

How to Implement a Crisis Sales Plan

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Nearly every sales organization – successful ones, anyway – know the importance of having a sales plan, but should your standard sales plan change in times of crisis? Almost certainly. Especially for crises that could last for an extended period, your sales organization should be able to quickly and seamlessly pivot to a flexible and effective Crisis Sales Plan. Here's an action plan to help you implement a new sales plan in times of crisis:

Have a Standard Sales Plan in Place

Can you continue selling in a crisis? Yes, but depending on the type, severity, and duration of the crisis, you'll likely need to change your approach to selling. Before you can *change* your sales plan, of course, you must have a strong and reliable standard sales plan already in place. Consider that standard plan a good baseline from which you can create an effective Crisis Sales Plan.

As a reminder, your standard sales plan – also commonly called a Sales Action Plan – should include components that help you:

- Know your customer
- Develop your industry positioning
- Assess your competitors
- Clearly define your value proposition and points of differentiation
- Define your target customers/markets

- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) goals
- Establish metrics that hold your team accountable
- Track and measure sales team performance with a well-designed and utilized CRM
- Develop clear territories
- Maintain customer relationships

Your Crisis Sales Plan should include these components as well, but they may change substantially from your standard plan during the crisis. So, how can you adapt your standard sales plan into an effective Crisis Sales Plan? Here are six essential steps:

1. Identify the Type and Scope of Crisis

Crises can be local and of short duration, global and long-lasting, and every variation in between. Before you can effectively adapt your standard sales plan, you must know the type and scope of crisis you are dealing with.

First, make sure you have a clear understanding of the *type* of crisis. Is it a meteorological event such as a blizzard, hurricane, tornado outbreak, earthquake, or tsunami? Or is it an economic crisis such as a recession or major shift in markets and availability of financial resources? Perhaps the crisis is the result of an act of terrorism, or biological in nature, such as the global novel **Coronavirus pandemic**.

The type of crisis will help determine proper response – everything from the timing of resumption of sales efforts to employee work environments to your communications throughout the crisis period.

Next, consider its geographic scope. Is this crisis confined to the local area? Or is it larger – regional, national, or global? Remember, however, that even a localized crisis can have widespread impact depending on where your customers and suppliers do business.

2. Determine the Likely Duration of the Crisis

If the crisis is likely to be very short-term in nature, you might not need to adapt your standard sales plan much. Increased communication is always essential, but you might not need to significantly alter your sales strategies, processes, goals, or measures.

But if the crisis extends for weeks, months, or longer, your standard sales plan will most likely need a serious overhaul.

3. Implement Changes to Your Sales Plan as Necessary

The type and duration of the crisis will help guide appropriate responses, modifications, and communications. In lockstep with your company's overall Crisis Management Plan, implement changes to your sales plan as necessary and appropriate. Keep in mind that because sales drive company revenue, the changes you make to your sales plan will impact all company operations. Take a multidisciplinary approach and keep other departments involved throughout the crisis.

Be aware, also, that your new sales plan will also likely alter your sales operations during the crisis, perhaps requiring a shift in tactics, territories, and even in the use of technology and transportation.

4. Communicate and Motivate Throughout the Crisis

It is critical to ramp up communications during and after a crisis. Include all stakeholders in your communications efforts, from sales team members to other company employees to company management and suppliers. Don't forget to keep your customers informed as well. Let them know that you are adapting your operations as necessary to continue to serve them throughout the crisis and ask how you can help them.

It's also critical to keep your sales team focused and motivated during a crisis. Effective and plentiful communication can go a long way toward keeping your team inspired, but

there are other key factors as well. [Click here](#) for a sample crisis checklist on *How to Keep Your Sales Team Motivated*.

5. Refine Your Sales Plan as Necessary During the Crisis Period

Don't just implement changes and consider your work done. It is critical to *continue to assess the effectiveness of your sales plan throughout the crisis period* and refine your Crisis Sales Plan as necessary. By definition, crises are dynamic events, changing day by day and hour by hour in many cases. So, be sure you continually monitor and adapt your sales plan.

6. After the Crisis Ends, Review Your Crisis Sales Plan for Necessary Enhancements

Once the crisis ends, review your Crisis Sales Plan. Where was it effective? Where did it fall short? Did it evolve as necessary? Did it facilitate customer service and a continuation of sales operations? Use the answers to these and other questions to help you develop and strengthen your sales plan not only for a recurrence of a similar crisis, but for other foreseeable crises as well.

Also, be aware that many crises can fundamentally and permanently alter your marketplace, your competitive landscape, and the way you do business. So, don't simply revert to your standard sales plan when the crisis ends. Instead, examine your regular sales plan and determine where it needs to change as well.

Bottom Line:

Can you continue selling in a crisis? Yes, but depending on many factors, you'll probably need to adapt your standard sales plan into a well-defined but flexible Crisis Sales Plan. Overall, company crisis management strategies should certainly include plans for continuation of sales operations – even if the nature of those operations change during and perhaps after the crisis.

Remember, during times of crisis, companies that are agile, creative, and quickly adapt their sales plans can continue to thrive.

To learn more about how to establish a sales plan in times of crisis, **contact Don McMahan** at 925.487.1970.