

Polish up remote selling strategy

It has been widely reported that many organisations – Twitter and Google are cases in point – have decided to locate all staff at home and close or scale down their offices until the pandemic passes. Others are returning to their workplaces but are offering much more flexible arrangements so staff can work from home, maybe two or three days a week.

“Has there ever been a better opportunity for channel businesses to ‘showcase’ their remote working solutions than by conducting remote sales presentations using it,” argues Gary May, one of the ICT channel’s leading sales training specialists. Get it wrong and the consequences are disastrous asserts May, as presenting on screen is a different art form than presenting in person.

Here are his top tips for successful remote selling:

- Body language is restricted into a narrow field of view, so utilising the ‘steeple’ posture eliminates this common mistake and ensures your body language is always in the prospects field of view.
- Eye contact is limited as we’re looking at the screen rather than the camera, so placing a simple sticky arrow by the camera will help make you appear more engaged.
- Expert questioning strategies are critical, not only for the answers you get back but to ensure the smoothness and direction of the meeting. Predictive Answer and Socratic Questioning work best.

“On top of these there’s the deadly curse of all remote meetings! Not listening and over talking! ‘Sorry, you go’. ‘No, it’s fine, you go’.

“I can also see remote meetings being the ‘nemesis’ of the over-enthusiastic, salesy, pushy, ‘talk, talk, talk, never listens’ type salesperson. Prospects don’t have to put up with it remotely and can simply press the button and leave!

“Never has it been more critical for sales teams to have a polished product presentation, a nailed-on agenda, expert questioning and elite closing skills,” adds May

“For me, remote sales meetings are here to stay but, and it’s a big but, they are also a lot less forgiving for those who haven’t or won’t master their trade.”



JAMES SHRAGA
FIDELITY GROUP

“Whilst we have championed remote working solutions for our channel partners and their customers for the past few years, the reality of mandatory home working bought uncharted waters for all. The hosted solutions that we provide day in and day out have made the transition seamless with value added bolt-ons to enable management oversight and unified communications across the various mediums. We have set up new management reporting and communication structures to ensure that we could remain connected despite geographic distances and we share our experiences both internally and externally. Whilst our teams have remained effective and motivated, the real challenge that we see in the future will be integrating new staff into the organisation within a remote working environment from a cultural, training and management perspective, though as channel innovators we look forward to this challenge.”



ANNA ROPER
9 GROUP

“Most salespeople are social creatures but having a screen between you and your prospect can strip away some of your best techniques. We have developed a web-based brochure which allows our team to share and capture information. Marketing plays a vital role in commanding attention from a distance. Customers gravitate towards content that has meaning and relevance, so carefully tailor the tone of your messaging to the current climate. Placement is as important as the message itself. Digital Marketing has become a priority for us and many of our Partners. We have been providing support and advice on how to succeed in this space during lockdown. As ever, demonstrating value throughout the process is vital. Be crystal clear about your prospect’s individual circumstances and offer a personalised proposal, which is a genuine fit with their current challenges.”



PAUL HOLDEN
AKIXI

“The first thing is simple – it’s trust. Covid-19 has forced the issue of remote working, however, enabling sales teams to be productive has always been paramount. Work is not somewhere we go, it’s an output in order to hit individual and company goals. After trust, it’s providing the right tools to communicate both internally and externally with partners and customers. This includes a unified collaboration platform for voice, chat, video, screen sharing, and the right access to information, utilising the cloud for one version of the truth for documentation, reporting and analytics. Mix all that together then set the right example yourself with good leadership.”



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Agencies or customers will switch off



ANDREW JONES
AUDPRO

"As a channel-first operation, enabling our partners to close sales is paramount. We've taken a hard look at our Partner Toolkit and refreshed it to address current challenges. Engaging, white labelled animations to share on social media, as well as sales training presentations have been incredibly popular among partners, as have our remote sales training sessions. These have helped partners' teams close more sales, and we're getting better feedback about what the people actually selling need to hit their targets. From a partner onboarding perspective, our recent webinars have helped push the AudPro name out to many more channel resellers and helped us grow our partner network even through these challenging times. Our most significant piece of advice is - find ways to bridge the virtual gap, try and have a laugh with those on the other end of the video call and make it memorable."



BIMAL MODHA
HIGHLIGHT

"Firstly, I think it's important to consider basic hygiene factors – desk, chair, screens and suitable web cams. Then you have to accept that interruptions will happen, and that people will take time out – it's their home and home life after all! The fundamentals are around safety and security; you can't be concentrating on a conference call if your toddler's about to fall out of an open window. Watch out for burn out. Spending all day in front of a laptop screen or monitor is not good for you; get out, go for a walk, do a 1- to-1 whilst walking. Staff are working longer and longer and not taking the necessary breaks or hydrating which is bad for all concerned. Above all, remember you're working in the new normal; you're not working from home, you're working out of your home during a pandemic – very different."



GAVIN JONES
BT WHOLESALE

"Throughout lockdown, BT adapted to new ways of working. Home working can feel very different to working from your normal workplace and we are empathetic towards individuals' differing situations. We are committed to doing everything we can to support our sales teams. We believe that, when supported effectively, our sales teams can operate well from home and have taken the steps to equip them to sell effectively remotely. Whilst at home, we have ensured that employees have access to the appropriate systems and are updated with sales initiatives. Additionally, just as with partners and prospects, open dialogue is vital, so we stay connected through Microsoft Teams. As a team, we're looking forward to returning to the office to be able to bounce off each other in person and appreciate the value of face-to-face discussions with customers."



