

## Let's get ready to sell again!

Let's start with the great news: we're coming out the other side! The shutters are being pulled up and the world is starting to trade once more. So, as your sales force emerge from lockdown, pencils sharpened, we felt it would be useful to review how best to address the team and prepare your organisation for what can only be described as a unique situation.

Many politicians have likened the COVID disruption to that of World War II. But is that true? Yes, it is global and yes, it has impacted virtually all industrial sectors. But that is as far as it goes.

Unlike the last world war, it has run for months not years. And, by the very nature of isolation laws, it hasn't displaced vast populations or forced mass migration.

It has been ugly, painful, tragic and disruptive. However, because of its timescale – months not years – the vast majority of the world's population and market places collectively wish to *"get back to normal as quickly as possible."* You see, the big difference here is 'months not years': our 'memory foam' imprint is still very much recognisable. This means that most businesses will look to how it was previously, before shifting to a major, new 'post Covid' strategy.

So, it is likely that your order book will start to return to normal, albeit with fluctuation that makes cash-flow forecasting difficult, to say the very least. But it will return and, hopefully, with many recognisable faces. The key to how quickly this happens will involve the skills your sales force command.

Since the financial recession of 2007/8, the global economy has enjoyed a fairly smooth ride of growth. The only hint of choppy waters lies around Brexit and the uncertainty this has brought. Big businesses, and we mean really big businesses, don't like uncertainty because the bigger you are, the harder it is to change. Think of shouting to the captain of an oil tanker, *"Look out, there's a dinghy below!"* and you get the picture.

SMEs fair better. They tend to be more agile and capable of responding more quickly, turning change into opportunities ripe for capture.

So, where do we stand now that the commercial lights are being switched back on? Given that the 'memory foam' imprint is still relatively fresh, your cookie cutter should still work. It is also likely that certain sectors will recover quite quickly. People, markets, whole populations want to 'get back to normal,' and this will be a significant driving force.

However, as all seasoned business executives will know, rapid change of pace brings many risks and management demands. For most SMEs, the sales force leads a company's direction. They bring vital customer feedback to the board and help steer R&D accordingly.

For larger corporations, R&D and Marketing tend to steer the ship, which may answer why some (not all) large corporations miss opportunities.

Successful post-lockdown trading is all about two things: spotting opportunities and ethical selling. Never before has it been more important for heads of ALL departments to tune into their sales force for guidance and market steer. Whether this is for pure cash-flow management or gain in market share, now is the time to move quickly and ethically.

We state 'ethically' because many opportunities will, sadly, arise from others' misfortune, so don't let a sudden big win erase the memories of the last few months. Some of your competitors will have ceased trading. Many of their staff may be seeking employment. History will remember as heroes those who helped others more than it will flatter rapid growth.

So, some pointers for your first sales briefing post lockdown. You might want to invite the heads of other departments too!

- **Terms of business and order taking.** Will the old model suit your cash requirements, and how 'credit friendly' can you afford to be? Review all trading terms and make sure your sales force are clear on the boundaries.
- **Customer feedback.** Set up a dedicated portal for your sales force to document and disseminate their experiences. There will be a lot of 'noise' out there for a while, so it is important that management has a way to capture and filter feedback, ensuring that it reaches the right ears and does not overwhelm.
- **Spotting opportunities.** This is a trainable skill and part of the Sales Skills Audit suite. Make sure your executives have this skill under their belt and know how to use it. Also, consider a second portal, or outlet, specifically for new market opportunities and consider a regular meeting to review this.
- **Motivation and ethics.** Just as you wind up the motivation of your sales team with the 'opportunities' out there right now, remind them of the long game. People like to do business with people that they like, and what we do now, how we behave in this era, will determine how much business we write in the next decade.
- **Negotiation skills.** This selling skill will come under increased pressure in an unsettled market place. Again preset parameters for your sales force in advance and ensure they are crystal clear of where a good deal starts and finishes for your organisation. If this skill looks at all faded, run a negotiation skills assessment module on your sales force in advance.