

Huthwaite[®]
International

Become a Future Leader

The business landscape
has changed, so must you.

Essential reading for business leaders, senior salespeople, procurement professionals and L&D directors

**Arm yourself with the skills needed
today, to succeed tomorrow**

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	6
Understanding the post-pandemic world	7
A changed business climate	8
A changed customer	9
A changed workforce	10
Meeting new needs	12
Agile sales strategies	13
Top tips to creating an agile sales strategy	14
New age negotiations	18
Top tips for adopting new age negotiations	19
Communication skills and embracing culture change	24
Top tips for improving communication skills and embracing change culture	25
Skills for future leaders	28
Closing comments	29
About Huthwaite	30
What next?	31

Foreword

After months of reeling from the devastating impact of Covid-19, we are now having to acclimatise to the new socio-economic conditions that it has left in its wake. While the economy is undeniably tougher, the truth is that this most unwelcome pandemic has brought with it opportunity and challenge in equal measure. Lingering economic uncertainty, squeezed margins and nervous buyers may well be the new norm in this emerging post-pandemic world, but so too are the lucrative possibilities brought about by the sweeping trend for digitalisation.

Even if this is not the future we planned for, it is indisputable that sales growth can be achieved – and that new value can be built into B2B sales propositions. The problem is understanding how this can be done.

In the latest independent research that we have commissioned, we bring rare insight into how businesses across every sector have struggled to maximise their potential in our new post Covid reality. According to our research, 73% of business leaders don't believe that they have the skills required to succeed in a post-pandemic world.

In this new era of time-limited virtual communications, businesses are, now more than ever before, feeling the effects of gaps in communication skill sets.

At Huthwaite International, with our vast portfolio of national and international clients, we see first hand how and why the importance of such skills cannot be underestimated.

In this whitepaper, we reveal how the right tools and support for behaviour change can enable businesses to develop the skills they need to succeed in any economic climate, across remote as well as in-person channels.



Tony Hughes, CEO of Huthwaite International.

73% of business leaders don't believe that they have the skills required to succeed in a post-pandemic world

Introduction

Based on our independently commissioned research, this whitepaper explores how the future of sales, negotiation and communication skills is shaping up, and, most importantly, what tools businesses will need to thrive and set themselves apart. Offering a deep insight into the views of business leaders across every sector from manufacturing to sales and marketing, this report firstly outlines how businesses are adapting to the emerging socio-cultural trends for virtual communications, and what new challenges they now face.

The second part of the whitepaper highlights how sales, negotiation and communication methodologies, together with change culture, can help overcome these new challenges and boost growth in this era of new age communications.

Understanding the post-pandemic world

When such fundamental world transformations happen, such as we have witnessed during the pandemic, making small changes to old practices won't give us the results we need – not even close. Regardless of business sector, size or location, cultural and economic dynamics have shifted so extremely that how we approach our business life needs a radical overhaul. Of particular importance is how we can adopt new ways of working that will help face our challenges, and the ways in which we can change our behaviour to meet new demands on the way we operate with our colleagues and customers.

At the heart of this new need is an organisation's ability to adapt verbal behaviours across its business model. Not only have virtual ways of working and communicating shifted behaviour patterns amongst teams and clients, they have also changed wider cultural and business priorities.

Digitalisation of communications is the driving force behind this change in behaviour. Virtual meetings, discussions, negotiations and sales have seemingly made communicating well on a day to day basis more difficult. Yet, with such a changed market the need for businesses to lead with successful verbal behaviours has never been more apparent. Skilled professionals must identify how they can adjust their verbal behaviours to build and restore trust at a time when it is so vitally essential to business success.

Professionals now need to work harder than ever to assure their peers, colleagues and clients that the relationship they share hasn't changed. Some may say the pandemic has created a more humane and community-led world, in which communicating with purpose and with honesty will be an important element of business going forward.

If we believe this to be true, then in order to function effectively in a changed post-pandemic world, organisations must be mindful of communicating with integrity, agility, clarity and consistency so they can build trust.

A changed business climate

As businesses adapt to new relationships, ways of working and challenges around trust and perception, there is a return of some business confidence, which has undoubtedly been bolstered by the gradual reopening of the economy and the recovery of supply chains. A change in attitudes to the current necessity for remote working and selling has boosted an overall sense of optimism. Despite the challenges of this changed business climate, over half (53%) the business leaders questioned in our research are optimistic about the future of their business growth.

