



ONLINE MEETING AND VIDEOCONFERENCING TOOLS OFFER A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY FOR SELLERS

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Most of the time, products and services don't sell themselves. The people who sell goods and services for a living—sales representatives, sales managers, district managers, business developers and other professionals involved in the process of selling—need to get in front of the prospects and customers they are targeting.

There's nothing like being able to show or explain in person why a customer needs a particular product or service—and why it's better than what the competition is offering. But oftentimes such meetings are not feasible or cost effective, especially for smaller companies with limited resources. The target audience might be hundreds or thousands of miles away, or the company's travel and

entertainment budget may be maxed out for the quarter.

Internet connectivity and the latest meeting applications have dramatically changed the selling landscape, however. Now, it is possible to reach many prospective buyers in an intimate way without even leaving the office.

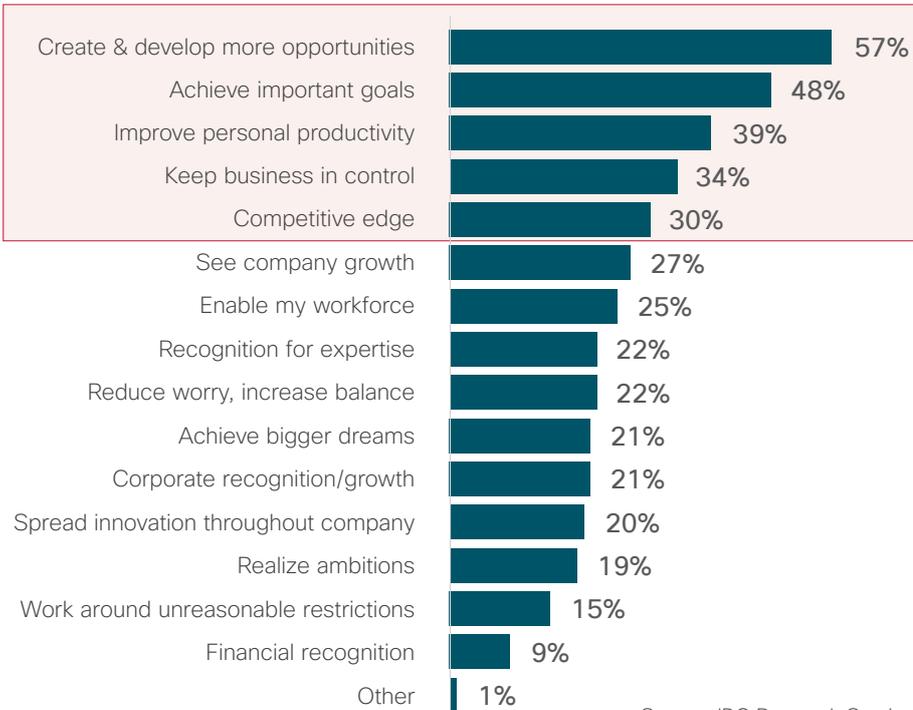
By using online meeting and video conferencing solutions, sellers can get in front of clients quickly and also at times that are convenient for all parties. Online meetings can replace, or in some cases, complement, in-person encounters.

The latest tools allow easy sharing of documents, presentations, graphics, and other content to help demonstrate the value of what is being sold.

Sales-related professionals can use these tools not only to push products



Top five personal benefits of meeting with other people in your job



Source: IDG Research Services

and services to prospects, but also to connect and work with colleagues around the world who can share expertise and best practices, building a supportive global network of sales professionals. For example, a co-worker with deep familiarity of a particular region and its culture can share invaluable insight with sales people who are trying to sell to that market from other regions.

This paper looks at some of the meetings-related challenges sellers are facing today and how online meeting and videoconferencing solutions can address these—and help them sell more and as a result boost their company’s revenue.

Why In-Person Meetings Don’t Always Work

Holding in-person meetings with clients and prospective customers is a tried-and-true strategy: Anyone who

has ever tried to sell something knows there is nothing like an in-person encounter to more effectively bond with other individuals, find out what they are like, and learn what they are looking to accomplish in business or as a consumer.

These meetings can present a number of drawbacks for sales professionals, however, according to a survey conducted by IDG Research Services in December 2015. The report, sponsored by Cisco WebEx, looks at the challenges of meetings and the personal and professional benefits associated with online meeting and video conferencing solutions.

