



THE BROOKS GROUP

The Next Normal

← PLAYBOOK →

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



As we work through the impacts of COVID-19, it is my belief that the secret to successfully moving to the post-pandemic “next normal” is to sell yourself out of it. I understand that may be easier said than done, given the fact that salespeople in today’s marketplace must battle for every lead, every meeting, and every sale, given the proliferation of reduced budgets or reduced buying authority. It is my hope that the following whitepaper, “The Next Normal Playbook,” will be a trusted companion to you in this dynamic time - providing both strategic insights and tactical tips that you can implement today to

help you and your team sell your way out of the pandemic.

As you scroll through this whitepaper, you’ll benefit from ideas culled from our deep and varied experiences – both from our years of experience as a sales training organization, and from conversations and surveys we have had with hundreds of sales leaders during these last four months.

Having been in the sales training business for more than 40 years (and multiple recessions!), we knew that by jumping into action at the onset of the pandemic – convening sales leaders, understanding their challenges, and working quickly to help them find impactful solutions – we could play a role in helping sales organizations put the situation into context. This exercise proved more fruitful than we could have ever imagined, and the results are included in the whitepaper.

Frankly, as I reflect on the past four months, one of the biggest take-aways I have is that by leaning in with our clients in a true and powerful partnership, we gained next-level market insights that we never could

have gotten if we were simply trying to sell products and services in the face of such tumult. We decided immediately to be a resource to clients and prospects, and to use our training tools and methodologies to simply help in any way we could. This led to rapid innovation, to a complete redesign of our core offerings, and a position as a trusted advisor and partner to sales leaders and their teams.

So, I leave you with the following advice: If you, like us, believe that the way to sell your way out of the pandemic is to become intimately familiar with your clients and their needs, while making sure you have the right team, skills, and methodology to approach the marketplace, please read the whitepaper, and prepare yourself to lean into a bright future.

If in any way I can be of service to you and your team, please feel free to reach out to me directly with questions, comments, or thoughts.

Sincerely yours,

Gary Fly
President & Chief Revenue Officer

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The first six months of 2020 have been among the most turbulent of times that most of us have experienced. There have been three very unique epochs we have withstood along the way as COVID-19 gripped our world: Hitting the wall (March), resignation (April/May), and, finally, emerging into the next normal (June, July, and beyond).

With more than 90 percent of sales leaders expecting to miss their projected 2020 sales targets, it's now supremely critical to re-enter the sales landscape with a concrete plan for sales success.

Here at The Brooks Group, we have redoubled our efforts to take the pulse of our dynamic and challenged marketplace, and we have worked with our clients to prepare them for the changed reality.

Along the way, we have gathered data, insights and expertise that have helped put the pandemic into context, and – we believe – can help provide wayfinding to you into the next normal.

We hope this playbook will help you ensure your plan for post-pandemic success is sound. We'll cover three themes:

- The Right Team
- The Right Skills
- The Right Sales Approach

With the proper people, plan, and insights, we believe you can position your sales pros, and your business, for the best possible outcomes.

Right Team

Shopping for Sales Professionals

Like it or not, there's been no better stress test on the efficacy of our sales team than the current crisis. Likely, you as a sales leader have made some keen observations about the abilities of your current lineup of sales professionals, based upon how they have managed their activities through the pandemic.