Recognising the opportunity to catch more customers online, many businesses have, in record speed, made the leap, and updated their digital infrastructure. Entirely set up to accommodate a more productive and cost-efficient hybrid work force that can work remotely, they are now reaping the benefits, both in terms of sales and lower operational costs.

Given this success, it is perhaps no wonder then, that one in three businesses feel that remote working has had a positive impact on their business and that they will continue the practice in future.

43% of business leaders recognise communication skills as business-critical

No longer considered temporary pandemic workarounds, remote working and virtual selling are now permanent fixtures of everyday business life. Entirely changing work cultures, they represent, in themselves, a seismic socio-cultural shift, making effective communications more important than ever before. With fewer in-person internal catch-ups and customer meetings, product developments, updates and company policies must be communicated in a more structured and deliberate way, so that nothing is missed. The rise of the hybrid salesforce – that is, salespeople, who can sell and negotiate over the phone, via video, or apps, as well as in person – is inevitably bringing the importance of great communication skills to the fore. Already, business leaders are recognising the power of communication skills to make or break their businesses, with 43% deeming them to be business-critical.

A changed customer

In this post-pandemic world, even customer interactions have changed. As B2B customers got used to remote and digital ways of engaging, the preference for these types of omnichannel interactions are now here to stay with buyers preferring a mix of remote and digital self-serve interactions as well as in person engagement at more critical stages of the Buying Cycle. What has become more important therefore, is the strength of salespeople's verbal skills – on what is said, how it is said, as well as on how well they listen and process information. The more structured nature of pre-scheduled conference calls is also making preparation and planning for such interactions all the more important.

But it isn't just virtual platforms that are altering the nature of customer interactions. Buyers themselves have changed, emerging from the pandemic with unprecedented anxiety about spending their budgets. With the rise in popularity of automated buying processes, they have also become savvier, seeing at a glance exactly how each product or service stacks up in terms of price and specifications.

To deal successfully with post-pandemic buyers, sales people must now step up their communication skills to build a rapport and reassure them, even if it can be difficult to make remote interactions feel as intimate as in-person experiences.

90% of business leaders believe that improving communication skills is important

As businesses grow, the communications challenge does not become any easier. Faced with more complex, multi-person decision-making units, salespeople must carefully construct the right approach, and communicate to numerous new contacts using virtual platforms.

With the need for better dialogue and interaction at an all-time high, it is not surprising that 90% of business leaders believe that improving communication skills is important. In fact, according to our research an overwhelming 90% of businesses believe that virtual communications specifically, is an important part of their business, now and for the future.

A changed workforce

The new trend for remote working may have revitalised business, but it has, nonetheless, also created problems of its own. Nearly 50% of professionals have picked up bad habits during lockdown. Adversely impacting the growth of businesses, these unproductive behaviours often centre around communication and engagement.

The move to communication via virtual platforms is, in many cases, causing even the most experienced salespeople to forget fundamental sales imperatives, including the need to listen to their customers. Focusing instead on how quickly they can get sales messages across in shorter online meeting windows, they aren't taking enough time to listen, and are failing to explore and pick up on the full extent of customers changing needs. All of which can fuel trust issues.

Without the right support and guidance on how to get the most from communicating in a virtual world, professionals risk falling into a trap of abandoning any customer-centric approach to business. This is a challenge that is transcending organisational structures, with marketing and service functions also slipping into silos when customer facing, and failing to pick up on the same sales cues they would once pass to account managers. This is also exasperated when sales teams are working off marketing material focused on pre-pandemic challenges, which now feel irrelevant, out of touch and even irritating.

| 50% of professionals have picked up bad habits during lockdown

Other learned but unwanted behaviours that are emerging include unfocussed meeting agendas, and unstructured customer approaches by phone or video conference, which inevitably hinder sales outcomes.

A general lack of planning and preparation is also plaguing businesses, particularly as client expectations for planned conference calls are usually higher than for less time-restricted, in-person meetings.

Increasingly aware of these problems, 80% of business leaders now believe that their teams would benefit from training. Businesses are also picking up on how the jump from in-person to remote working can leave their team members feeling disengaged.

Of all their worries about trading in a more remote world, business leaders top concern is now maintaining team motivation. With teams fractured and split across various geographical locations, training and cultivating any consistent and inclusive work culture is more challenging than ever.