CHRIS TUCKER
INCLARITY

"As a UK wide vendor, Inclarity has always empowered its sales teams to work remotely. The support required by our partners relies on a quick and flexible response whether that be for face-to-face presentations, webinars, or local meetings. With the tools available today, coupled together with our feature rich hosted telephony platform, the Inclarity team, our partners and in turn their customers can rely on having the same working feature set regardless of where they are in the world. In the current climate with COVID-19 and for the foreseeable future this being the 'new normal' we have adapted to a new way of selling. We use technology to help us deliver the benefits of engaging with us as a business. This has been very successful over the last few months with webinars, MS Teams collaboration tools and traditional voice and video."



ANDREW WILSON
CITYFIBRE

"We were initially concerned about how a move to working completely from home might impact the team's ability to serve our partners and each other. Following early emergency simulations to test our systems and business continuity, we've ensured they can confidently access the systems and communications they need to actively support partners. We have maintained frequent cross-team contact to share information and 'look after each other' and we have regularly updated everyone on their performance. Teams thrive as a community, so it's essential to sustain a dynamic environment. To achieve that we're creative in our use of the usual platforms to keep things fun and flexible as well as empowering. We've enabled individuals to stay productive and feel included working from home by creating that right environment. Significantly, the outcome is that our partners continue to feel supported and confident that we're there for them."



LEE BROXSON
JOLA

"Resellers are nimble, flexible, and resourceful. Above all they know how to sell and just need their suppliers to help them find opportunities for appropriate and differentiated products. Jola account managers work closely with reseller sales teams and both have adapted well to communicating via Teams and webinars, instead of face-to-face. Our partners' sales teams and their customers took to videoconferencing just as easily. Jola identified product areas where volumes were still growing; Mobile Broadband, eSIM and Teams Direct Routing and ran campaigns and webinars focussed on the benefits of the products and finding opportunities for them. Each of the webinars had more than 200 attendees and in three months we signed 72 new partners. When COVID is over, we will recruit and train this way and we will certainly continue our more pro-active approach to helping partners uncover current opportunities via video calls and webinars."



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Kaleidoscope continued



"I absolutely believe our sales team can operate effectively from home, arguably better than in the office. Home working has a number of benefits, including increased productivity, less distractions, less travel and also more time spent with family, which helps our employees get that much sought-after work/life balance. Sales can be a relentless role with lots of travelling and long hours, yet the recent pandemic has forced us into reconsidering what the sales process looks like. We're now doing most of our meetings via video conference; facilitating new tools such as Microsoft Teams, Collaborate and Zoom to work more effectively. We've made sure our employees are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to work from home by delivering specific training around remote working and ultimately, I believe the key to its effectiveness comes down to good communication."



"The last few months have been an eye opener, but our team has always been equipped to sell remotely, so it was easy to extend those capabilities and culture to the full team. In terms of customer and partner engagement, our operations have become more time and cost-efficient with less travel and more capacity for meetings. We can react faster, with internal and external meetings called when needed and global relationships are improving as a result. We are of course fortunate to have been able to support the sales team and maintain customer experience levels using our own iCall Suite call monitoring, recording and call back analytics. There will always be a place for face-to-face contact, but a mix of video and calls have become the norm and ultimately, the way we engage with customers in future will be driven by their needs. Giving them that choice is powerful."



"It's all about providing the right technology to enable staff to engage with end users using impressive technologies. In a lot of ways, the resellers' sales team are showcasing the businesses ability to practice what they preach. Our resellers have worked extremely hard to make sure that when any end user is on a call with our team, we put ourselves head and shoulders above the competition. As soon as Covid-19 took hold, our resellers worked very hard to think about how the end users would want to engage with potential new technology providers and it became apparent that it had to be thought about from the ground up. Some of our most successful resellers spent a lot of time training their teams on using technologies such as Teams or Zoom to make sure when they use this to present it is as professional as possible."



"Remote working isn't exactly new to the Union Street sales team; we've done so for years. That said, remote selling is a bit of a culture change. Whilst face-to-face may be our preference, our sales team have been no less effective when selling remotely. Many resellers were disappointed by some other vendors' responses to the pandemic. Consequently, we received higher than average enquiries throughout the Lockdown. Our sales team have done a fantastic job of assisting these resellers in converting to aBILLity billing, despite the slight unfamiliarity of remote selling. As with anything, ensuring your team are correctly equipped for the job is pivotal. We've provided them with the best hardware, secure remote network access, and the most efficient collaboration tools available. Communication is also key, and we hold regular Teams meetings to assess performance and review progress."



"Our sales teams have been home based for some years, but we have definitely seen their roles evolve through the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Core activities such as demos and training have now moved to a remote model. We have worked to adopt practices that keep the whole team connected and maintain a strong team and success driven culture. We now talk and meet far more than we ever have done. Every morning we check in as a team and every evening we have a video call to catch up and share what's happened and how things have gone. We have also adopted a range of new tools such as Microsoft Bookings to help meetings run more efficiently. Our channel support model has also evolved to support partners with things like specific training in remote demo skills. The channel has quickly adapted and seized the opportunity."



"Our staff have always been ready to work independently and from any location. The transition to remote working was straightforward, with Salesforce and Microsoft Teams being especially important to enable collaboration and ongoing operations. Coupled with our own Clear Voice hosted service to keep our teams connected, the only thing we're missing from the office is our Fi-Bar! Ensuring our teams have the right tools at their disposal to maintain productivity hasn't been our only consideration, as mental wellbeing is equally important. We've used daily calls and WhatsApp groups to keep our teams in touch and interact just as they would in the office, keeping positivity and motivation high. Coaching has been another key consideration, but by using call recordings in team meetings and on customer calls, we've continued to feedback to staff and ensure our messaging and service stays strong."



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