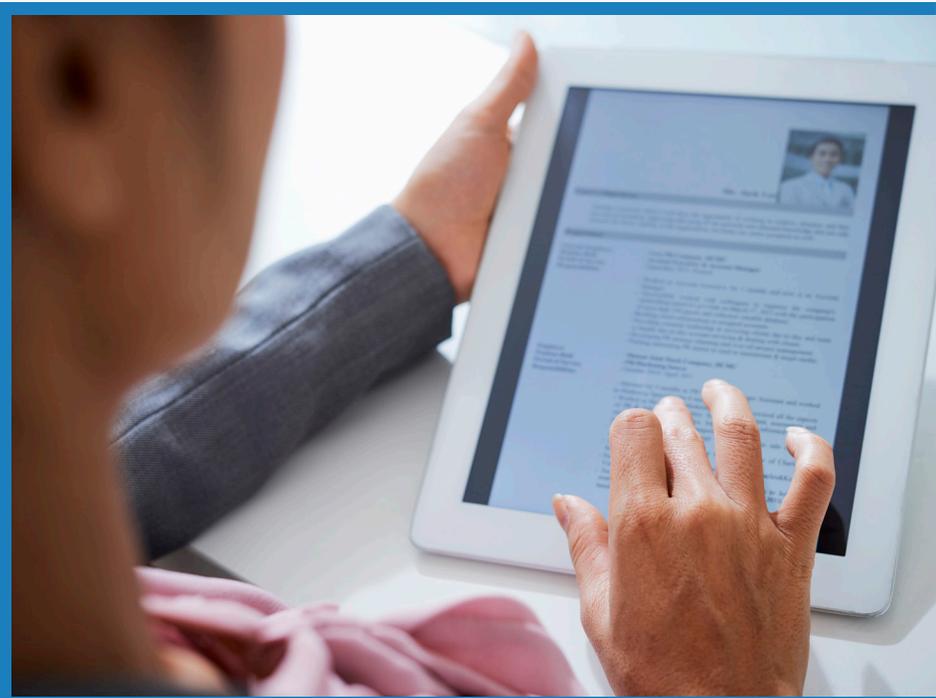
Our surveys found that nearly half of sales leaders would consider replacing the weakest 10 percent of their sales performers right now – a reflection of the need for solid “A” players to prepare for a transformative experience, including new territories, new roles, and new frontiers.

For those needing to trade up, it's a buyers' market right now – with a plethora of talented and well pedigreed sales professionals available who have simply found themselves on the short end of the numbers game.

Upskilling during turbulent times, indeed, has precedent. A Harvard Business School study indicated that, across the past three recessions, 9 percent of companies made strategic investments, including human capital, and came out better as a result of progressive thinking.

Here are some ways to take advantage of the current talent glut, according to the [Harvard Business Review](#):

1. Target three to five great players you would have liked to have hired over the past five years, and check in to gauge their current status.
2. Set up a task force to source potential candidates.
3. Interview and check references remotely with the same rigor you would in person.
4. Go out of your way to motivate the best candidates – rolling out the red carpet and making your top executives available for one-on-one chats.
5. Don't ignore the sourcing, retaining, and development of in-house talent, with an eye toward a promotion or shift for someone who has shown stellar performance during the crisis.



Protect Your “A” Players

It's never been more critical to retain your top sales performers right now. Though cash-strapped organizations may be tempted to consider across-the-board pay cuts and restructuring of incentives, it can be a fool's errand to be penny wise with your sales lifeblood (considering the market conditions for A players we discussed earlier).

So how can you retain and motivate your top performers, and ensure their ongoing satisfaction so they will continue to headline your sales organization?

- Guarantee their 2020 compensation based on 2019 numbers: Most businesses understand that the first half of 2020 is an anomaly unlike any we've experienced. Protecting your top performers' downside can go a long way toward reassuring skittish nerves.
- Increase commission percentages: With sales harder to come by, it might be advisable to provide more upside reward for good deals. Perhaps apply this to new deals, or deals of a certain threshold. This will inspire your hungry sales pros to get even hungrier.
- Transparency at all levels: With so much dynamism in the markets, and within most companies, bring your top performers into the fold – informing them ahead of time of changes or new areas of focus so they can feel valued – and not shocked or surprised.

