



Get closer
to your customers
in a socially
distanced world.

2021 PLAYBOOK



How can this playbook help?

It's no exaggeration to say that COVID-19 has triggered a B2B sales transformation. Social distancing has made it harder than ever to get close to decision makers, and having key contacts on furlough can lead to communication difficulties, strained relationships, and missed sales.

This new socially distanced world is here to stay, with **74% of companies** planning to permanently shift to more remote working post-COVID.

But it's not all doom and gloom! Every challenge brings opportunities, and this challenge is no different. Buying behaviour has changed in response to the pandemic, and the businesses that can respond to these shifting needs will be the ones to thrive in the new world:

50%

of B2B companies have already reduced their budgets.¹

44%

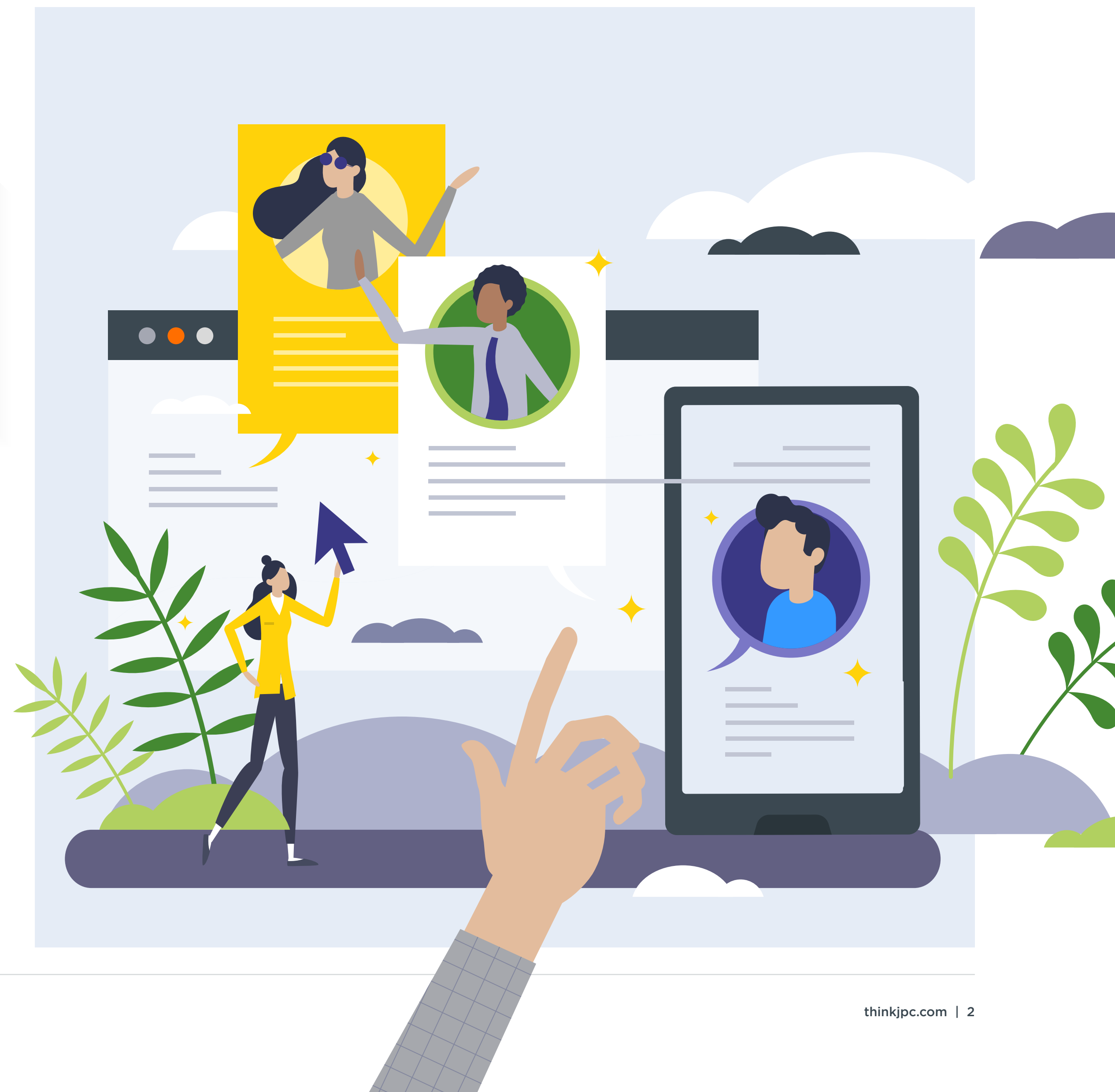
of sales professionals say their customers' sales cycles have increased.²

