CSOs need to ensure their frontline sales talent has the skills required to succeed in a virtual selling environment.

Learn about critical virtual selling competencies and the seller behaviors that constitute each competency.
Adding Seller Competencies for Virtual Selling

Rapid changes in B2B buying, accelerated by disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, require CSOs to reassess the seller competencies needed for a virtual environment. In fact, 74% of CSOs report they have recently or are currently updating their seller competency profiles for virtual selling, and 61% of CSOs are already investing in new technology to enable virtual selling.

Almost three-fourths of CSOs report they have recently updated or are currently updating their seller competency profiles for virtual selling.

Gartner has identified three key seller competencies that CSOs should add in their updated seller competency profiles:

1. Digital Dexterity
2. Data Literacy
3. Virtual Customer Engagement

Sellers will need to master these competencies and associated skills to successfully use existing and new technologies that enable effective virtual selling (see Figure 1).

Before focusing on virtual selling competency mastery, CSOs must ensure alignment with sales enablement leaders. This alignment should be around defining virtual selling competencies and ensuring the updated seller competency profiles can support the company’s long-term strategic objectives in addition to short-term ones. This alignment also ensures that urgency for updating selling skills becomes a sales priority.

Figure 1. Virtual Selling Competencies for Sellers

Source: Gartner

The combination of a seller’s ambition and ability to effectively apply technology to improve business outcomes

Skills:
- Ability to Work Digitally
- Ambition to Work Digitally

A seller’s ability to read, write and communicate sales data in context

Skills:
- Data Understanding
- Data Responsiveness

The virtual-first selling behaviors to effectively engage customers in both live and asynchronous virtual customer interactions

Skills:
- Synchronous Customer Engagement
- Asynchronous Customer Engagement
organizationwide priority and encourages the adoption of these skills by different sales teams. CSOs can use Table 1 to make the business case for virtual selling competencies and build a compelling narrative for why it is relevant for sellers to master these competencies.

1 Digital Dexterity

Digital dexterity is the combination of a seller’s ambition and ability to effectively apply technology to improve business outcomes.

A seller’s digital dexterity can take various forms. It includes basic activities, such as effectively collaborating with remote colleagues using digital tools. It also includes higher-order activities, such as leveraging an organization’s AI and predictive modeling capabilities to decide a seller’s next selling motion. Additionally, our research suggests that a leader’s emphasis on the need for digital dexterity increases the likelihood of their sales teams developing digital dexterity by 2.4 times.¹

The Markers of Effective Digital Dexterity

CSOs can share the table of effective and ineffective behaviors with their sales enablement teams and sales managers. This table will help them accurately determine whether the seller exhibits behaviors that demonstrate digital dexterity (see Table 2).

Assessment Criteria for Identifying Digital Dexterity Gaps

As a next step, CSOs must periodically review seller progress to evaluate digital dexterity levels. For this evaluation, CSOs should direct sales enablement leaders and sales managers to use the categories and questions below to build an assessment criteria that helps diagnose gaps in sellers’ digital dexterity levels. The answers to these questions can be subjective, such as a noted discomfort with a specific task, or more objective, such as not at all, rarely, sometimes, often or very often performing a specific task.

Table 1. The Business Need for Virtual Selling Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitfalls of a Standard Approach to Selling ...</th>
<th>... Are Overcome by a Virtual-Ready Sales Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology-supported tasks viewed as supplementary to traditional means</td>
<td>Integration of technology into daily workflow to increase seller productivity in sales tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed and/or misinformed decisions with overreliance on personal experience and intuition</td>
<td>Adoption of analytics for day-to-day selling activities and timely decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for in-person collaborations and apprehension toward virtual interactions</td>
<td>Confident, timely and purposeful involvement of remote experts and customer stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambition to Work Digitally</th>
<th>Effective Behaviors</th>
<th>Ineffective Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believing technology</td>
<td>Willingly inquires about and attempts to use various digital tools in daily workflow</td>
<td>Resists using new digital tools in daily workflow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positively augments tasks and activities</td>
<td>Anticipates the need for and invites experts from other geographies best suited to join virtual customer meetings regardless of their location</td>
<td>Primarily builds customer engagement strategies independently, relying solely on personal or immediate team’s knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to Work Digitally</th>
<th>Effective Behaviors</th>
<th>Ineffective Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working from anywhere with the right technology</td>
<td>Uses collaboration tools to increase engagement during virtual meetings</td>
<td>Uses collaboration tools to only passively present supplier information and solutions, without effectively engaging participants during virtual meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses data to build a comprehensive view of the customer</td>
<td>Relies on customer interactions to source relevant information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selects the most appropriate content and formats it according to the communication medium</td>
<td>Determines the communication medium without considering customer preferences and the purpose of the communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner
• **Use of Digital Tools to Develop a Comprehensive Customer Understanding** — How often does the seller use the customer’s digital footprint through digital tools, such as microsites or social media platforms, to understand the customer’s business priorities and challenges?

• **Selection of Best-Fit Communication Channel** — How often does the seller consider the communication channel that will match the customer’s communication preferences?

• **Interaction in Virtual Conversations** — To what extent does the seller use technologies to make virtual conversations interactive with the customer?

• **Remote Collaboration** — How often does the seller successfully involve experts from remote geographies as needed?