“During times of socio-economic change, businesses often struggle to adapt, quickly becoming irrelevant”

Meeting new needs

As devastating as it has been, the pandemic has brought about a whole new horizon of opportunities. New market challenges have emerged, giving businesses of every size the opportunity to adapt and meet them. However, to be agile, businesses must first recognise what these new market demands are. This means establishing, at a micro level, what each prospect they are targeting is actually looking for. Only by developing a deep understanding of individual customer needs can businesses begin to find ways to add value.

Agile sales strategies

During times of change, businesses who struggle to adapt can quickly becoming irrelevant, simply because they are out of touch with the changed needs of their customers. According to our research, one in three business owners is concerned about client satisfaction. This suggests that despite now having more opportunity than ever before to meet with customer representatives via virtual platforms, many businesses are uncertain about how to engage with prospects online to find out what they want.

This is where developing sales skills using a proven methodology like SPIN® Selling becomes increasingly important. Using SPIN® Selling skills and tools, salespeople become more consultative sellers, confidently uncovering buyers problems and challenges so they can identify how their products or services can help. By learning how to become trusted advisors to their clients and asking highly incisive questions at the right time, they can build real value into their propositions. *“Now, more than ever, buyers will be anxious about the consequences of their actions. Sellers need to uncover, clarify and help resolve these anxieties in full co-operation with the buyer. Otherwise, there will be no buyer. But get the approach right – from starting consultatively to positioning yourself as the right people in their particular crisis – and you’ll be one step ahead. In the long run, there might even be more business there than you thought”.*

¹“In these unprecedented time, what are customers thinking?”. Huthwaite International. June 15th 2020, page 5

Top tips to creating an agile sales strategy

01

Implement a sales methodology:

First and foremost, salespeople should implement a consistent sales methodology across their business. With SPIN® Selling, professionals are given the tools they need to take customers through the entire Buying Cycle™. In this challenging post-Covid world, clients are, now more than ever before, looking to share their anxieties with someone they trust. By listening to how Covid-19 has affected them, and asking the right questions about this impact, salespeople can start to co-create a narrative with the buyer about what the right future solution looks like. With the customer's buy-in, salespeople can deliver the very best solutions.

02

Focus your sales:

Salespeople should target who they will first approach at the beginning of a sale. Whether in person, or over a virtual platform, salespeople should start talking to the contact who is most receptive. In a series of one-to-one conversations, assessing the landscape, finding the right internal support, and discussing who in the organisation might be managing business problems that can be solved, should be a priority. Even if this contact is not ultimately who makes the purchasing decision, they will be able to give insight, make the right introductions and help to sell-in a proposition.

03

Flexible verbal behaviour:

As well as deeply understanding how the customer is using language, skilled salespeople are equally careful when choosing the words they use. It's often unconscious. Many effective salespeople can't tell you what it is that makes their approach successful, or they ascribe their success to something that, on closer inspection, isn't actually what they do. The good news is you can train people to become more aware of their language and narrow that gap themselves. Even better, as people become more self-aware, they can make choices and adapt their verbal behaviours to become more effective. We call that flexible verbal behaviour and it's the key to success in every verbal business interaction.

04

Active listening:

Are you actively listening to your customers? Skilled sales people spend more time listening than they do selling. It allows them to gain a true understanding of their customer's needs and in turn offer them a solution to their problems that is not only relevant but adds value. By actively listening during a sales conversation, you are able to build a more compelling case as to why your product or service is an ideal offering for your customer. It ensures agility and understanding, in turn building trust and rapport.

05

Questioning skills:

In order to actively listen and demonstrate verbal behavioural flexibility the customer has to start talking. And that requires the next skill on our list – questioning. Salespeople cannot be agile in meeting their customer's precise needs without an in-depth understanding of what they are. Gaining that understanding needs rigour. When it comes to questioning, a seller must develop a structured approach. Successful salespeople ask questions that enable the customer to communicate the value of the product or service to the rest of the decision-making unit in a much more compelling way. There's a huge difference between *"the sales person told me we'll save..."* and *"I've worked out we'll save..."*.

06

Do your homework:

Post-pandemic, taking the time to understand how COVID-19 may have affected a customer is key. This knowledge will allow salespeople to ask more relevant questions about their current situation and in turn further their understanding of the customer's needs.