42%

of sales professionals say there was turnover or layoffs at their customers' companies.²

And if you think you can just wait it out until things go back to 'normal', think again. This new socially distanced world is here to stay, with 74% of companies³ planning to permanently shift to more remote working post-COVID.

This playbook examines the attitudinal and behavioural shifts your buyers are going through, and shares ideas on how you can revolutionise your selling culture to respond to these changing priorities, increase sales and grow customer loyalty throughout COVID-19 and beyond.



The challenges & opportunities for astute B2B practitioners.

Despite the massive global changes we're living through, astute B2B practitioners recognise COVID-19 as a chance to reposition their offering for the long term.

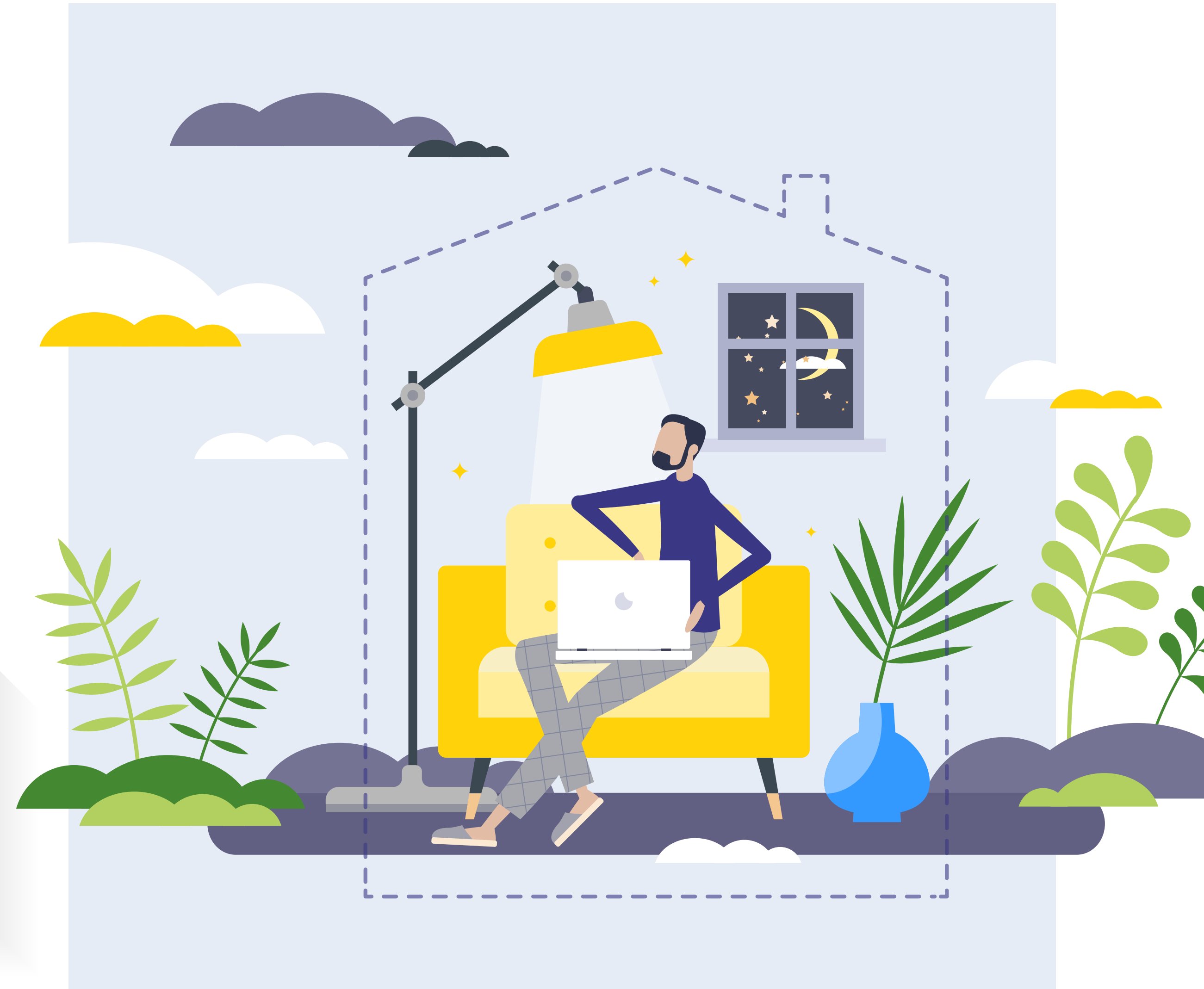
Most B2B sales teams, however, are not making the most of the opportunities this new world offers. While over 90% of B2Bs⁴ have transitioned to a virtual sales model during COVID-19, almost half still feel that this approach is less effective than traditional face-to-face selling.

