



Leveraging Real-Time Web Collaboration to Improve Your Sales Process

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Introduction

Sales organizations are always looking for ways to boost the performance of their sales teams by making them more effective in the sales process. Recent advances in Internet infrastructure technology and maturity of technologies supporting collaboration over the Internet have resulted in new methods for sales organizations to interact with their customers, collaborate with sales team members, and develop better visibility into their sales pipeline. Today, sales organizations are increasingly embracing real-time Web collaboration tools or Web Meetings to complement their sales processes because these tools can greatly enhance sales productivity and reduce costs. Sales organizations adopting Web Meetings are experiencing the following benefits:

- Sales cycles can be shortened by leveraging the Web to close more deals faster.
- Sales teams are able to reach more prospects more often and develop more revenue opportunities with their accounts.
- Sales organizations are reducing the costs associated with the sales process (travel, phone, etc.).
- Prospects are being engaged more effectively in the sales process by creating a personalized buying experience for them.
- Sales teams are able to communicate more effectively with customers and with one another.
- Sales teams are able to get more out of their CRM and Sales Force Automation systems.

Tailoring real-time Web collaboration to meet the specific requirements of the sales process is creating a new dimension by enabling the sales team to effectively complement their selling processes and close more deals.

Sales management quickly realize how Web Meetings, can help them be more productive, help them meet their sales goals, and quickly gain a competitive advantage. Customers also benefit from the reach, convenience, and flexibility of meeting with sales teams, and being fully engaged in the sales process from their own desk.

The Sales Challenge

Ineffective and inefficient interactions with customers can lead to extended sales cycles that result in high sales costs, missed sales quotas, and even lost revenue opportunities by sales teams. These interactions and their limitations are the root of many of the challenges faced by sales organizations today, which can be broadly categorized under two categories: Lost Revenue Opportunities and High Sales Costs.

Lost Revenue Opportunities:

- During a telephone conversation with his prospective customer, a sales representative may not know whether his audience is completely engaged. If the customer is not completely engaged, then the customer may not hear key sales messages resulting in ineffective sales calls and lost sales opportunities.
- During sales calls, customers often ask questions or request information beyond the expertise of the sales person. In these situations, sales people have little choice but to explain to the prospect they will get back to them



later with an answer. This creates delays in the sales process and may reflect poorly on the sales person because they don't appear to be responsive to the customer's needs and can result in lost sales opportunities.

- Sales managers must often rely on brief, verbal summaries of account activity from their sales teams when updating their sales pipeline and forecasts that get rolled up into a corporate sales number. The lack of detailed sales call information, such as what customers the sales team is meeting with, how often they are meeting with them, and what topics are being discussed, limits the sales manager's visibility and insights on the level of activity taking place with target customers. This type of information is necessary when validating the accuracy of forecast information and prioritizing sales activities with high potential customers during the selling process.
- Sales managers are typically limited by time and distance constraints in being able to monitor sales team performance by making joint sales calls on customers. Coaching and mentoring are important functions performed by sales management and critical to the development of individual members of the sales team to improve their sales performance.
- Fast growing sales organization are usually limited by the speed at which they can recruit high-quality professionals and budget to open new offices. The lack of an adequate sales coverage in new markets may hurt company growth in these markets.

High Sales Costs:

- Meeting with customers can require traveling across the country, state or city, and can result in high expenses and hours of unproductive time for the sales team after accounting for flying time, driving time, hotel, and parking expenses.
- Key stakeholders in customer organizations often have unpredictable schedules that can lead to delays in scheduling on-site meetings for delivering presentations and demonstrations, performing technical and proposal reviews, and conducting contract negotiations during the sales process. Scheduling these types of meetings must typically be done in advance to ensure the right stakeholders will be able to participate. Then there is always the risk of one or more stakeholders who have to cancel at the last minute. Missed meetings require make-up meetings with absent stakeholders. The result is prolonging the sales cycle by days, if not weeks, and adding cost to the sales process.
- Customers are dependent on the sales person to obtain critical information, such as meeting schedules, copies of presentations, proposals, contract documents, etc. during the sales process. Time spent by the sales team in performing administrative tasks is unproductive. Furthermore, if the sales person is not available, the customer may have to wait for delivery of the requested documents or information. This can result in customer frustration and delay the sales process.