Optimize Your Non-Sales Roles

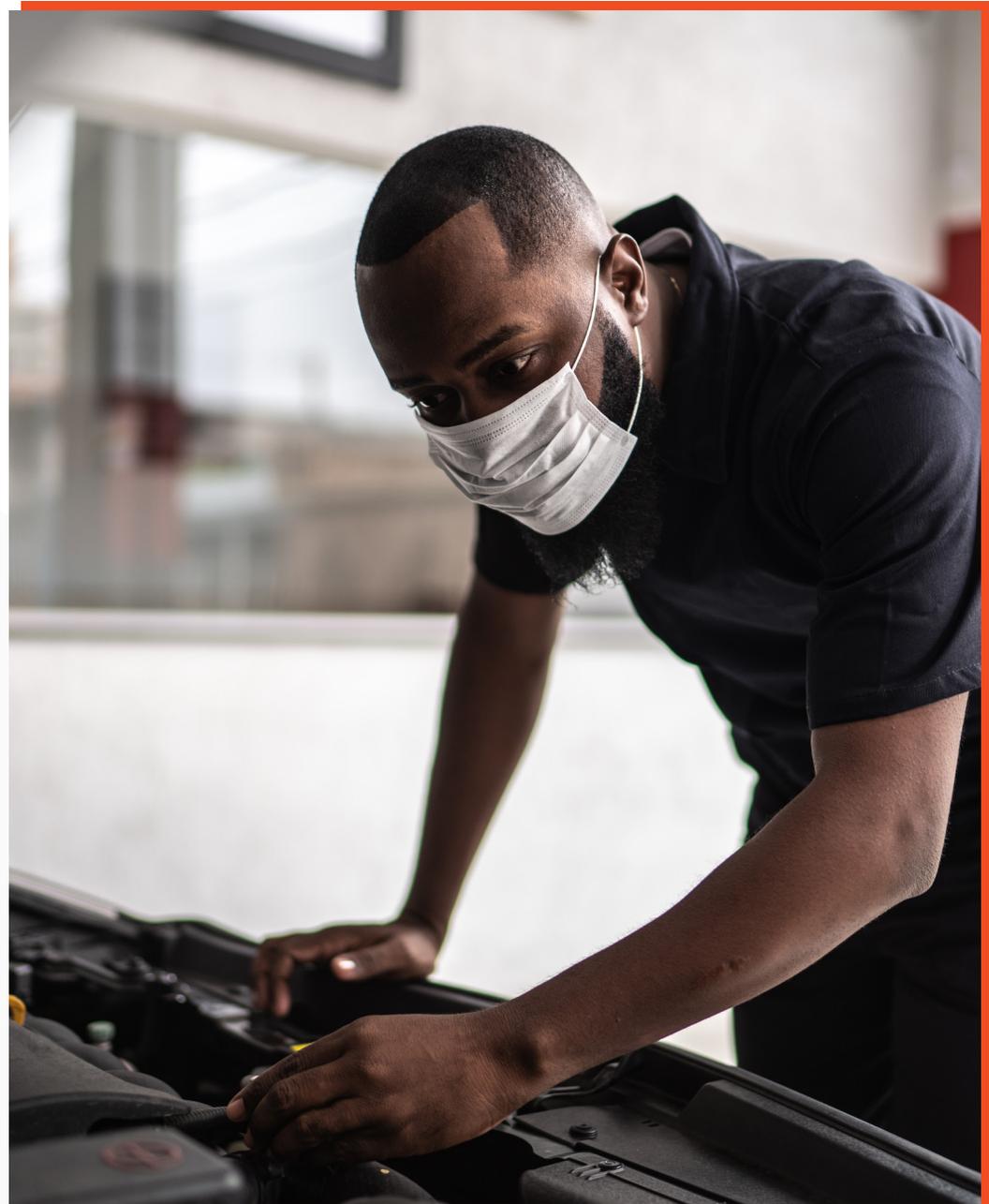
The most insightful enterprises understand that everyone on the payroll has a hand in sales success. Never has this been more important than during COVID-19. To ensure the public's safety, many companies are limiting visitors, including sales professionals, to their facilities.

However, your customer service representatives, parts and repair teams, and service technicians serve essential functions in keeping your clients up and running in the near term, whether through in-person or virtual means. Preparing these colleagues to be your eyes

and ears to the needs of your clients can leverage their visibility for the benefit of your buyers and our bottom line.

Here are a few tips to help engage your service-oriented team members in the battle for dollars:

- **Communication is Key:** Align with your service professionals prior to client contact, so they understand the expectations going in. Perhaps they will encounter an opportunity for a capital sale when they go out – for example, if a repair would only serve to provide temporary relief from a larger problem. Your service personnel need to be able to translate this back to the organization in an impactful way.
- **Leverage their Spirit of Caring:** Most service or technical personnel embrace their roles because they want to help and to share their expertise with people. Interestingly, that’s not that far off your mission as a professional, either. Though your service personnel may not see themselves as “salespeople,” they certainly understand the concept of doing what’s best for our customers. Prepare them by having them ask good questions, make suggestions, and follow through on expectations.
- **Trust is Critical:** In these times when our buyers are making hard decisions about expenditures, it’s important to be seen as genuine and trustworthy. That’s why it’s important for all team members to be seen as supportive of our clients’ realities. Trust will arise from clear communication, empathy, and a focus on how to provide the ideal outcome for your clients’ current needs.
- **We’re All in This Together:** Ultimately, our mission in these uncertain times is to help people to the greatest ability in this environment. Remember – our success is directly tied to that of our buyers, so now is the time to make sure those buyers have what they need to fulfill their mission, for the greater good.





