

Sales Management Through the Covid Crisis - People

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This article is the fourth in a series on how companies in the Asia Pacific region are responding to the Covid crisis. You can catch up with the story so far in the preceding reports on the problems senior executives have shared with us, the strategies that are working and the processes that are helping to drive revenue, even in difficult times at [GXS Partners](#) or [Sales Dragon Consulting](#). Now we turn attention to how companies are changing their approach to effectively get the most out of their people during the Covid crisis and support them to succeed.

Many of the executives we spoke to reported that their teams expressed gratitude in still having jobs during a period of wide-spread cost cutting and layoffs. They had many a story of people less fortunate than themselves. Executives shared substantial challenges in maintaining morale, but on the positive side some took this time to re-evaluate the needs of the organisation and shared their tips for finding and keeping the best people.



Assessment and Candidate Selection

The skills needed for sales organisations to thrive in the post-Covid environment have shifted. A number of the companies we spoke to said they were still hiring, either because of back-filling to maintain existing sales team sizes or to bring in new capabilities as the crisis had created new opportunities for which they had not yet developed the skills internally.

Assessments and Skills Identification

As described in the preceding articles in this series, many organisations that we spoke to commented that the Covid crisis had forced a re-evaluation of their strategies, processes and systems. It has also made them reconsider the skills that are now needed for roles across the updated organisation. Executives advised that having an up-to-date and dynamic understanding of the capabilities needed in the new world in a structured and consistent format was important. Skills such as virtual selling, prospecting, even more active listening than before and showing resilience were becoming ever more critical for many roles.

Upskilling and Candidate Selection

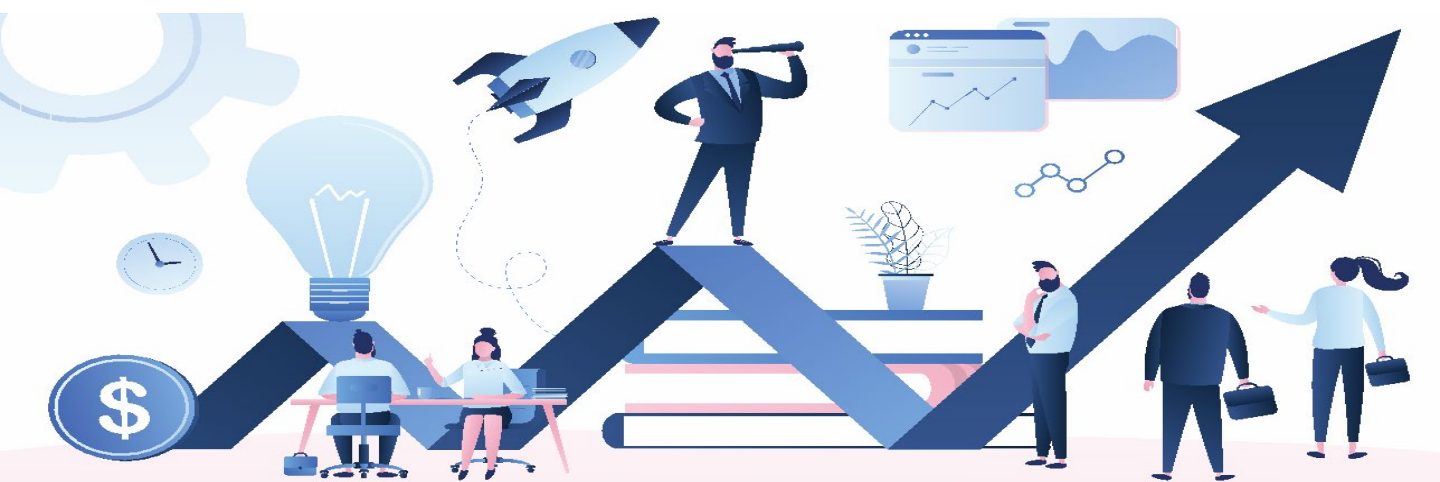
Understanding the capabilities available in the current resource pool within the sales organisation has been highlighted as key. Executives advised that a systematic assessment against needs can ensure individuals are in the roles for which they are best suited and identify where targeted upskilling is needed. Furthermore, understanding where there are capability gaps was instrumental for guiding recruitment. While many organisations reported using various assessment tools, many still reported concern around the challenge to rapidly and comprehensively identify the precise skills needed and where the gaps were.

Training and Induction



Generally speaking, Covid has caused most of the companies we engaged with to tighten their belts. On the other hand, it has been a time of reflection, bringing to light deficiencies in systems and skills. Specifically, companies have been forced to reimagine and invest in training procedures to emphasise the emerging skills required for successful sales personnel and to account for prolonged virtual and distance requirements. Effective training has needed to address not only the necessary hard skills, such as virtual technology and cloud resource use, but also soft skills that are increasingly valuable.

For induction, some companies struggled with bringing new hires up to speed and had to think of how to communicate their expectations with limited face-to-face interaction. Mentoring and virtual shadowing are helping embed new employees. At the same time, employees themselves have been discovering areas in which they need more knowledge and training if they are to be successful through this period and beyond. This has re-orientated some companies towards a training for growth mindset, and the proliferation of virtual sales workshops available is proving valuable.



Motivation

Many organisations we interviewed found that traditional tools and techniques used to effectively motivate sales teams have been disrupted during Covid. They reported having to cancel both formal and informal team events, some of which served as gatherings to bring people together and boost morale. While managers spoke of difficulties in providing support to staff remotely, many of whom were dealing with their own private issues alongside the demands of work, they reported trying various new measures to support teams. For example, specifically allocating time for less formal virtual discussion between remote working colleagues and utilizing external structured coaching or counselling sessions.

Many organisations also reported adjusting targets to reflect the difficulties in the current environment and acknowledge that earlier metrics may no longer be achievable. This might include adjusting monetary incentives, such as commissions and quota bonus structures, to provide people with positive reinforcement and continue to realistically stretch the organisation's targets. Central to success is making these delicate adjustments according to the business's situation; one respondent advised that monthly adjustments are needed while several others reported a preference for quarterly changes.

This report has focused on some of the people strategies companies have been using to help them survive, or even thrive, during the Covid crisis. In our final article of the series, we will share some actions that we have devised and that you can start to use in your organisation to increase efficiency and resilience during this time.

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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