07

Confidence:

One of the most powerful tools in the sales person's repertoire is their confidence. There is little that impresses potential customers more than the calm, assured demeanour of a genuinely confident sales person. A confident seller develops trust, provides reassurance and enhances their own and their company's reputation as well as the customer's experience. Confidence enables the sales person to explore the customer's needs and offer ideas in the most persuasive manner possible. Confidence cannot be learned, it has to be gained, and there is no better way of gaining it than by being fluent in a sales methodology that works. Investing in high quality sales training can be a wise move for any organisation.

08

Understanding the customer's business strategy:

Sometimes even the most well-honed sales skills are not enough. Customer organisations can be complicated things, with any number of challenges that need addressing and almost certainly not enough resources to do it all. Prioritisation is crucial. Whatever is closest to the customer's strategic direction is what matters most. Sellers must master the skills and knowledge to uncover and understand their customer's business strategy. By aligning solutions to strategy, sellers will maximise the chances of their project being prioritised and being allocated the resources to close the deal.

09

Consider the whole customer decision-making unit:

Just when you thought it couldn't get any more complicated there's the customer's decision-making team to consider. It's a fact of life that corporate buying decisions are rarely made by one single individual. Be aware that somewhere there is someone influencing the buying decision who you will probably never meet and may never hear from. Current research suggests that at least six people, all with different needs, are involved in the buying process. This means that salespeople require a deep understanding of the role each person has in making the decision (which incidentally may have nothing to do with their job title) and a clear sales strategy to address each one. And remember, Procurement are seldom far from any major purchase – even if you don't see them. Think about how their particular and often incomprehensible needs might or might not be met by your solution, and what you might have to do to persuade them.

“Only 15% of employers feel their teams are experienced enough in communications to maintain business growth in a post-COVID market”

New age negotiations

In times of crisis, a great deal of world, business and family decision-making is done through negotiation. Some crises such as economic crashes, wars or political dramas can, to an extent, be anticipated and prepared for. However, this wasn't the case with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The speed and severity of the threats people were bombarded with as a result of the pandemic fuelled a level of uncertainty around the information we were given, leading to a sense of mistrust. This was exasperated by the fact that the entire global community was in completely uncharted territory, making it difficult to draw on prior experience and feel confident about decision making, perceived risks and potential gains.

These factors led many to a panic mentality, which placed a huge focus on the need for people, organisations and institutions to debate and agree possible solutions together – making skilled negotiators priceless. Negotiation skills became, and still remain, THE single most important tool to drive business success at certain points of the decision-making cycle.

Little wonder that 90% of business leaders believe that such communication skills are vital for the future of their business. But despite this, comparatively few are confident that their teams have the tools they need to do well in new age negotiations across virtual platforms.

According to our research, one in four business leaders feel their teams fails to engage or focus clients in meetings. And worse still, only 15% of employers feel their teams are experienced enough in communications to maintain business growth in a post-COVID market.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, 80% of business leaders feel their teams would benefit from training to improve their company growth.

Top tips for adopting new age negotiations

01

Be aware of procurement:

So, you invest in sales training, develop your team's skills, strategies and confidence and give them the knowledge they need to do an outstanding job. And they do; the users love your proposal and your company has signed it off. So that's it, the deal's yours, right? Wrong. Now you have to go and see Procurement – the professional buyer. It's time to negotiate. It's Procurement's job to tell you they like your proposal but they can get the same thing 20% cheaper elsewhere. They want to do a deal with you but they want better terms. As procurement professionals, they are experienced negotiators. Are your sellers equally familiar with the process? If not, they should be. Negotiation skills are the last piece of the jigsaw, the final weapon in the ultimate sales person's armoury. And don't think you can cut corners by just training the sales managers to negotiate and sending in the 'big guns' at the close. Buyers love it – because the only thing a manager can do that a sales person can't, is give more concessions.

02

Never concede and always trade:

When faced with difficult conversations during a negotiation, whether with procurement, an existing client or even a supplier, effective negotiation involves movement by both parties towards an outcome. Avoid 'giving' something without 'getting' something in return. When you need to move from any stated position, make a conditional offer such as *"I might be able to move on X, if you are prepared to move on Y."* This is particularly important towards the end of talks. Huthwaite's research shows that more concessions are made in the final stages of negotiations than in the whole of the main discussion. To avoid this, draw up an agenda of all the issues to be discussed early in the negotiation, so that additional ones can't be introduced at a later stage. When faced with 'final demands', carefully check there is nothing else to come before considering whether to agree. Remember, once you've got their issues and demands, don't concede. Trade. The seductive sight of a deal can tempt the unwary into unilateral concessions.

