

Remote Versus In Person

The debate over which sales strategy is best continues

by: David Aulio, Automated Business Solutions

While the COVID-19 pandemic is over, its impact certainly remains. This effect, combined with ongoing advancements in technology and changes in consumer behavior, continue to stimulate much debate on which sales strategy is better — remote or in person. Are sales executives thriving today where “remote selling” has become a very effective tool?

Do the most successful sales executives (including those of us within the independent dealer channel) seek ongoing “face-to-face” interaction with customers?

As successful sales executives evolve within our industry, I strongly believe that those who overachieve are successful because they have strong work ethics and create habits for themselves that generate ongoing sales prospects. Some are stronger when selling remotely. Others prefer face-to-face contact. Many effectively deploy both strategies. So, is one strategy better than the other? Honestly, I don't know. As sales leaders, do we really care what approach is deployed as long as we effectively support our customers, grow the sales pipeline and close business?

Many of us encourage our sales executives to constantly be in front of people. I fully support that, especially if a sales rep's skill set and account types support live interaction. If you prefer reps to be in the field and demand live interaction, just make sure it is really happening and that you hold people accountable for that specific (live meeting) activity. Ask yourself: Are my sales reps' activities “running the business” or are they “growing the business”? Are they flipping a base or getting you the organic growth you seek?

On the opposite end of the spectrum, I have also seen many situations where successful sales executives are able to use tools like Microsoft Teams, effective phone calls and creative business writing to shorten sales cycles and build high-level relationships. My employer, Automated Business Solutions, covers all of New England and many accounts nationally. As a team, we would not be successful in many



accounts if we were not effective in supporting, providing strategy for and growing accounts remotely. Having a strong remote strategy provides for improved time and account management.

We also need to think about our customers' needs and have a better understanding of what drives consumer behavior. Today, customers have access to resources where they may already know

what you offer before you walk in the door. Conducting effective account reviews via webinars has been a great tool to reinforce relationships and create new selling opportunities. This is a bit of a mixed message, but throughout my career some of my highest-grossing accounts have been those I see (in person) the least.

Which works best, a remote or an in-person selling strategy? I think it is a debate that will continue. Whatever strategy is deployed, I do think we need to be careful about painting a “broad-brush” approach for all sales reps. Times have changed and it is a reality we need to embrace. People today are coming to us with a variety of skill sets and personal (work/life balance) needs. I think it is important that we focus on their strengths instead of trying to force behaviors and tasks that might not work.

There are certainly some accounts where live interaction is likely best. In our business, being visible can no doubt create opportunities just by walking around an office and asking questions. However, there are other times when a planned, remote strategy could work best to create value over a period of time. I do think the main goal is to always have live interaction, but if you can effectively move sales cycles forward in other ways, why not?

Whether it is the account or the sales rep, I think this is not a one-size-fits-all mentality. Obviously, smaller deals usually have shorter sales cycles, so it might be easier to “pop in” to an account given its size. Larger accounts likely come with longer sales cycles, with more influencers and stakeholders involved in final decisions. Larger accounts

might require using LinkedIn, webinars, ongoing email correspondence and conferencing solutions to bring multiple people together to move opportunities along over an extended period of time.

As I considered the remote versus in-person debate in writing this article, I did what my teenage son does with a lot of his homework assignments — I Googled it. I simply Googled “remote versus in-person selling” and the following result was provided: “One of the advantages of face-to-face interactions is that sales reps can read a prospect’s body language and facial expressions. These are often missing in remote sales, especially via phone and email. Virtual interaction doesn’t have that intangible connection people make when talking face to face.”

No doubt, this statement generated by Google will resonate with those embracing a face-to-face strategy. Many who prefer face-to-face interaction may say that virtual interaction does not have the same “connection.” I cannot argue with that. But, again, some who successfully deploy

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remote strategies may think otherwise.

As sales leaders, let’s continue to build on the strengths of our people to grow the pipeline and keep our customers happy. Depending on the account and the sales rep’s capabilities, if that requires more face-to-face interaction, I support it. If you have sales executives who have proven to grow their business and support their customers by deploying remote strategies, I see nothing wrong with that either. ■

With a successful career in both the direct manufacturer and independent dealer communities, David Aulio has been vice president of business development for Automated Business Solutions (ABS), based in Warwick, Rhode Island, since 2019. He has helped ABS find success throughout New England by focusing on employee development, solutions selling and new business partnerships. Aulio can be reached at daulio@absne.com. Visit www.absne.com.

