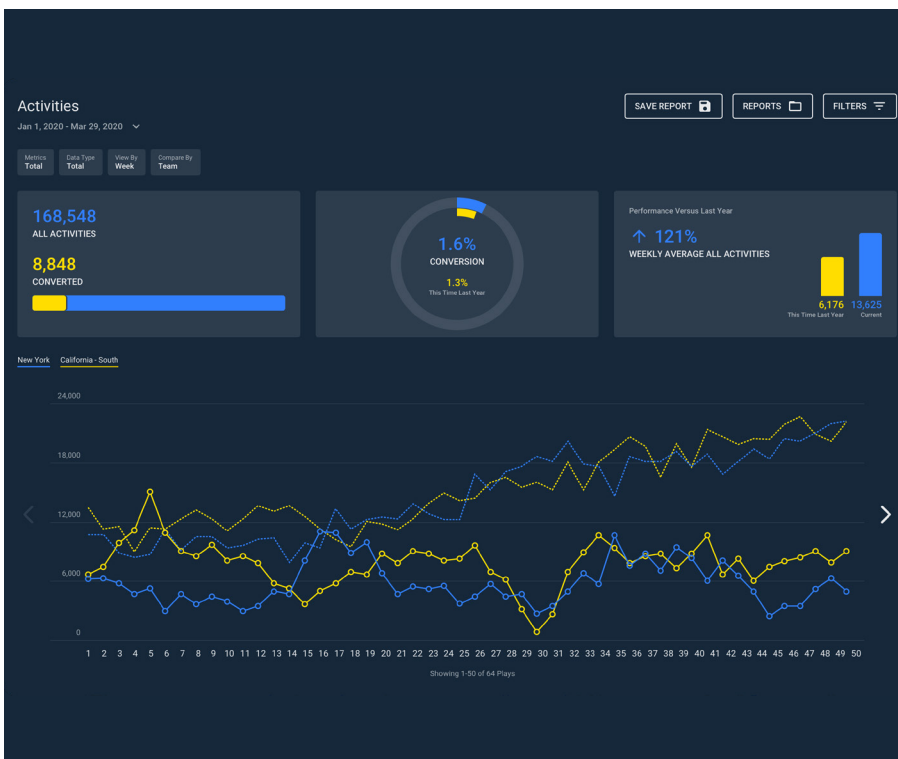
said [Jacque White](#), SVP Customer Success at DXC, and Frank Cespedes notes:

“Modern reps are buying concierges. Precisely because buyers now have access to so much information about product and price, research indicates they place higher value on the salesperson who can usefully curate that information to their business context.”



Instrumented

Remember how we said above that field reps have traditionally been lone wolves, checking in only periodically to report on results? That is rapidly changing. As modern reps engage in modern sales processes (right now 100% online), data is available as never before about what reps are doing when and with whom. It's as if we've outfitted each rep with a fitness tracker. The good sales organizations treat this the same way you would treat data for an elite athlete. What are they doing that's working? What are they doing that's not working? Elite athlete and coach alike depend on data to get better every day and every week. With today's digital selling process, we can do the same thing.



Welcome to the New World of Selling

Let's face it, we are never going back.

What B2B seller, after spending 90 - 180 days fine tuning their sell-from-home motion, now wants to get on planes again and spend 14 days waiting for the travel day then 48 hours to travel to and from a corporate headquarters for a single meeting?

What B2B buyer wants to agree to in-person meetings, when we just proved to ourselves that we can get it all done over video conference?

“Sellers are realizing how much more productive it can be to sell virtually because they are traveling less and can make more sales calls. Companies are realizing how productive and cost effective it is to have sellers traveling less and working remotely. Most importantly, buyers are seeing the advantage of video meetings instead of in-office visits from vendors.

And in today’s circumstances, buyers are more likely to be available to meet. Even when we return to our offices, virtual sales will still be easier and more cost effective for buyers, who won’t have vendors coming by their offices, getting badged in, and taking additional time to network after the sales call.”

Lori Harmon | Board Advisor | Strategic Global Cloud Sales Leader | Author and Speaker

Within the new reality of sales, we can be:



More Digital



Faster



More Self-Guided



More Content Rich



More Instrumented

We can do this and we will do this. Or at least the winning teams will do this. Now is the time to get all systems and processes built and tested so that we come out of COVID-19 lockdown ready to put distance between us and our competitors who do not use this time to re-tool.

Sales is never going back, and that is a good thing. Let’s be on the right side of change—the promoters and catalysts, not the resisters. The future belongs to the bold. Comments and suggestions welcome as always.

Rock on!

-Dave Boyce & Chris Harrington

Resources:

[XANT Playbooks](#)

Winning by Design

- [Research](#)

- [Webinar on Remote Selling](#)

[Justin Michael Webinar on Building Pipeline](#)

Justin Edwards, [3 Things COVID-19 Forced](#)

[That Are Here to Stay](#)

XANT Labs, [The Definitive Guide to Sales Cadence](#)

Frank V. Cespedes and Jared Hamilton, [“Selling to Consumers Who Do Their Homework Online.”](#) HBR.org March 16, 2016

Frank V. Cespedes and Tiffani Bova, [“What Salespeople Need to Know About the New B2B Landscape.”](#) HBR.org August 5, 2015

Lori Harmon, [“Our Finest Hour: How to Create a Virtual Sales Revenue Engine in a COVID-19 World and Beyond.”](#) NetApp Blog, May 4, 2020