Right Skills and Strategies

Respecting New Boundaries for In-Person Visits

As we enter the “next normal,” it is a certainty that unannounced “drive-bys” with a dozen Krispy Kremes and unplanned drop-ins likely will be seen not just a breach of protocol, but disrespectful to companies who wish to mitigate any risk of a COVID-19 outbreak.

Expectations of buyers, whether we like it or not, have changed – and any future sales calls will need to be both planned – and purposeful. Your calls, therefore, should be more substantive in nature and deliver true value to customer.

Here’s what to consider before determining whether an on-site call is necessary:

- **Risk Versus Reward:** Though it may be tempting to resume face-to-face activity, the cost, right now, could outweigh the benefits. It’s critical to qualify and prioritize the right opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and to plan accordingly. Tire-kicking is best conducted virtually.
- **Have Something to Say:** The old “buddy seller” approach of “just check-

ing in” to see how it’s going is destined to fail. Being prepared for ANY sales meeting today should involve a healthy bit of pre-call planning, a customer-focused agenda, and a desire to present true solutions that deliver value to the investment of time during the interaction.

- **Be a Trusted Advisor:** Delivering enhanced value can go beyond simply what your company is offering. Offer to deliver a market-driven needs assessment that draws from real-world, current day experience.
- **Know the Rules:** If you are indeed invited to your buyers’ site, make sure you are completely clear on their requirements for visitors. Be prepared for masks, social distancing, temperature checks and other protocols that may be required.

Reading People Virtually

With virtual selling likely to be a staple for some time to come, it’s likely that you have become more than familiar with Zoom calls and screen shares. These digital tools do have limitations – namely, the inability to replicate the inputs we typically gather in person.

Sales professionals thrive off reading body language; they can use certain subtle cues like a flinch or a fidget to their advantage; and use the dynamics of the room as data points that make us more effective at closing deals.

So how can we ensure humanity remains a part of their interactions, and how can we be sure they are picking up on that psychological data which is so critical to the sale?

- **Commanding Attention:** Multitasking is rampant during virtual sales calls. To combat this, encourage your sales reps to engage in an interactive conversation – this should be more dialogue, and less monologue.
- **Asking Good Questions:** Query on things like: I’d like to make sure I am communicating clearly about my offer — what do you think about it? What do you think of what I said? Do you have any specific concerns about the details of our product or service? Do you mind if I share my screen to show you some visuals around our offer?

- **Interpretation is Everything:** Whether the buyer is using the camera or not, now is the time to listen closely to the nuances in their voice – not just what they’re saying, but HOW they’re saying it. Heightening awareness of those nuances will help your sales pros sharpen their attention and inform a successful response.

Avoiding Random Acts of Sales: Shifting the Conversation

It’s a stark and time-tested reality: Under stress, we are not our best selves. This is true for individuals, for teams, and for organizations.

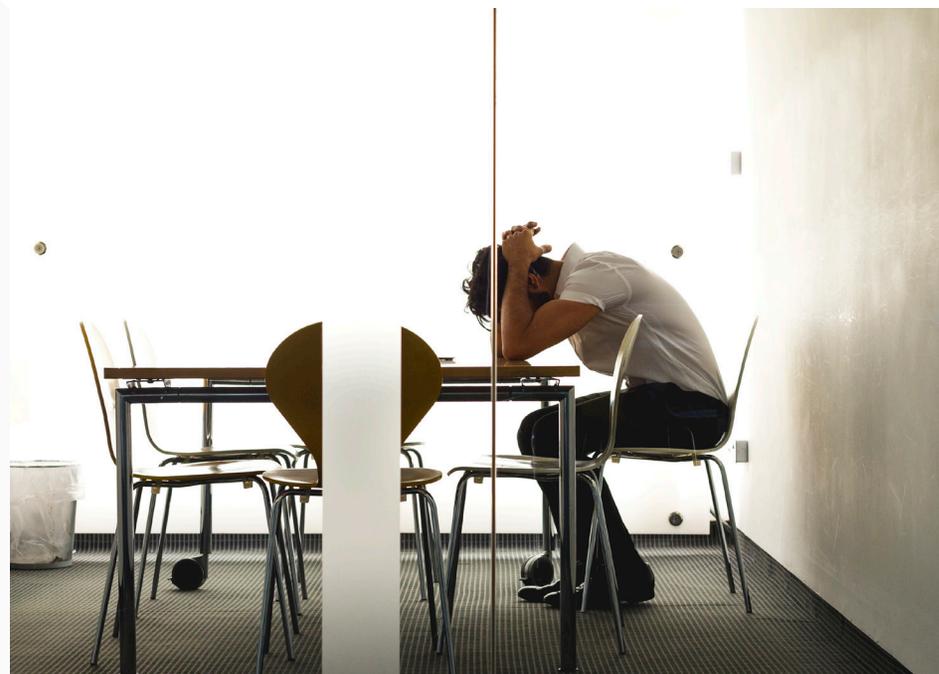
In times of extreme stress, like we’ve just experienced and continues today, any sort of weaknesses that we’ve had in our sales techniques are magnified substantially. Add in the pressure brought by fewer prospects and less revenue, and it’s little wonder that many sales pros are engaging in the kinds of bad habits that give rise to what we call “Random Acts of Sales.”