The Value Proposition

To meet the challenges outlined above, many sales organizations have turned to Web Meetings. This solution has enabled them to improve their sales process and achieve their sales goals. The value proposition to various stakeholders in the sales process is outlined below.

Sales Team: Web Meetings provide sales teams with numerous benefits including cost savings, improved productivity, and higher sales performance due to improved communications and teamwork.

Improve Revenue Opportunities

- Sales teams can reduce the cycle time for the sales process due to improved, flexible communications with customers. Shorter cycle times enable the sales team to make more sales calls and close more deals resulting in increased sales performance.
- Sales teams can gain more control over the sales process by tightly integrating dispersed sales teams and subject matter experts with improved communication capabilities. Similarly, partners can be brought into sales opportunities when appropriate.
- Sales teams can qualify more customers and spend more time with those who are qualified vs. unqualified resulting in higher sales productivity and performance.
- Sales teams are able to expand their reach into new markets with Web Meetings. They can use Web Meetings to provide sales coverage in remote locations without requiring investment to setup offices or hire professional in those areas.

Reduce Sales Costs

- Sales teams can conduct online presentations, demonstrations, proposal reviews, and contract negotiations with customers with greater scheduling flexibility, and correspondingly reduce travel time and costs.
- Sales teams can shorten the internal development and review cycles for creating sales presentations, tailoring product demonstrations, drafting proposals, negotiating contract terms with customers, etc. resulting in lower sales costs.
- Sales teams can improve their productivity by integrating Web Meetings functionality within CRM and Sales Force Automation systems.

Sales Management: Web meetings enable sales management to participate more often in the sales process at a lower cost and work more closely with the sales team to close sales.

Improve Revenue Opportunities

- Sales management can gain insights into sales activities with target customers that help to validate their interest level when updating sales pipeline and forecast reports. These insights also support prioritizing sales activities with high potential customers that result in improved win rates.
- Sales management can coach the sales team on delivering key sales messages when preparing presentations and demonstrations for customers that result in improved win rates.

Reduce Sales Costs

- Sales management can participate on sales calls and conduct sales meetings



- with their sales team without having to incur travel time and expense.
- Using reporting and analysis capabilities, managers can learn more about the specific details of a sales opportunity such as interactions the sales rep has had with the customer.
- Sales management can reduce the new-hire ramp up costs by training new hires with pre-recorded training sessions or offering live sessions over the Internet, obviating the need for newly hired professionals to travel.

Customer: Web meetings also provide several benefits to customers who attend these meetings during the sales process. Web Meetings serve not only as an effective information exchange mechanism, but also provide customers greater flexibility in scheduling critical meetings with the sales team that require the attendance of key stakeholders and decision makers from their side.

In addition, customers enjoy the convenience of attending Web Meetings from their desk, or wherever they may be, without having to incur travel time and cost to attend on-site meetings with the sales team. Customer stakeholders can replay presentations, product demonstrations, etc. delivered by the sales team at their convenience in the event they were unable to attend the scheduled Web meeting. This reduces delays in the sales process that otherwise would occur due to rescheduling meeting events at a later date.

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

Benefit	Return on each \$ Spent on Web Meetings	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 Real-Time Web Collaboration Solution

There are a number of key features and functions sales organizations should look for when implementing a real-time web collaboration solution that will enable them to realize the benefits and improved sales performance of their sales team. We will use WebEx Sales Center, the most widely used Web collaboration solution among sales organizations, as a model for discussing these attributes. WebEx Sales Center provides a sales collaboration platform which enables sales organizations to personalize their customers' buying experience, in Web meetings and outside.

The table below provides a list of essential Web collaboration attributes that help to improve the performance of sales organizations by improving the productivity of the sales team.



