

What Salespeople Need to Know About Video Conferencing

By
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There are many ways to sell, and many sales support activities work together to nurture a buying decision, but most salespeople would agree that one of their most powerful and productive sales activities is the face-to-face sales meeting. That is the opportunity salespeople have to build a personal rapport with their customers, build trust, and gain understand of customers that goes beyond what they hear in a phone conversation or read in an email. This is why salespeople spend a great deal of time traveling to meet with customers. It is also a huge limiting factor on what a sales person can do. After all, a sales person can only be in so many places at once.

Salespeople have a long tradition of leveraging technology to maximize their productivity. They use customer relationship management (CRM) applications to more efficiently track and follow up on leads. Marketing organizations develop strategies to better qualify leads before handing them off to sales, so that salespeople spend more of their valuable time with higher quality prospects. And salespeople are always refining their contact strategies and their communications so that they

achieve the greatest impact in the limited time they have to spend with customers.

In recent years, desktop video conferencing has emerged as a valuable new sales tool. Traditional video conferencing has been around for a while. Often referred to as telepresence, it relies on costly, specially equipped conference rooms. Desktop video conferencing works with normal desktop PCs and web cameras as well as with some mobile devices equipped with front-facing cameras. It also works over the Internet. This means video conferencing becomes available to anytime, anywhere there is Internet access.

Early Internet based video conferencing solutions were unreliable and the video quality was poor. However increases in Internet bandwidth and improvements in streaming video technology have made the latest high-definition desktop video solutions both reliable and totally suited for business use. And, one of the most effective uses of high-definition video conferencing is in sales.

Desktop Video Conferencing Sales Scenarios

Sales is an activity that involves a lot of collaboration between lots of people. This goes well beyond communications between the sales person and the customer. Here are several ways desktop video conferencing is being employed to support sales activities:

Sales presentations – A good desktop video conferencing solution provides all the features one needs to have an engaging, personalized meeting with customers. In addition to video feeds that enable customers and salespeople to see each other, there is desktop sharing, which enables presenters to show as they tell, and there are annotation tools that enable context specific highlighting and visual augmentation. As long as all parties to the meeting have Internet access, the meeting can be held anytime, anyplace. Participants only need to be in front of a PC with Internet access.

Although a video conference is not the same as an in-person sales call, it is far more engaging, and offers far more persuasive opportunity than a telephone call. That makes it a valuable tool for leveraging a sales person's limited time. Depending on the nature of the business, salespeople who spend a large portion of their time visiting customers in person may be able to prepare for, travel to, and engage with a small handful of customers each week. On the other hand, using video conferencing and eliminating the travel may enable that sales person to have the same number of sale calls every day. Even if a video conference is not as fully effective at closing business as an in-person meeting, doubling or tripling the meeting rate can increase the overall sales productivity of the sales person.

There is an additional advantage video conferencing has over in-person meetings. In an increasingly mobile and global business environment, it is often the case that different

people involved in a customer business decision are located in different places. Desktop video conferencing provides a simple way to bring all the decision makers together for one presentation in a way that they can all see and interact with each other. This becomes a more efficient way to communicate that can accelerate business decisions.

Sales teams – For many business models, sales is a team effort. There may be an account manager, but there may also be a solution specialist, a business process analyst, and others. All of these people must engage with the customers during the sales cycle. These communications become more complex if those people are in different locations. A desktop video conferencing solution offers a simple way to bring all sales team members together in a conference with the customer.

Product Demos – For certain kinds of products, a desktop video conferencing solution is an excellent platform for delivering product demos. With high-definition video, the presentation team is able to observe customer reactions to the presentation, which is important for any follow-on discussion.

Sales training – As any sales manager knows, salespeople require training to stay current on product offerings and presentation strategies. They also need contact to help them stay focused and motivated. A desktop video conferencing platform provides a way to do this that is far more cost effective than bringing the entire sales force out of the field and into a motivational meeting. A video conference also takes less time away from sales activities. As Mike Huska, CTO of Incential describes it, "Our virtual organization depends on GoToMeeting with HDFaces video conferencing to maintain the company culture and promote teamwork. We get tremendous value from video conferencing when we're demoing a new product to our staff because the reactions – positive or negative – are right there on people's faces."

Many different kinds of companies are using desktop video conferencing to enhance their sale process. For instance, TERIS, a company that specializes in providing information technology solutions for the legal industry, depends heavily on video conferencing not only for their technical support staff, but sales too. TERIS has been using a conferencing solution for the past six years, and recently they have added tablet-based conferencing for their employees. Sales teams are constantly on the go, working from various locations. They depend on a conferencing solution that is easy to use so they can quickly join a meeting from any location. Being able to conference from their tablets has made this even easier, and it has enabled them to be highly responsive to client needs.

Similarly, Optio Solutions, LLC., an accounts receivable management company, finds high-definition video conferencing especially valuable in sales situations. Video conferencing helps their salespeople establish relationships with clients more quickly, and they find customers are more receptive when they can see the person they're talking to rather than just a presentation.

Important Features in a Video Conferencing Solution Suitable for Business-to-Business Sales

What are the essential features of a desktop video conferencing system that is suitable business-to-business sales? A good business-grade video conferencing solution should include the following:

- Easy scheduling functions, with full integration into standard email applications like Outlook;
 - High-definition video using standard desktop PC hardware that provides a smooth, clear video experience over normal Internet connections;
 - Simplicity of design so that starting a meeting is as easy as the click of a button, and high reliability so that meetings can happen anytime without technical delays and interruptions. This is important because it enables impromptu meetings and increases responsiveness in sales situations.
 - Full desktop sharing, including shared screen and annotation tools, with the ability to see both the shared screen and the video feeds at the same time. This enables the kind of rich meeting experience that is so important to advancing a sales cycle;
 - Simple user controls such as mute and unmute controls and instant messaging text chat between participants during a conference;
 - Integrated VoIP, as well as integrated phone-based audio with international toll-free options for easy voice communication. This makes it fast and easy to convene meetings regardless of attendee location;
 - Administrative features including security controls (password protection, data encryption, individual level security controls), administrator remote control, attendance reporting, and meeting recording and archiving;
 - Supports mobile devices, such as smart phones and tablets, because of the increasing mobility of workers. This enables impromptu video conferencing anytime, anyplace. Industry analysts report that three-fourths of the North American workforce consists of mobile workers at least part of the time.
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Is High-Definition Desktop Video a Replacement for In-Person Sales Meetings?

The answer to that question depends on the circumstances. Video conferencing does not provide an experience that is totally equivalent to an in-person meeting, so in that sense it does not replace in-person meetings. However desktop video conferencing adds an entirely new dimension to technology enabled meetings. In some instances, a high-definition video conference will accomplish everything that a more costly and time consuming in-person meeting would achieve.

However, asking if desktop video conferences can

replace in-person meetings is not the most important question. The more important consideration is that initiating a desktop video conference is as easy as setting up a conference call. With the additional value of high-definition video, shared desktop, and annotation features, desktop video conferencing becomes an entirely new kind of sales tool that is just now becoming available to business users. It fills a huge gap in the communications spectrum between in-person meetings and the traditional conference call. There is great opportunity for sales organizations to take advantage of this technology to create a richer, more responsive, and ultimately more fruitful engagement experience with their customers.

David Talbott is a Technology Analyst who specializes in mobile and cloud based technologies that are altering the way businesses operate and changing how people work.

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