The biggest downside of in-person meetings? Slow decision making, which was cited by nearly 40% of the survey respondents as a top challenge of face-to-face meetings. Slow decision making often leads to lost business.

Trying to achieve work and life balance while traveling for meetings is another top challenge, says one-third of survey respondents. Workers—and company management—have become much more aware of the need for balance, and business travel is one of the culprits when it comes to robbing people of time for other activities.

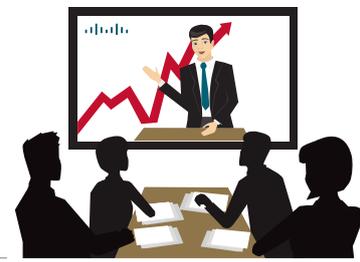
About one third of the respondents also note the inability of team members to attend in-person meetings. The potential results of this are not only that members miss out on important communications, but they are not present to contribute insights and show the client the full team that is behind the effort.

One company that provides an example of the potential drawbacks of face-to-face meetings and how they can be addressed by online conferencing is Velocify, a provider of cloud-based intelligent sales software. With just a single webinar, Nick Hedges, CEO and president of Velocify, can simultaneously present to and collaborate with all individuals involved in the buying decision.

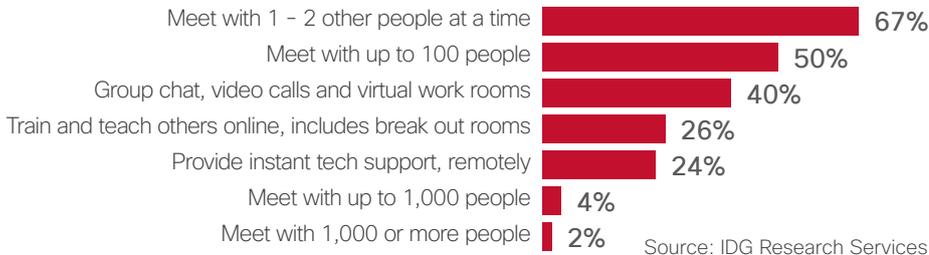
“This process used to take weeks of coordination and multiple business trips to meet with key decision makers in different offices,” Hedges says. “Virtual meetings also allow for a more consultative sales approach, which typically involves bringing in more internal experts during the sales process.”

Online meetings have their own set of problems too. When asked to identify the top five obstacles when collaborating online or via video conferencing, the most common response by survey respondents is getting meetings started on time (54%).

Other drawbacks include keeping participants engaged and attentive, getting participants to commit to meetings, technology challenges, and getting reliable network connections.



Online meeting and video conference capabilities used if available



What's at Stake: The Benefits of Meetings

What's to be gained from holding meetings? Quite a bit, according to the IDG Research survey respondents. The top personal advantage, according to 56% of respondents, is enabling sellers to create and develop more business opportunities for themselves.

Meetings also allow sellers to achieve important goals (48%), improve their personal productivity (46%), help their companies to grow (34%) and gain recognition within the organization (32%). The top benefit for business, fittingly enough, is increased sales, according to 58% of the respondents.

"Once we started relying more heavily on online meetings, we were able to effectively push prospects through the sales funnel, tightening sales cycle gaps and keeping us very busy," says Scott Teger, vice president of operations at 36 Labs, a provider of marketing acceleration and lead generation services.

Other advantages are stronger customer relationships (54%), improved customer service (50%), growth in the customer base (42%), and increased productivity (34%).

Those surveyed use, on average, two different online meeting and video conferencing platforms on a regular basis, but they typically only pay for one system, according to the research. The top reason for multiple platforms,

according to 79%, is being compatible with different clients or colleagues, followed by the fact that certain solutions work better depending on the devices individuals are using to access the solution (44%).

The Power of Online Conferencing

Online meeting technology can be especially valuable for those who need to demonstrate the value of their company's products to customers.

As research firm Aberdeen points out in a December 2015 report, "Whether honing in on the efficiency of customer-facing interactions, or maintaining optimal levels of customer satisfaction, today's enterprises are keenly aware of the financial value of supporting stronger and more intimate relationships between sellers and buyers of all sorts of goods and services. There are many ways in which savvy market-facing professionals leverage screen-sharing tools to help them shorten their sales cycles and beat quotas."

