



Improve Your Sales Process Using Web Conferencing

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Introduction

The importance of building credibility and good relationships with customers in the selling process is stronger than ever. Competition is intense, and getting more so. And while the days of selling face-to-face are not diminishing, many sales organizations are using web conferencing to make the most out of their valuable meetings with customers. The reality is that web conferencing technology greatly enhances sales productivity. Sales organizations that are adopting the use of web conferencing are experiencing the following benefits:

- Shorter sales cycles
- Improved close rates
- More responsive to customer needs
- Ability to reach more prospects more often
- Reduced costs associated with the sales process (travel, phone, etc.)
- Improved communication among the sales team

Once adopted, usage of web conferencing technology can spread quickly in a sales organization and beyond. Management will quickly realize how web conferencing can help them be more productive, help them meet their sales goals, and quickly gain a competitive advantage.

The Sales Challenge

The process of selling involves constant communication – communication among the sales team, and between the sales rep and the customer. Typically, these interactions are done by phone, voice mail, email, and face-to-face meetings; and each of these has limitations.

- Phone – Interactive, but the typical call is missing any visual component.
- Voice Mail & E-Mail – Often effective, but lack of interactivity can lead to unnecessary back and forth communications.
- Face-to-Face meetings – While productive, can be difficult to schedule and can incur travel costs and unproductive down time due to travel.

It's these interactions and their limitations that are the root of many of the challenges felt by nearly every sales organization.

Meeting with Customers: All sales people are challenged to find mutually convenient times to meet with customers. Traveling across the country, state



or even town, can result in high expenses and hours of unproductive time. Key decision makers have unpredictable schedules and often called out of town with little notice. Delays in scheduling and missed meetings will result in prolonging the sales cycle by days, if not weeks.

Selling Complex Products: The sales cycle for high-end, complex products or solutions can be long and involve numerous interactions with various people in the customer's organization, as well as with partners and vendors who may be part of the total solution offering. The sales process can involve on-site meetings to deliver presentations and demonstrations, as well as technical reviews, proposal reviews, and contract negotiations resulting in non-productive time and high costs associated with travel.

Up-Sell and Cross-Sell: Every company likes to leverage its relationships to sell additional products and services. Up-sell and cross-sell efforts are often handled by an inside sales organization, which relies on the phone and email. While generally very effective, each can lead to excessive back and forth communications with customers, which can frustrate the customer and also be a drain on the sales team's productivity.

Sales Team Interactions: In addition to external interactions with customers and partners, sales teams often interact internally among themselves.

- Sales managers frequently meet with their teams to update their sales pipeline and forecast, develop strategies, and discuss issues with the product, competition, and specific customers.
- Proposal teams are formed to respond to RFP's, which require a coordinated effort and input from subject matter experts in the organization. These teams can be located in dispersed offices making interactions and communications among team members cumbersome. Missed proposal deadlines can result in lost revenue to the company.
- Sales teams must also be trained on new product offerings. Product road shows can be very expensive due to high travel costs and non-productive time incurred by both the presentation team and sales staff.

Team Selling: Organizations selling complex products or solutions often team with partners or vendors during the sales process. Sales teams may have to frequently communicate and/or meet with their counterparts from partner



The Value Proposition

organizations to jointly develop presentations and proposals, conduct technical discussions to design and architect the proposed solution, etc. Again, finding acceptable meeting times, as well as travel and other costs, detract from an efficient sales process.

To meet the challenges outlined above, many sales organizations have turned to web conferencing, which has enabled them to improve their sales process and achieve their sales goals. The value proposition to the participants in the sales process is outlined below.

Sales Organization: Web conferencing provides sales organizations with numerous benefits including improved communications and productivity, better teamwork, and cost savings during the sales process.

- Interact with customers more frequently through online presentations, demos, proposals, and contract negotiations, which reduce travel costs and greatly increase scheduling flexibility.
- Provides more frequent, meaningful contact with customers during the sales process by enabling the sales rep to schedule meetings with customers with little or no lead-time.
- Reduces the cycle time for the sales process due to improved, flexible communications with customers.
- Increases the reach of sales teams covering large geographic territories.
- Results in higher close rates by demonstrating a high level of responsiveness to customer needs during the sales process.
- Improves team selling by tightly integrating dispersed sales teams and subject matter experts with improved communications capabilities that enable them to interact frequently and efficiently. Similarly, partners can be brought into appropriate opportunities.
- Shortens the internal development and review cycles for creating sales presentations, tailoring product demos, drafting proposals and contract terms, etc.
- Enables sales reps to qualify more customers and spend more time with those who are qualified vs. unqualified.