03

Prepare and plan with care:

Much like skilled sales professionals, competent negotiators plan in great detail before entering a negotiation. This includes planning for all scenarios and for each stage of the negotiation, including the development of a credible fallback that describes what they will do if that particular negotiation fails entirely and identifying as many negotiable issues as possible - prioritising them and developing a negotiable range for each, prior to the meeting. This is then considered from the other parties perspective so common ground can be identified and used should concessions threaten a deal.

04

Logic is not persuasive:

It may sound illogical to state that logic isn't persuasive, but when it comes to a negotiation – as any parent will tell you – logic often falls flat in disagreements, negotiations and indeed deal making. Instead of talking at the counter party and trying to browbeat them with long chains of logical arguments, skilled negotiators have only one or two key reasons for any particular position they adopt. They do however prepare lots of smart questions to probe the other side's stance. Their objective is to create doubt in the validity of that stance as the first stage of their tactics to persuade. They accomplish the second stage and create movement by offering flexible trades and using their levers.

05

Creating doubt and building power:

When it comes to negotiating, power, confidence and belief in your stance very much exist in the head. Many sellers feel that power in negotiation lies with the buyer. However, sellers must remember that buyers are around the table for a reason: they need the service being sold and can seldom afford the deal to fall through either. Power is a perception. If you feel powerful, you are powerful, and you behave accordingly. If you feel weak, the reverse applies. If power is about perception and feelings, you can manage and control it. By asking considered and well planned questions, skilled sales people can adopt a position of power, and in turn deal with difficult issues with confidence, and importantly without conceding.

06

Identifying and using your levers:

Skilled negotiators develop the best possible deal for them, that still allows a win for the other side. This can be achieved by identifying and using levers throughout a negotiation. A lever is something that costs you less than the value the other party places upon it. It can therefore be traded for something that you value. Comparing the priorities on each negotiable issue identifies those levers. It means that you can often give less than you take, but it is a perceived win-win because your counterpart places less value on that item.

07

Develop your behavioural skills:

Preparing and planning are fine, but we all face impromptu negotiations with no time for either. When this happens, often all negotiators have to fall back on are their personal negotiating skills. The stereotypical image of the negotiator as a hard-faced and intractable character is incorrect. Skilled negotiators have wide behavioural repertoires and the flexibility to match their behaviour to suit the situation. In these scenarios it is vital that negotiators remember to focus on gaining an understanding of their counterparts priorities. This provides negotiators with the necessary information to trade in a fair way that offers a win, win for both parties. However, it is important to remember that a win-win does not always mean fifty-fifty.

08

Cut the poker face and show emotion:

Skilled negotiators are certainly very careful about the information they give to the other party. The saying 'knowledge is power' is certainly true in negotiations and skilled negotiators give half as much factual information during negotiations as average negotiators. Surprisingly, there is also evidence that skilled negotiators give far more information about their feelings and motives throughout the process than their average counterparts. These comments are used to influence the climate of the negotiation and to send clear messages to the other party about how the negotiator feels about the progress of discussions. After all, you can argue with facts, but you can't argue with feelings.

09

Avoid argument dilution:

It's natural to want to justify your position during negotiations. Throughout education we are taught to do this. But, it does carry with it a potential risk. The more reasons we give to support our position, the more likely it is that one of them will be open to attack. Huthwaite research shows that skilled negotiators give far fewer reasons than their average colleagues. They put forward one good reason and stick to it. If the other party is unable to undermine this argument there is no need to advance any others. Skilled negotiators identify one good solid reason for their stance on an issue, and stick to it.

10

No deal is better than a bad deal:

Obvious, isn't it? But not so obvious when the deal has been in the sales forecast for months, it seems tantalisingly close and all that's required to close it is a few final concessions. Because they're clear about their 'worst' position and have a credible fallback, skilled negotiators recognise a bad deal and aren't afraid to walk away from it.

“58% of businesses have seen a significant improvement in business growth or customer satisfaction as a direct result of communication training.”

Communication skills and embracing culture change

To meet the changing needs of customers and embrace a new, more flexible omnichannel approach to sales, businesses must be able to count on the efficiency of their teams' communications skills. With so much opportunity to communicate with clients via virtual platforms and apps, every individual team member now has more power than ever before to positively influence business decisions.

