

Sales in Times of Crisis

Three rules to create even closer B2B customer relationships

The “Corona Crisis” has been an unprecedented event for many salespeople and their managers. The jury is still out on how long this situation is yet to last – but one thing is clear: both customers and sales organizations alike are deeply unsettled and highly insecure as to how they should cope with the situation.

Salespeople will create even closer B2B customer relationships during this crisis if they observe three rules:

1. Be close

Yes, customers are now busy coping with the crisis and the last thing that they need is a salesperson trying to sell them something. Nevertheless, now is the time for salespeople to be close to their customers. Therefore: get on the phone and call. Why? Because a) shared pain creates solidarity.¹ And b), customers know that salespeople know they will not sell anything at this moment. And yet they call. Isn't this a sign of real dedication? Isn't this a way of telling the customer “I know I won't make a sale with you now, but I do care about our relationship and that's why I call.” Of course, this kind of attention works only if salespeople observe points no. 2 and 3 below.

2. Be brief

Chances are high that customers are buried head to toe in crisis measures when we call them. Time is scarce. Consequently, salespeople should not seek long, deep, SPIN-style conversations at this moment but rather accept multiple short conversations. We call them Scrum-style: focused, short and concise. For each conversation they may have in mind a small commitment on the customer's side when they call. This could be as simple as the customer's agreement for another call once things have gotten back to normal. This will give salespeople a legitimate reason to renew contact: “You asked me to call once the dust has settled after all the upheaval.”



Don't ask for more than this when you arrange customer calls in times of crisis.

3. Be of value

Now may be the time to think about effectiveness – about doing the right things. The reason is that what customers really want is usually different from what salespeople think they need. This discrepancy is already significant in “normal” times, and it gets even bigger in times of crisis. The first thought that comes to salespeople's minds in times like this is: “This is the crisis that we are in, and this is how our company and products can help you cope with it.” However, this view is solely focused on the vendor's capabilities. In the current situation, salespeople should focus even more on the customer's needs. Any help is welcome, for example in the form of contingency planning aids or prioritization tools. They may not have anything at all to do with our products – but customers will remember when the next RFP is being drafted.

Managing the sales force remotely

Be it (Key) Account Management, Opportunity Management, Pipeline Management, Call Performance Improvement or other sales management tasks: we have worked with clients such as Cisco, Bechtle, Deutsche Telekom and Wabtec over the past 20 years to combine the advantages of instructor-led development programs and online channels. We teach, enable and supervise sales organizations to reach their full potential even when face-to-face contact is difficult. [Contact us](#) to learn more.

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¹ Brock, Bastian - Jetten, Jolanda – Ferris Laura J. (2014): Pain as Social Glue: Shared Pain Increases Cooperation (Psychological Science Vol. 25/11, pp. 2079-2085.