Customers: Web conferencing provides customers with increased flexibility and cost savings during the sales process.



- Reduces the need for customers to attend face-to-face meetings and presentations with the sales team. Customer can participate in online meetings from their desk, or wherever they may be, without having to incur travel time and cost to attend meetings. This provides the customer with considerable flexibility in scheduling critical meetings with the sales team that require the attendance of key participants and decision makers from their side.
- Provides the ability for the customer’s personnel to replay presentations, product demos, etc. delivered by the sales team at their convenience in the event they were unable to attend the originally scheduled online meeting. This reduces delays in the sales process that otherwise would occur due to rescheduling meeting events.
- Improves response time from the sales team back to the customer so critical issues can be addressed quickly. Customer decision makers can be invited to meetings with little or no advanced scheduling, regardless of where they are located, to discuss and resolve issues that otherwise could extend the sales process.

In summary, all participants in the sales process can benefit from web conferencing. Estimates of the value that can be realized by sales organizations using web conferencing are shown in the following table.

Benefit	Return on each \$ Spent on Web Conferencing	Cost Savings/Productivity Gain
Reduce Travel Expense	\$1 to \$5	2x to 7x cost savings
Recover Non-productive Time	\$1 to \$2	
Shorter Cycle Time/Better Performance	\$1 to \$20	1x to 20x productivity gain

What to Look for In a Web Conferencing Solution

There are a number of key features and functions sales organizations should look for when implementing a web conferencing solution that will enable them to gain widespread adoption. We will use WebEx Meeting Center, the most widely used web conferencing solution with over 9,000 corporate customers, as a model for discussing these attributes. Below is a table containing the essential list of Web Conferencing Attributes.

Web Conferencing Attribute	WebEx Capability
Support seamless data, audio, and video interactions that compliment face-to-face interactions.	Depending on the needs of meeting participants, Hosts of a WebEx meeting have the option of incorporating integrated audio and video conferencing into the sales presentations and demonstrations.
Rich Media Support	In addition to live video and integrated teleconferencing, the WebEx MediaTone network supports the synchronous replay of streaming video, flash animations as well as PowerPoint animations and transitions. The richer the sales presentation, the more engaging it will be for the customer.
Easy to access, easy to use	The sales team and customers must be able to participate in web conferencing meetings without any installation or any training. Sales reps can start a meeting with a single click. The WebEx network checks each participant's computer at the start of the meeting and loads any necessary components automatically – no user driven download or installation required. Once in the meeting, WebEx provides a standard web-based look and feel that is easy to navigate and makes it easy for customers to hear the sales pitch without leaving their desk.
Reliable, predictable performance, worldwide.	Web conferencing is being viewed more and more like telephony in terms of availability and reliability. Sales people will not risk using web conferencing with a customer if they aren't convinced it will operate flawlessly. WebEx incorporates a redundant, global network infrastructure in their solution that provides ubiquitous access – regardless of location, hardware platform, operating system, browser, and wired or wireless status.
Supports secure access to data by participants in the meeting.	Customers are extremely sensitive to confidential information that may be shared in a web conferencing meeting. WebEx provides encryption of all session content. All data is switched through the WebEx network, and nothing stored for a snooping competitor to uncover.



Conclusion

Nearly every business would like to increase their revenues while holding the line on expenses. Many are doing just that by integrating web conferencing into the sales process. When a sales organization embraces web conferencing, the sales team reaches more prospects, accelerates the cycle, and improves its close rates; the result to the company is more revenue while reducing costs. Web conferencing is a complement to face-to-face interactions that are essential to building strong relationships. With the business agility web conferencing enables, the ability to conveniently meet and quickly present new products or resolve issues, meeting online strengthens the bond between the sales organization and its customers.

Top sales organization have embraced web conferencing and use it every day to improve their interactions with customers, partners, and within their internal sales teams. If you're not using web conferencing, you should take a serious look at it, and see how it can lead to improved performance in your sales organization.

Collaborative Strategies is a San Francisco based IT analyst and consulting firm focused on the areas of electronic collaboration and knowledge management. Since 1989, we have worked with vendors and end users of collaborative tools and technologies. Collaborative Strategies produces industry reports on a variety of technologies in the areas of electronic collaboration and knowledge management. For more information on Collaborative Strategies, please visit our Web site at www.collaborate.com or contact us directly at 415-282-9197.

If you wish to learn more about WebEx Meeting Center, please visit www.webex.com or call WebEx at 877-509-3239.