However, without any training or proper support behind them, employees are finding it difficult to rise to the challenge. Nearly one in three of the business leaders questioned in our research feel individual employees can impact communications negatively, making sales and negotiations efforts less effective.

The kind of highly developed communications skills now required by all employees don't come naturally to everyone; they must be learned and practised in a supportive work culture that is open to new ideas.

From our research, it is clear that businesses are starting to recognise the need to adapt. In the last six months alone, issues, such as team training, functional support and new business lead generation have all been raised as growing concerns amongst business leaders.

Generating revenue through better selling and protecting margin through better negotiation are more important now than they have been since we emerged from the 2008 recession. But Team motivation has, in particular, emerged as a top concern as businesses struggle to offer consistent support and a unified work culture in this new world of remote and hybrid working.

For those businesses that are already taking the plunge and addressing the gaps in their teams' communication skill sets, the rewards are high. According to our research, 58% of businesses have seen a significant improvement in business growth or customer satisfaction as a direct result of communication training.

This success, however, depends on learning and development teams not only implementing training, but also evaluating it and cultivating the right work culture to support long-term behavioural change.

Top tips for improving communications skills and embracing change culture

01

Train for the skills you'll actually use

Our research shows the best organisations and most ambitious professionals put time they've saved via remote working to good use by utilising virtual learning to sharpen their skills using virtual selling and negotiation methodologies, communicating with customers, colleagues and teams in a virtual environment. There's surely no better training paradigm than to use that same environment to receive, understand and experiment with the new behaviours; and apply them through roleplay and simulation.

02

Break down complex messages

Keeping people's focus and attention in meetings is a key challenge, particularly in a virtual environment. If you have complex or important messages to deliver, break them down into smaller, shorter chunks and summarise the key points frequently. Send any reading beforehand and use visual aids to support your messages. A word of caution, many of the presentation slides we see used in virtual meetings are densely populated with text while the presenter is simultaneously talking. Try replacing busy slides with short bullet points to support what you are saying. Graphics can work even better but beware the damage that broadband lag can wreak on complex, highly animated graphics or builds – they might not look so good on your audiences' screens as on your own.

03

Encourage collaborative learning across your company

Virtual community is important, so it's important that where people can work together on activities or learning tasks in a group small enough for everyone to participate, they do so. Collaborative learning is increasingly important to forge stronger teams and strengthen shared goals. Work cultures are a sum of available and visible behaviours, so encouraging collaboration across team projects can help to re-define group norms.

04

Inspire a flexible growth mindset

Training will only take hold if you actively cultivate a culture that embraces change and personal growth. To change behaviours, you need to change attitudes, so always explain why you are asking for new skills to be learned, and what evidence there is to show that they work. You can also encourage employees to try new ways of working by rewarding their efforts, and not just their achievements.

05

Prioritise training outcomes

Although this is difficult to do in such times of rapid change, in order to be effective, training must be aligned with specific business outcomes. Think about why your team needs training, and what you would like to achieve. Build specific outcomes into your training programme, and plan how their success will be measured.

06

Deliberate practice is key

Behaviour can only truly be changed through repetition and application in real settings. So, focus on encouraging your teams to develop specific micro skills that can be applied in the context of live accounts. Rather than ask them to deliver generic, macro outcomes, such as *"get more sales"*, break down the kind of behaviours you would like them to put into practice by encouraging them, for example, *"to ask questions this way"*.

“80% of business leaders feel their teams would benefit from training to improve their company growth”

Skills for future leaders

As businesses move forward in this post-pandemic world, it is clear that many leaders are doing so with a renewed sense of confidence. The cost-efficiencies and profits to be made from remote working and adopting an omnichannel sales approach are paying off, with 53% of the business leaders questioned for our research now feeling optimistic about their future business growth. In fact, 90% of the businesses who participated in this study believe that newly adopted virtual communications are already adding significant value and will continue to be important for the future.

However, the jump from in-person to virtual selling has not come without a significant number of growing pains, exposing cracks and weaknesses in many teams' communication skill sets. Our research indicates that only 15% of employers feel their teams contain the kind of experienced and effective communicators that can maintain business growth in a post-COVID market.

With less opportunity to build face to face relationships with customers, salespeople are relying much more heavily on the strength of their virtual sales, negotiation and communication skills to successfully grow their sales pipelines and ultimately secure deals. On top of this, they are having to interact with more savvy and risk-adverse customers, and often on time-limited conference calls.