Avoiding these pitfalls requires a specific and deliberate focus on both pre-call planning activities and execution. Here are some steps you can take right now to get your team working efficiently:

- **Shift from Empathy to Intentionality:** Though a sympathetic ear is still appreciated, avoid being generic with your approach. Be prepared. Slow down and ask good detailed questions, to make sure your salespeople understand what it is prospects are looking for. When we deliver our IMPACT Selling® training at The Brooks Group, we call this the Probe step – where discovery occurs. Be honest, open, and communicate.
- **Protect Price:** Succumbing to price pressures is a panic response – one which can come either from management insistence downward, or from the salesperson up, as they consider their personal cash flow needs. Though some companies are pushing very hard to move inventory to keep cash coming in the door, it can create a catastrophic vortex that can ultimately reset pricing expectations for your clients and sink gross margin for the foreseeable future.
- **Listen to Current Trends:** Understand what’s happening in real time, as currently as you can – whether that’s through social media or via other

means. Make sure your sales teams are sharing information regularly, so you can have a holistic view of what your customers are saying. Likely what is setting the pace today, won’t necessarily be tomorrow.

- **Look for the Triggers:** What will make conditions right for customers to pull the trigger on a purchase order? Typically, this will be more than simply a price discussion – it will delve into things like your ability to deliver at their desired quantity, payment terms, their customer demand cycles, and other signals that your buyer is ready to make a deal.
- **Use Realistic Goals and KPIs:** Finally, make sure your KPIs aren’t driving your sales representatives to make bad decisions. We see some sales leaders who are adjusting KPIs from the number of physical meetings, to a more attainable measure called “total touches” – something that can be quantified via voice, video, as well as face-to-face (or, mask-to-mask, as the times would indicate).



Right Sales Approach

Value-Based Selling and Determining TCO

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses most impacted by the shutdown are tightening their belts and watching every penny. As a result, we are seeing more chief financial officers (CFOs) or another delegate of the corporate finance team participating in buying conversations.

In fact, participation in sales calls by CFOs is up 91 percent over pre-pandemic levels, according to an analysis of sales calls by Chorus.ai. This landscape has given rise to the importance of a detailed ROI discussion around the products and services that you offer.

In our conversations with sales executives, and in our own experiences, here are the keys to having a value-based conversation with your buyer:

- **Know the Audience:** Unlike your usual buyer, finance professionals will likely have different motivations as they consider your offering. If you are able to make some quick assumptions based upon their role within the organization, you can get a handle on their wants, needs, and motivations around the purchasing decision. Use these assumptions to create a few focused questions that you can ask to get to the heart of their perspective.
- **Know the Big Picture:** It is likely that there is more motivating their decision than just price. Use the conversation to talk about things like how your offering can improve efficiency or improve total cost of ownership for their products.
- **Know the Pain:** The CFO is likely dealing with strained budgets, slow sales, and supply chain interruptions due to COVID. Any assurances you can provide that your offering

can help keep their business pointed forward, productive, and efficient, will be useful in getting past the price conversation.

- **Enlist Your Advocate:** Your existing contact likely is still a strong ally. Leverage this advocate by asking them if they can provide some enlightenment on what is most important to the CFO. What are his or her big concerns are going to be? What are their most important priorities in terms of this purchase?



