

# Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis - Strategies

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This series: **Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis** has been developed by GXS Partners and Sales Dragon Consulting. We have combined our extensive experience in sales management and business transformation to highlight key insights in collaboration with senior executives across the region.

This article is the second in a series of reports on how companies in the Asia Pacific region are facing up to the Covid crisis. Based on in-depth interviews with our clients across a broad range of industries, and having outlined the challenges they are facing in part one of this series (found here at [GXS Partners](#) or [Sales Dragon Consulting](#)), we now turn to look at some of the strategic best practices that are helping companies through this period. Executives emphasised the need to update their understanding of the market, adjust how they position their product or service’s value in light of market shifts and align the organisation around the new strategy.



## Market Strategies

Covid is causing fundamental shifts in global markets in terms of demand, sales channels and customer bases. Ensuring a holistic understanding of the target market and optimising services or products to meet shifting needs is vital for success moving beyond the Covid-era. Here are some strategies adopted by executives we spoke to:

### Market Segmentation

For some companies, one unexpected consequence of Covid has been that it is forcing managers to re-evaluate their market strategies, including region, segment, channel, and product type. In pre-Covid times, some organisations still neglected taking enough time to purposefully think about what clients value, which segments to target, how to leverage existing businesses, and to set both immediate and longer-term goals. Overall, though a shock to the system, some respondents expressed the view that a Covid-enforced strategic re-evaluation has been very beneficial for business.

### Channels

Some businesses have found that their established sales channels did not serve them well in a crisis. Many ongoing shifts, such as the increasing prevalence of e-commerce, were accelerated during the crisis. While many companies reported that research into available alternatives and determining which channels prove more effective at delivering goods and services to clients is ongoing, certain actions – such as pivots from B2B to B2C or adopting diversified versus highly focused sales channel approaches – are becoming increasingly well-established as the crisis continues.

### Research

Some executives we spoke to said decision-making has been challenging during Covid because they were unable to rely on accurate market data. In response, many have re-thought their demand forecasting approach. Many have taken it upon themselves to ask their clients for help in communicating their changing needs. Some managers told us they actively assessed how their competitors were responding and held regular meetings with their sales team to communicate updates in order to ensure the right market insights were available to promote holistic awareness.



Our clients told us that the priorities of their customers have shifted because of Covid, particularly on how they prioritise “value.” Price, place of production and perceived hygiene have all rapidly and unexpectedly shifted upwards in relative importance. In response, some companies are re-aligning their sales strategies to clearly emphasise the inherent value of products or services. For example:

## Business to Business

In the B2B arena, companies are becoming very focused on collaborative cross-departmental approaches to retain key accounts and win new high-value business. For existing clients, targets are set for increased conversations and needs discovery with key accounts to maximise the perceived value clients have of existing relationships. Repeatedly, executives spoke about reducing churn rates and looking at potential additional cross-selling or up-selling opportunities. With pressure on price in the short-term, companies are responding by offering improved long-term pricing to secure deals, increase renewal incentives, and identify and address accounts that are at risk. For both new and existing business, companies reported success using approaches such as account-based management with involvement across different sales and marketing functions that can provide customers with highly personalised, targeted, one-to-one experiences.

## Business to Consumer

Our B2C clients have also said that they are spending more time talking to their customers to find out how their preferences have shifted. Some then re-evaluated how their products’ value can contribute to their customers’ desired outcomes. For example, one sports supplies company explained how a major advantage of their home gym equipment is that it offers safety from crowds. Pre-Covid, this would not have been a key selling point. Now, it is very important.

## Sales Approach Diversification

As we discussed in our earlier article, sales forces reported facing the challenge of driving revenue with existing clients while simultaneously winning new business even as resources diminish in a rapidly shifting environment. Many executives reported that returning to fundamentals and restructuring key roles around different types of sales activities has been helpful in addressing this issue. For example, one executive we spoke to chose to divide his sales force into specialist “farmer” (account manager) and “hunter” (prospector) roles, with farmers focusing on growing the organisation’s value with existing clients while “hunters” stay more focused on understanding changes in the market to prospect new business.



# Organisational Alignment to Strategy

Companies focusing on “agile” strategy during the Covid crisis have found that they need to have appropriate structures in place to quickly respond to challenges or new opportunities. Frustrations arose where plans fell flat because the existing structure of the organisation resulted in a slow response. Here are some ways companies are overcoming that problem:

## Organisational Structure

Given the changes brought on by Covid, both in physical work environments and travel limitations, many companies reported exploring different formal structures for the sales organisation. Executives told us that one of the key considerations was to ensure that the sales organisation has the right balance of functional versus localised management, allowing for quick adaptation to the broader sales function. Matrix structures which incorporate individual reporting to more than one supervisor depending on the situation were reported as one successful approach to allow for multiple stakeholder inputs, as long as clarity of reporting lines is in place and the model is fit for purpose given the specific market dynamics.

## Interdepartmental Collaboration

All interviewees emphasized the need to quickly flex, change and pivot to new sales opportunity areas or respond to challenges in response to Covid. Some businesses told us that they have established multi-disciplinary crisis teams in response to Covid, with appropriate remit to identify and implement changes. While these teams may have been formulated to deal with immediate impacts of the crisis, many have evolved into integrated planning hubs for working inter-departmentally. This is assisting in communication, identifying problems, brainstorming solutions and putting action plans into effect as efficiently as possible. While anyone within the organisation can identify potential areas to pivot towards or responses to a crisis, it typically takes multiple departments to successfully execute changes in sales strategy. It is important that each business function understands its interconnected role and how it contributes to the overall strategy in order to respond effectively.

## Core Competency Boundaries

Managers reported the importance of crafting clear strategic priorities to guide any brainstorming around potential pivots in sales focus. This helps to reduce time executives spend in exploring unrealistic tangents in the short term, and to better evaluate what is required for sustainable major shifts. One manager emphasised the importance of understanding the limits of the organisation’s capabilities when evaluating new directions to move toward profitability, in particular to ensure that suggestions were either adjacent to or building upon what is already possible. This would allow for the company to more confidently and quickly make any shifts.

This article has focused on some of the strategies companies have been using to help them survive, or even thrive, during the Covid crisis. Our next article, focuses on how companies are modifying processes and using technology to good effect as they move through the Covid era and beyond.

We are grateful for the input to these articles from our friends across a broad range of industries. You can also contribute to the discussion by contacting any of the authors or, if you would like to discuss how best to steer your business through the Covid crisis and beyond, we would be happy to talk to you.

Not sure where to start? Call any one of us and we will help you figure it out.

**GXS Partners is an independent strategic consulting firm specialising in devising effective interventions for competitive advantage.**

The name GXS is derived from the Chinese initials of “Gong Xin Shi” or 拱心石, meaning keystone; the element in construction which holds everything together, or in other words, the link between strategy and operations. We are trusted by business owners, directors and senior leaders to define the right strategic priorities and transformative solutions to have them realised.

With an Asia Pacific focus, we combine in-depth understanding of Greater China and the Asia Pacific region with our global experience. We have held senior executive positions ourselves, delivering market growth, running effective operations and transforming organisations to create value. We work with many of the world’s leading organisations in their sectors, as well as high growth enterprises and ambitious innovators.

**Sales Dragon Consulting is a sales-focused management consulting and training firm dedicated to helping companies grow.**

Sales Dragon Consulting brings 25 years of experience executing and managing sales and business development strategies across APAC. We’ve developed highly effective and proven sales methods working with top-level sales teams and winning thousands of mandates from major corporations throughout the region. We create experts in sales and sales management – we create Sales Dragons!

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