

How to design a hybrid sales strategy

Iñigo Gallo asks his colleague Cosimo Chiesa about three key building blocks of a hybrid sales strategy -- a strategy that has become a necessity in lockdown times and offers advantages once the current storm has cleared.



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- **Hybrid sales strategies -- combining face-to-face and remote interactions -- are here to stay.**
- **A good hybrid sales strategy can be broken down into three phases: designing the sales model, developing the sales team and managing people remotely.**

- **Salespeople need to acquire new skills to succeed in hybrid sales, while leaders should move towards a coaching style of management.**

In a February 2021 e-conference, IESE's [Iñigo Gallo](#) interviewed his colleague [Cosimo Chiesa](#), focusing on the keys to a successful hybrid sales strategy. Here are some of the highlights of their conversation:

Iñigo Gallo: Can you give us a brief definition of hybrid sales and tell us why it's urgent to talk about now?

Cosimo Chiesa: In March of 2020, lockdowns began and the world changed. In this new reality, we need hybrid sales -- essentially a set of techniques for consultative sales online as well as off-. The era of the product-price salesperson, who goes around offering promotions or gifts, has ended. Consultative sales -- where salespeople act more like advisors to provide solutions -- can be done in person or remotely. In the latter case, new digital techniques, knowledge and methodologies are required.

IG: So let's look at the three main phases of hybrid sales. First comes designing the sales model.

CC: Designing a hybrid sales model takes into account possible face-to-face and virtual visits. First of all, we need to study what our customers and prospects want. We analyze behaviors, expectations, requirements and, in particular, the channels through which they would like to operate. Then it's time to rethink the entire customer journey; that is, what happens at each stage in which a client or prospect comes into contact with a potential supplier. With that, we have to reconfigure and redesign our strategy and move forward with smart data.

In a hybrid model, it's key to identify new opportunities that are emerging with an eye to future buyers. Finally, as with any new methodology, we must create new KPIs. And Marketing needs to stop accusing Sales of simply eating lobster with customers, while Sales needs to stop accusing Marketing of only knowing how to work with PowerPoints.

IG: An optimist might say that a hybrid strategy could bring the two areas together.

CC: If I were the CEO of a company today, I would force Marketing and Sales to sit together and exchange information.

IG: The second phase must be building the sales team.

CC: These salespeople need to have a high degree of emotional intelligence that includes the ability to connect with the customer from behind a screen, when body language is lost. They must operate, and sell, wherever their customers want to be. And they must know how to work with smart data.

There's a lot of work that goes into converting a lead into a sale. The traditional focus on the salesperson's techniques has moved to a focus on clients' needs. Next to inbound marketing (i.e., content marketing to draw customers in), we need inbound sales, in the sense that the salesperson must follow the customer throughout the purchase process, while knowing what's happening in the Marketing Department.

At the same time, salespeople need to work remotely. With a known customer, this is relatively easy. But it's complicated with an unknown prospect, what we used to call "cold calling." When we get in the trenches, preparation is key. In a study we do at IESE that looks at the reasons sales fall through, No. 1 is always the price, but No. 2 is that the offer is not tailor-made or well calibrated enough to fit a prospect's needs.

Even if a sale isn't closed, if it's well handled, it may leave the door open for a prospect's future return.

IG: At what point do we worry about spamming prospects?

CC: When a sales pitch fails to make a connection. This can happen with traditional client relationships and with online prospects.

IG: The third and final phase to talk about today is managing people.

CC: Leadership from a distance means moving from a methodology more focused on control to one that's more about coaching -- that is, communicating, listening, encouraging, developing and uniting a team.

IG: That said, in a while, being good in person could come back as a competitive advantage.

CC: Many will want to return to interacting face to face, because they are more comfortable that way. But working remotely also has many advantages, such as its flexibility.

IG: On this point, many teams are finding that they can save time and money.

CC: Saving time and travelling less. As such, sales teams can be resized or part of their time saved can be spent increasing their number of contacts.

At the end of the day, a good sales strategy consists of having a passion for transmitting value in a hybrid reality, as we're living in these times of COVID-19.



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