Upskill Your Team, Virtually

Virtual communication is here to stay, so it's little wonder that 53 percent of companies are looking to virtual training to upskill their team to face today's unique challenges. But we have found that there's a right way, and a wrong way, to deliver training in today's dynamic landscape.

Simply shifting in-person training into the world of Zoom – and compelling people to sit still for two days of instruction or taking a generic approach to sales training, without regard for the nuances of the company's business model, sales landscape – can be as bad as delivering no training at all.

Here are a few things to look for when choosing the right virtual sales training provider:

Built for Virtual: It can be highly ineffective to take a two-day, in-person class, and deliver it over Zoom for two days. In a best-case scenario, salespeople typically can focus for about two hours at a time, with frequent breaks and plentiful opportunities for interaction. Also, make sure the structure and format embraces the kind of experience that is optimized for the realities of at-home, computer-based learning.

Skill Delivery: There is a special skill to instructional delivery via virtual means. Not only should your virtual facilitator have the specialized training needed to ensure the training is successful, but you should ask: Do you have a producer or technical contact to ensure a flawless experience, and to troubleshoot problems? Are your tools



accessible across a broad variety of platforms? Also, do your facilitator and design team know how to mix the right formula of content, visuals, graphics, and interaction to keep things focused and compelling? Do you have things like breakout rooms, quizzes, and chats?

Customized for You: During these times, the best training for you and your sales team incorporates information that is truly focused on helping you to move the needle now. That should involve customized content designed for the variables of your business, market, or vertical, and pre-work that incorporates your company's goals and aspirations into the mix.

The Brooks Group's VILT Way

Virtual instructor-led training (VILT), indeed, can be an incredibly effective way to upskill your sales team to meet the challenges of the existing sales landscape. But it requires a nuanced approach to remote training delivery that we at The Brooks Group call The VILT Way.

Leveraging The Brooks Group's 40 years of expertise in delivering customized

sales training, The VILT Way reflects our commitment to designing focused and compelling training content to the unique virtual learning strata.

Benefits of The VILT Way:

- Right-sized instruction, delivered in short, interactive modules with frequent, focused interactive activities
- Specially-trained virtual instructors who have a particular expertise in maximizing virtual tools for training success
- Gain insights and learn techniques today, that you can put into practice immediately
- Real-time feedback used to adjust topics, approach, and group interactions based on real-world conditions

SIDEBARS

March Trend: Inspiring Idle Sales Professionals

As economic activity slowed to a crawl, we found that sales leadership looked to coaching to get their sales professionals through the early days of the pandemic.

- Nearly 63 percent were providing more coaching around business tactics to maintain sales success
- 57 percent of leaders were having regular coaching calls to discuss team members' personal well-being
- 40 percent are focusing on their team members' business well-being

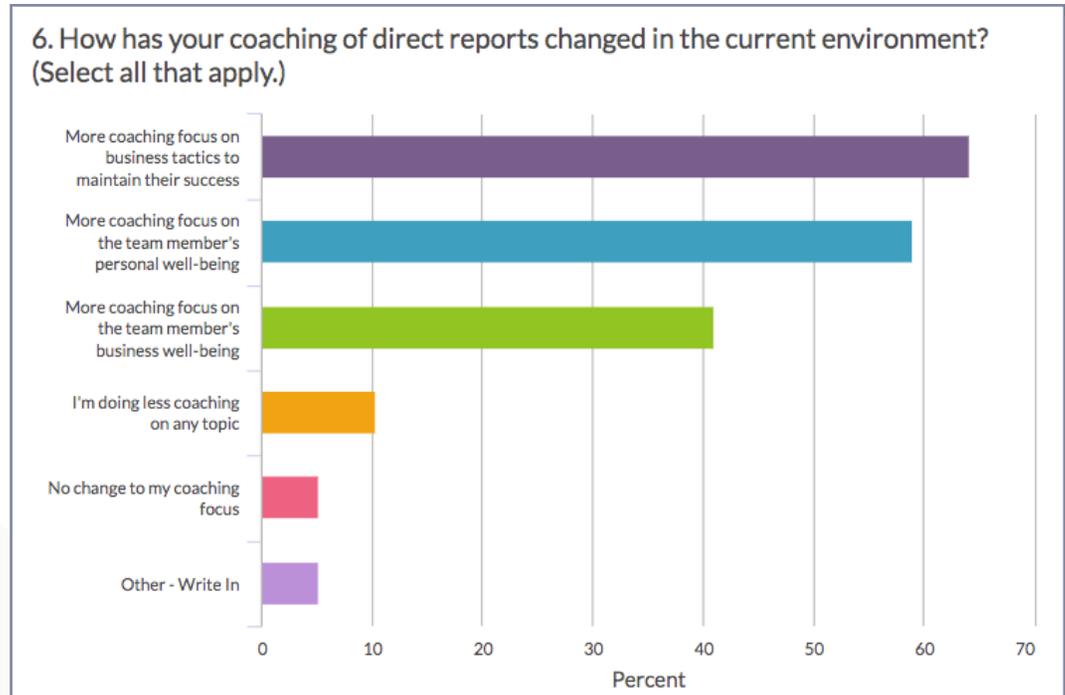
March also saw the adoption of virtual methods to keep commerce moving.