Web Meeting Solution Attributes	WebEx Sales Center Capability
Improve Revenue Opportunities:	
Keep prospects fully engaged during online sales presentations and demonstrations.	WebEx Sales Center detects when a participant has left the Web meeting session to check email, access another application, etc. by flagging the individual in the sales person's view. This enables the sales person to re-engage with the participant to keep them involved when delivering key sales messages.
Customized user interface for prospects for effective message delivery.	WebEx Sales Center provides a simplified view to help focus prospects' attention on the delivery of sales professional's message. In addition, a request-based mechanism seeking the prospect's permission before initiating a desktop sharing or application sharing session, which helps to develop trust between the sales professional and the prospect.
Leverage team selling through support of on-demand access to subject matter experts in selling situations.	WebEx Sales Center supports search and online presence detection when trying to locate and engage subject matter experts to address specific questions or issues posed by the prospect during a Web meeting. This demonstrates responsiveness by the sales team.
Assess customer interest levels to identify target customers and prioritize selling activities with them.	WebEx Sales Center supports tracking click-through activity of customers in the communications portal. This information is useful in determining the interest level of customers by analyzing the volumes and types of resources they access in the portal.
Support visibility into selling activities by the sales team that help to validate the sales pipeline and forecasts created for management.	WebEx Sales Center supports on-demand management reporting that provides information on customers participating in Web meetings, who attended from the customer organization, and the topics covered.
Support monitoring of sales calls for improved coaching and training of the sales team.	WebEx Sales Center supports sales managers auditing online sales calls in silent/invisible mode. This provides an effective way for sales managers to assess how well sales people are delivering sales messages, etc. so they can work with them to improve their performance.
Deliver reliable, predictable performance, worldwide.	WebEx Sales Center is built upon a redundant, global network infrastructure that provides ubiquitous access – regardless of location, hardware platform, operating system, browser, and wired or wireless status.



Web Meeting Solution Attributes	WebEx Sales Center Capability
Support secure access to data by participants in the Web Meeting.	WebEx Sales Center provides encryption of all Web meeting content. All data is switched through the WebEx network, and nothing is stored that could be accessed by unauthorized parties.
Reduce Sales Costs:	
Support integration with telephony to enhance the Web Meetings experience.	WebEx Sales Center supports launching telephony calls to online participants and incorporating audio in the Web conferencing session.
Support on-demand customer access to critical information needed during the sales process.	WebExSales Center supports setting up a private communications portal for customer access to meeting schedules, sales documents, recorded presentations, etc. during the sales process. This portal can be created with a few clicks allowing it to be completely owned and managed by the sales rep. This portal helps sales team streamline customer communication.
Reduce ramp-up time for new members of the sales team.	WebEx Sales Center offers capabilities where training sessions can be delivered by using presentation material or sharing application sessions. Recordings of such sessions can be made available through the communication portal.
Support integration with CRM and Sales Force Automation systems.	WebEx Sales Center is integrated with Salesforce.com so the sales team can launch Web Meetings from within their SFA application by utilizing the data stored therein. This improves the productivity of the sales team when making sales calls. One click integration is also available with Microsoft Outlook.

Conclusion

Nearly every business would like to increase their revenues while holding the line on expenses. Many are doing just that by integrating real-time Web collaboration solutions into their sales process. Web collaboration support for sales-centric business processes is creating a new dimension. When a sales organization embraces Web meetings, the sales team reaches more prospects, accelerates the sales cycle, and improves its close rates. The use of Web meetings in the sales process is a complement to face-to-face interactions that are essential to building strong customer relationships. Real-time Web collaboration solutions, such as WebEx Sales Center, supports business agility by providing the ability to conveniently meet with customers, present new products, resolve issues, etc.



Top sales organizations have embraced real-time Web collaboration solutions and use them every day to improve their interactions with customers, partners, and within their internal sales teams. If this solution is not part of your sales process yet, 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 Sales Center, please visit www.webex.com or call WebEx at 877-509-3239.