The ability to maximise these skills is, in effect, proving to be what will set businesses apart in this new digital era. Those that have already invested in skills training are taking an early lead, reporting significant improvements in business growth and customer satisfaction.

The implementation of a consistent sales, negotiation and communications methodology, provides the framework for success. Empowering sales teams with SPIN® Selling gives salespeople the verbal skills they need to uncover customer challenges, so that they can find new ways to add value to their propositions.

Negotiations training can also prepare businesses to re-negotiate supplier and partner contracts to help reduce fixed costs and stabilise the bottom line. Communications training will help you to build trust in your virtual environment and develop your core communication skills at every level.

With a supportive change culture, in which training is continuously evaluated and teams are given the time to develop, practise and perfect their new skills, businesses can ensure that newly learned behaviours are permanently adopted.

Closing comments

The workplace is unrecognisable compared to only 12 months ago. Future leaders will need to reassure and motivate employees, connect with customers and communicate how their vision fits into the new normal.

Having the right infrastructure to support new hybrid workforces is one thing but having the skills to maximise the potential of virtual communications will be quite another. As businesses embark on a new journey, future planning and upskilling of teams cannot take a back seat. This report demonstrates the value of investing in team development today, and the potential risks of failing to do so. It has never been more important in business to invest in team development. The research really does speak for itself:

- Only 15% of employers feel their teams are experienced enough in communications to maintain business growth in a post-COVID market
- 50% of professionals have picked up bad communication habits in lockdown
- 73% of businesses don't have the skills to succeed in a post pandemic world

Businesses have a window of opportunity to pick up pace and make vital changes to the way their organisation communicate, sell and negotiate before getting left behind. With 80% of business leaders believing their team would benefit from training to improve company growth, it is only a matter of time before existing team skills become further outdated and the bottom line is impacted.

As we recover from the pandemic, both culturally and economically, we will continue to see significant shifts in what is deemed 'normal' business behaviour. Future leaders are already preparing and upskilling their teams to ensure they exit the recovery stage ahead of the game.

References

1. ['In these unprecedented times, what are customers thinking?'](#)

About Huthwaite

Huthwaite is an international training provider and behaviour change specialist. We help organisations to transform their sales, negotiation and communication outcomes by permanently changing the behaviour of their teams. We have spent five decades studying the behaviours that are needed for successful business and helping organisations apply that knowledge through our skill development programmes.

Our training interventions are founded on extensive science-led research and analysis. Through that work we have identified the sales and negotiation behaviours needed for high performance. Our world-renowned methodologies align clients to those standards and our approach supports permanent behaviour change appropriate to each client.

Research, high performance behaviours, renowned methodologies and behaviour change are the components which, along with our expert team, combine to help our clients achieve a high performance that is sustainable. This is our model. We call it Change Behaviour. Change Results™. It is rigorous and it supports measurable return on investment by transcending changing markets and short-term trends that can needlessly disrupt how professionals sell, negotiate and communicate. It is relied on by companies around the world for their commercial success.

Our team of staff and associates vary in background, specialism, gender, nationality and perspective. They are intellectual, practical, commercial. Our people define us. Their diversity is the cornerstone of our ability to serve you and provide you with a balance of both deep and broad expertise. It's the reason why some of the biggest global brands come to us and stay with us. They know that together we will achieve something very special.

Our solutions are some of the most researched and validated on the planet. But they are made even more robust by the deep experience and knowledge of our team and our collective passion to make a difference for our clients.

Our clients count on us to help them perform, not only better, but to the highest standards.

What next?

If you would like an informal discussion with us about how you might approach a sales or negotiation skills improvement programme in your business, please get in touch.

Tel: +44 (0)1709 710081

Email: enquiries@huthwaite.co.uk

www.huthwaiteinternational.com

Huthwaite[®]
International

 @Huthwaite_Intl

 huthwaite-international

 TheHuthwaiteGroup

Samuel House
5 Fox Valley Way
Fox Valley
Sheffield
S36 2AA
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1709 710 081
Email: enquiries@huthwaiteinternational.com

Huthwaite International
Change Behaviour. Change Results.[™]

© Huthwaite International. This document is the copyright work of Huthwaite International and may not be reproduced (in whole or in part, in any form or by any means whatever) without its prior written permission. SPIN, Huthwaite, the Buying Cycle and the Company logo are trademarks and are registered in many countries throughout the world. The copyright notices and trademarks on this document may not be removed or amended without the prior written consent of Huthwaite International.