



## If You Want to Succeed in 2021 You Have to Master Virtual Selling -

According to Erica Schultz, Chief Marketing Officer of the Rain Group, 77% of decision makers prefer video over the phone when meeting with sellers today. A related study found that almost 90% of businesses intend to sell remotely in 2021. These statistics refute the idea that face-to-face direct selling will be the only way companies will sell in a post Covid world, and businesses are adjusting their sales & marketing strategies to include a virtual selling approach.

There are five traditional steps to selling: (i) preparation, (ii) qualifying, (iii) presenting, (iv) closing, and (v) following up; however, how you execute this process virtually in 2021, requires different thinking. This article will highlight these differences to help you perfect a virtual selling approach for your business, which McKinsey says has increased by 163% in the last 6 months and considers part of the "new normal."

### Preparation

During the preparation phase, you are learning about your potential buyer, deciding how you are going to contact them (e.g., by phone, digitally, or via *LinkedIn*,) thinking about your message and determining how to make a good first impression. Your pre-contact preparation is not all that different when selling virtually, but there are several new considerations for making a good first impression.

In fact, there are four different ways that work in tandem to project a professional image virtually: (i) visual, (ii) audio, (iii) background, and (iv) personal appearance.

Visual concerns include video, lighting, and positioning. While most computers have decent cameras, people with older, cheaper computers might want to pick up a high-definition web camera. The preferred webcam is the HD *Logitech 1080p*, which starts at about \$30.00 and can be purchased with a built-in microphone on *Amazon*. Lighting, which should be white, positioned in front of your computer, pointed at your face, and lit evenly with medium to light brightness, also starts at around \$30.00 on *Amazon*, but can run as much as \$150.00.

When it comes to audio, the quality of most computer microphones are not the best. Popular microphones include the *blue Yeti mic*, which will set you back \$100.00 to \$125.00 or a *Mpow Bluetooth headset*, which will run about half that amount on *Amazon*. Other audio considerations include being mindful of background sounds, muting any computer-generated sounds, and testing your mic before joining the meeting.

There are three backgrounds options: (a) setting up behind a solid, light colored wall without windows, (b) using a clean, neat, bright, professional prepared background, or (c) utilizing a green screen with a professional virtual background. If the previous options are not appealing, make sure that whatever is behind you is clean, orderly, and clutter-free.

Personal appearance tips to help you make a positive first impression include professional attire, looking into the camera with good posture and a smile on your face, and positioning the computer 1.5 to 2 feet away and at an elevation so that the camera is at eye level and the top of your head is 10% to 15% from the top of the screen.

## Qualifying

Concurrent with developing your virtual content you should also get your digital marketing resources in order and make sure you have mastered your videoconferencing software. When outlining your virtual meeting, create an agenda for your call and have several different presentations ready so you can adjust to different buyer situations.

When you begin your virtual call, lead with empathy (“I can only imagine your struggles in 2020, how are you ?”) and then complement the prospective buyer for getting this far. Next, build rapport by finding similarities between you and the buyer, as people like doing business with people who are like them, but be sure to keep your message authentic. Building rapport inspires trust. Minimize small talk and have prepared questions to learn about the buyer’s aspirations and frustrations (or pain) after you have built rapport.

Be sure to listen closely to the buyer and be thinking about how you can modify your approach to assist them or inspire new thinking about their problem. Watch the buyer’s body language. To keep the buyer focused on your virtual meeting throughout the call ask: “does that make sense,” “does that apply to you,” “are we in agreement so far,” etc.

During this step, you want to understand the buyer’s unique purchasing path. Studies show buyers are presently interested in the words “growth,” “not missing revenue opportunities,” “thriving,” and “savings.” Other buyers may be in the process of rethinking their strategies and may not yet be ready to buy anything. If this is the case, set up the sale for the future. Instead of pushing for the sale ask for referrals.

Interestingly, only about 12% of people ask for referrals, yet 86% of satisfied customers say they are willing to give them. Try this approach when asking for referrals: “When you think of your customers, suppliers, people at church, friends or other people in

your social circle, who is the first person who comes to mind as someone who could benefit from our services ?” I like this statement because it helps the buyer think about the best person in their network.

## Presenting

Once you understand the buyer’s aspirations and frustrations, you should bridge into your presentation. Given the uncertain conditions brought on by Covid, many businesses are holding on to their cash, so you must start off with a compelling reason for the business to buy now. For instance, you might say “according to several economic forecasts the economy is expected to grow by 4.7% in 2021 ... do you have a plan to take advantage of that growth ?”

To get your buyer in the buying mode, have them paint a picture of what their needs would be if there were above average economic growth in 2021 Help the buyer solve any problems and define their future needs. Make your case by taking the lead, working from your agenda, setting expectations, and using impactful presentation slides, stories, white papers, and demonstrations to drive the conversation and buying decision; and be prepared to handle the buyer’s objections.

As you end your presentation, answer why the buyer should act, why they should act now, why they should choose you, and how to minimize any risks. Question the buyer about what happens if they are not prepared for this opportunity ? Remember, people buy on emotion and then justify their choice with logic, so also point out the potential ROI of acting. In some cases, the objective of your presentation may be to prepare a proposal; in other cases, you may be able to ask for the sale.

## Closing

When you feel the buyer is ready to purchase, close with these next steps. If you are asking for the sale, start with an assumptive trial close, like: "to get started, all you need to do is execute the electronic document I just sent you." If the prospect stops you, then overcome the objection by: (i) restating their concern "so, what you are saying is X," (ii) asking "if that is their only concern" – so if you address that concern, they will buy today, (iii) empathizing with the buyer by saying "I can appreciate your concern ..." (iv) set the closing condition "so your only concern then is X ?" (v) overcoming the objection "If your only reason is X, then all you have to do is Y," and (vi) closing "If we do Y we will be fine for these reasons, so let us get started !"

If you are preparing a quote, you want to set the "closing condition." By setting the closing condition I mean (i) asking the buyer to move forward if you present a fair proposal that addresses their concerns, (ii) making sure that you can present your proposal to all decision makers, and (iii) finding out if they are soliciting other bids. If they are soliciting other bids, you might ask them to hear all bids before letting you present your proposal.

The keys to success when selling virtually are (a) adopting the right mindset, (b) learning and embracing virtual selling, (c) optimizing the needed technology, (d) preparing thoroughly, (e) using professional visuals, (f) balancing humility and boldness, and (g) delivering the right client solutions. Also, be sure to update your *LinkedIn* profile as 82% of buyers look up sellers on *LinkedIn* before purchasing.

## Follow-Up

Schedule a follow call whenever possible. Your objective should be to strengthen your relationships and build your sales pipeline with your key customers, past customers, and new prospects.

Periodically touch these different groups electronically to stay front of mind. Document all your contacts in your CRM software. Track your progress daily, and at the end of the day, reflect on how you can improve.

80% of businesses reported lower sales in 2020. A 2020 study says the top virtual sales challenges are (i) buyer focus, (ii) communicating value, and (iii) keeping your sales pipeline full. According to this same study, buyers say their challenges are (i) being listening to, (ii) identifying their current needs, and (iii) scenario planning. So, keep all these things in mind when you are selling virtually, and you will be fine.

Change can be difficult, but if you can implement this advice, your ability to sell virtually will be successful and you will capture more market share as we emerge from this economic crisis.

The reason you need to change can best be summarized by General Eric Shinseki who said, "If you don't like change, you'll like irrelevance even less !"



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