- 71 percent of respondents were using Zoom, Skype and other virtual tools to meet with clients and prospects (and 82 percent use these tools for internal meetings)
- 69 percent had seen travel restricted or eliminated
- 63 percent of sales pros were using the time to increase their contact with existing buyers

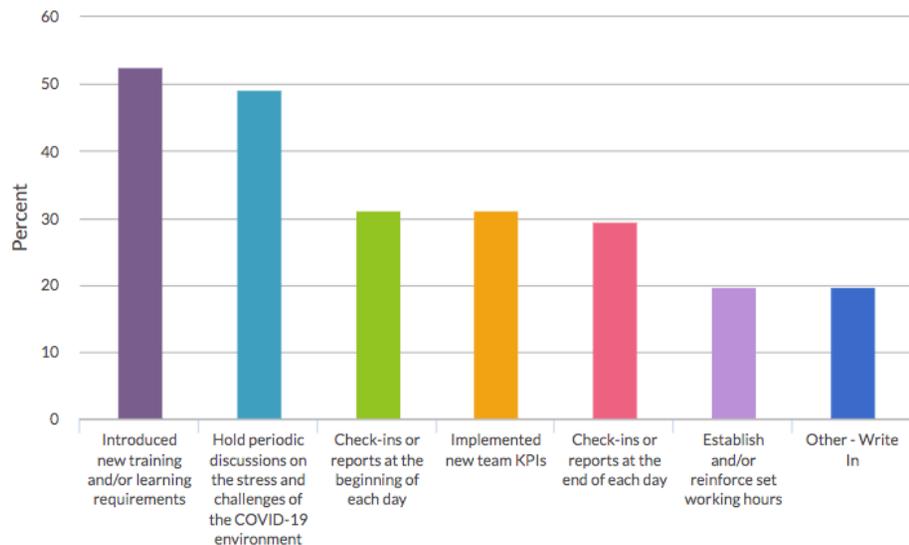
April Trend: Defining the New Normal

Throughout April, sales leaders sought to determine whether their pros were finding their way through the crisis. Though 88 percent of employees surveyed said they were maintaining a structured regimen of working hours, many sales managers implemented new measures of accountability.

- 59 percent of sales executives were requiring a daily check-in from their sales pros, either at the start or end of the day
- 31 percent of managers instituted new KPIs to measure sales efficacy in the pandemic-roiled environment



43. What new practices or routines have you implemented for your teams that are working remotely? (Please select all that apply.)



- 53 percent instituted new training or learning benchmarks, to ensure teams are dedicating some time to self-improvement.

Sales leaders implemented a variety of adjustments to systems and quotas to reflect slowing sales.