In the study entitled "Making the Connection: How Top Sellers Leverage Web Conferencing to Win," Aberdeen notes that among the ways sellers can leverage the technology are product demonstrations, interactive Web experiences that take one-directional product demonstrations to a new level, and online assessment or return on investment (ROI) calculator applications

that allow sellers to show buyers how a product or service will provide payback.

Videoconferencing in particular can be a valuable tool for sellers.

"The ability to look your prospect in the eye via webcam is more feasible and advisable than ever before," Aberdeen says. "Even before a video conference begins, you'll know that your buyer is serious about exploring your goods or services, when they accept an invitation to participate in this most intimate of digital sales interactions." Online meetings can bring out the personalities of professional sellers much more so than voice-only calls or e-mail.

Sales professionals from a number of industries say they've seen direct benefits from online meetings.

For Next Step Test Preparation, which offers tutoring services for students preparing for standardized tests, online conferencing offers a way to reach many prospective customers.

"Online meetings are a force multiplier," says John Rood, president of Next Step Test Preparation LLC. "Instead of spending time educating individuals about what we have to offer, we organize events to engage large

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And the technology allows companies to create a level of trust with prospects.

“We are in a high-touch business and that ‘face-to-face,’ even if it’s virtual, is key to building enough trust with a prospect to move closer to the sale,” says Matt Perez, COO and co-founder of Nearsoft, a provider of software developer recruitment services.

How to Determine the Best Online Meetings Solution

When it comes to how businesses actually use online meeting and video conferencing solutions, 58% of those surveyed by IDG say they are likely to meet with one or two other people at a time. However, 54% indicate they might use video conferencing for meetings of up to 100 people. Furthermore, 26% indicate they use group chat, video calls and virtual work rooms, while 20% use it for training and teaching others online, including the use of breakout rooms. People involved in sales should look for these specific features when exploring online meeting and video conferencing solutions and vendors:

View options – Does the solution offer video conferencing with full screen, multiple feed, or side-by-side with screen sharing viewing modes?

Content sharing – Can users share content on their screens or applications, sketch ideas on a virtual whiteboard and record meetings?

Mobile enabled – Is the solution designed to support mobility, and can it be used optimally with mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, as well as multiple platforms?

Also important to consider is how easily the platform scales to meet a growing number of users, and whether

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the platform supports a global user base. When looking into suppliers of online meeting solutions, companies should look at factors such as how experienced the vendor is in the communications and collaboration market, how it is regarded in the industry and among the research community, and what level of technical support the vendor provides.

Conclusion: Sellers Gain Value in Multiple Ways

Companies today are finding and using more channels than ever to move products and services, whether it’s on the Web, via mobile devices or through social media.

The world of sales is continuously evolving, with new online competitors springing up, new mobile technologies available, and business models shifting. Having all these options presents numerous opportunities for sellers, and it also puts pressure on them to keep up with the competition. Furthermore,

it tends to stretch staffs thin, as they try to cover all the bases.

Sales are key to helping the business maintain or grow market share, increase revenue, and expand the customer base. As a result, those involved in the sales process need to find quality leads and nurture those leads effectively.

That means engaging customers and prospects on a regular basis. Meetings are a big part of that strategy. With online meeting and video conferencing solutions, sellers can have a global reach and engage with customers as never before.

Video conferencing in particular allows sellers to virtually get in front of their prospects and establish a rapport—far more cost effectively than traveling across the country for a face to face meeting. Because of the convenience of the technology, sales-related people can actually meet more often with customers and prospects, building a stronger bond. They can also use these solutions to enhance their productivity and career growth, by leveraging resources throughout the organization without having to travel great distances.

Selecting the right solution is critical. If the online conferencing platform lacks certain features or is difficult to set up, use and maintain, or if it lacks adequate security and/or is not easily scalable, the benefits will almost certainly be limited. Taking the time to evaluate the market and test drive the technology offerings will foster success.

Any amount of time devoted to researching these offerings will almost certainly pay off—particularly from a sales standpoint. Online meeting and video conferencing platforms, as demonstrated by the survey data and examples from the field, lead to dramatic benefits such as increased sales, faster sales cycles, increased levels of customer trust and more collaborative sales teams. ■