• **Digitalization of Personal Tasks** — To what extent does the seller leverage existing networks to learn about technology that can improve efficiency and productivity of the seller’s daily sales tasks?

2 **Data Literacy**

Data literacy is a seller’s ability to read, write and communicate sales data in context.

Our research predicts by 2023, data literacy will become an explicit and necessary driver of business value, demonstrated by its formal inclusion in over 80% of data and analytics strategies and change management programs.

Unfortunately, only 43% of sales leaders consider their direct sellers as highly sales-data-proficient.

Closing this data literacy gap is important since sellers must be data-literate to be able to draw relevant, actionable insights from data and to inform improved sales decision making.

The Markers of Effective Data Literacy

CSOs can share the table of effective and ineffective behaviors on the next page with their...
sales enablement teams and sales managers. This table will help them accurately determine whether the seller exhibits behaviors that constitute effective data literacy (see Table 3).

### Assessment Criteria for Identifying Data Literacy Gaps

CSOs can direct sales enablement leaders and sales managers to track progress improving sellers’ data literacy. Sales enablement leaders and sales managers can use these categories and questions to measure which seller behaviors need to be prioritized to increase data literacy mastery:

- **Comprehension of Foundational Data Concepts** — To what extent does the seller understand basic data concepts and their relevance for various sales tasks?
- **Contextualization of Data Findings** — To what extent does the seller communicate and contextualize data findings based on the customer’s specific context and needs?

### Deployment of Analytics/Related Tools —
How often does the seller use the analytics provided by sales operations for both personal activities as well as sales tasks?

### Virtual Customer Engagement

Virtual customer engagement is the virtual-first selling behaviors to effectively engage customers in both live and asynchronous virtual customer interactions.

Customers expect sellers will not only engage them through live virtual meetings but also asynchronously, where sellers exchange information with customers outside of those live meetings.

### Table 3. Effective Versus Ineffective Seller Behaviors for Data Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Behaviors</th>
<th>Ineffective Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Understanding</td>
<td>Selects the right data and metrics to use depending on changing customer context and needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Data Responsiveness | • Validates data findings through offered self-service tools to share new insights with customers  
                  • Prioritizes next best seller actions based on sales analytics and field-level observations of how customers buy | • Relies on customers to contextualize data-based conclusions for their own business  
                  • Avoids using simple analytical tools in daily activities |

Source: Gartner
This combination allows customers to independently review information and engage with digital tools, while sellers ensure information consistency between channels.

### The Markers of Effective Virtual Customer Engagement

CSOs can share the table of effective and ineffective behavior below with their sales enablement teams and sales managers. This table will help them accurately determine whether the seller exhibits behaviors needed for effective virtual customer engagement (see Table 4).

### Assessment Criteria for Identifying Virtual Customer Engagement Gaps

CSOs can direct sales enablement leaders and sales managers to track seller progress to help improve their ability for successful virtual customer engagement. Sales enablement leaders and sales managers can use these categories and questions to determine which seller behaviors need to be prioritized to improve seller ability for virtual customer engagement:

- **Tailored Content Sharing to Virtual Environment** — How often does the seller create and share easily understandable information that customers can easily review on their own?
- **Preparation for Virtual Meetings** — To what extent does the seller prioritize the content shared in live virtual meetings to ensure maximum comprehension?
- **Stakeholder Engagement** — How often does the seller correctly identify key customer stakeholders and involve them in a purposeful manner during the purchase?

### Table 4. Effective Versus Ineffective Seller Behaviors for Virtual Customer Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Behaviors</th>
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</tr>
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</table>
| **Synchronous Virtual Customer Engagement** | • Limits the number of call participants and tightly defines their roles to avoid coordination challenges in a virtual setting  
  • Maps each stakeholder’s role and influence level to determine the need for their presence | • Applies live meeting tactics of expansive and often flexible agenda  
  • Plans assuming that stakeholders who previously joined live interactions will be the same stakeholders present for virtual interactions |
| **Asynchronous Virtual Customer Engagement** | Shares high-quality digital content aligned to key customer jobs during a purchase process (e.g., buyer enablement) for customers’ asynchronous learning | Shares content that customers cannot use on their own |

Source: Gartner
Conclusion

To successfully meet the needs of a virtual selling environment, CSOs must reconfigure their sales talent strategy.

CSOs need to align organizational investments and resources with a virtual selling approach, which will prepare sales teams to not only master relevant virtual selling competencies but also equip them with the appropriate tools for effective virtual customer engagement.

To sustain efforts updating seller competency profiles and supporting these virtual selling skills, CSOs must consider:

1. What are our current business and related talent objectives? Does our current competency framework continue to support these objectives?
2. What do our sellers need to know about how their customers’ buying process has evolved, and how should this impact how our sellers engage with their customers?
3. What can enablement and other organizational resources provide to help promote and develop these virtual selling competencies?

1 2018 Gartner Digital Dexterity Survey (n = 3,481 employees)
2 2020 Gartner State of Sales Operations and Analytics Survey (n = 299 sales leaders)

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Evolve Seller Skills to Connect With Today’s Buyers
Adapt Your Sales Onboarding Strategy for Today’s Virtual World
Reinvent B2B Selling for a Digital Buying Environment

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