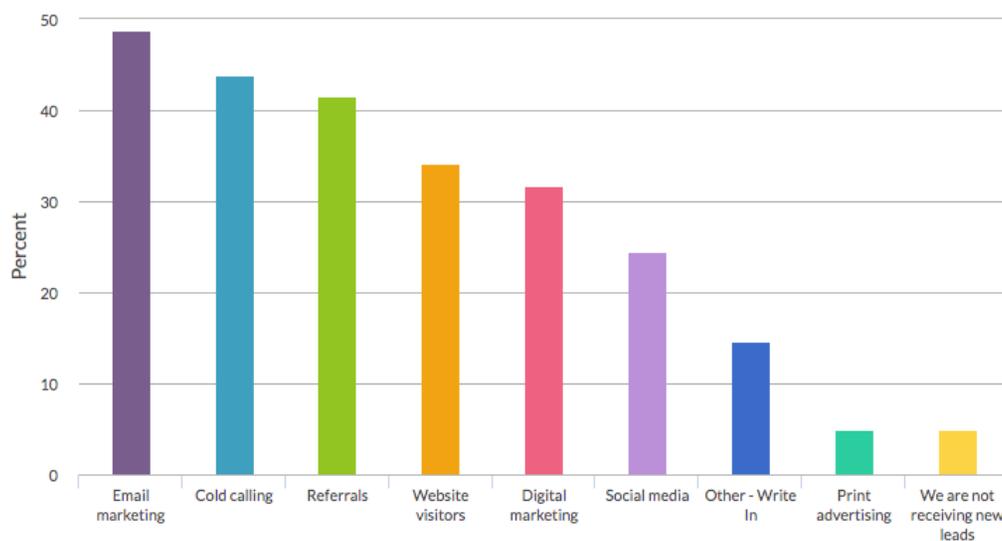
- A majority of companies (54 percent) had changed quotas
- About half adjusted the compensation of sales professionals to match the lowered sales expectations
- A slight majority of firms surveyed (51 percent) shed sales positions, and the same number redefined the sales roles of those who remained.

May Trend: Lead Lethargy and an Eye Toward Reopening

With 97 percent of sales leaders reported being well behind their sales plan, they sought to change the way they were injecting leads into their organizations.

- Nearly half (48.5 percent) of new leads were coming in via email marketing; sales leaders are also were reporting good lead volume from website visitors (36.4 percent) and other digital marketing activity (33.3 percent).
- 42.4 percent of new lead volume was derived from hitting the phones – sometimes an alien concept for field/outside sales representatives, but necessary today.

50. What are your organization's top sources of new leads right now? (Choose up to 3 sources.)

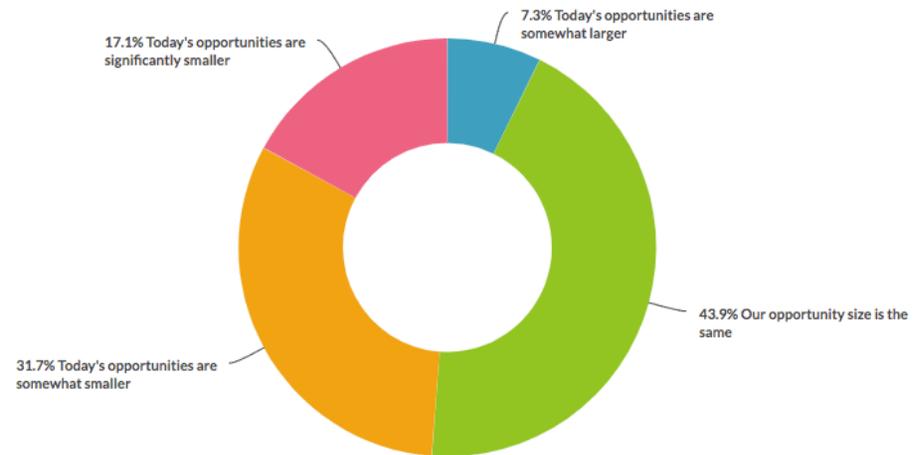


- More than a third of new leads (36.4 percent) were coming in via word of mouth, reflecting sales professionals' willingness to call satisfied customers for an introduction to prospective clients.
- Perhaps most reflective of the contracted economy, nearly half (48.4 percent) of the sales opportunities generated from these new leads were tracking smaller than standard.

As sales leaders prepared to resume in-person activities:

- 84 percent of sales leaders said it was challenging to determine what sales activities were permitted under their state's guidelines;
- 79 percent say they will insist upon at least matching, if not exceeding, their clients' guidelines for on-site visits by vendors, although;
- 80 percent of managers expect some of their sales pros to push back on their company's chosen path to reopening. ■

53. How does the size of sales opportunities generated from new leads today compare to the size of new sales opportunities a year ago?



About The Brooks Group

Founded in 1977, The Brooks Group is an award-winning B2B sales training company focused on bringing practical, straightforward solutions to your sales force selection and training challenges.

The Brooks Group provides a suite of proven sales and sales management development programs, industry-leading reinforcement tools, and best in class assessments.

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