The problem is compounded by the fact that face-to-face time in the B2B buyer journey was already decreasing before COVID-19 hit. Gartner Research illustrates that B2B buyers spend only 17% of their time meeting with potential suppliers when considering a major purchase. And when comparing multiple suppliers, the amount of time they spent with any one sales rep may be as little as five to six percent.

Faced with this physical distance and ineffective virtual sales programmes, desperate sales teams may be tempted to adopt a 'cold calling' model, and risk damaging buyer trust. But there is another way!

In the following sections, we cover some of the ways your buyer is changing, and the opportunities this offers to actually stand-out and get closer to them than ever before.

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The changing buyer in the age of COVID-19

Buyers are cynical

Did you know that 60% of your customers don't trust you? It's true, with [LinkedIn's State of Sales Report](#) revealing that only 40% of buyers would describe the sales profession as 'trustworthy'.

[Edelman's Trust Barometer](#) also shows a clear lack of trust in institutions, with the majority of respondents viewing corporations, the media, and government as unethical. This would be troubling at the best of times, but in these times of uncertainty trust is only becoming more important.

Build trust by being human

Trust is the most important thing to your buyers. When LinkedIn asked buyers how sellers can better put them first, they responded with trust and honesty above all else:

"Should be trustworthy and honest"

"Being honest and creative"

"Honesty, sincerity, and complete understanding of my business"

The missed opportunity is massive, particularly given that 88% of buyers ultimately buy from people they see as 'trusted advisors'. The key to building this trust is by being authentic, honest and human.

Tap into your buyer's emotions

"Think about a buyer today. The first is that they're frozen in place. Fear amplifies. Fear in the social sphere, fear in the economic sphere, fear from all the change they're dealing with through the crisis. It's emotional; it can overwhelm individuals."

- Tom Pisello, author of 'Evolved Selling: Optimizing Sales Enablement in the Age of Frugalnomics'.⁵

TOP TIPS!

People buy people. It works both ways. Stop viewing your 'buyer' as a functional entity and get to know them on a personal level.

1. Map your target's human factors.

Search social media for clues to decision makers' implicit and explicit drivers. Learn what moves them, what motivates them. And then use these simple insights to equip sales people to better engage with them on a personal level.

2. Tell human stories.

Buyers don't care how advanced or high-tech your solutions are, they only care about how you can help them, their stakeholders and their end user. So talk about your products in terms of the human benefits they bring, instead of whizzy features.

3. Bring people together.

Position your company as a trusted thought leader by bringing key industry stakeholders together with your teams to debate issues and share opinions. This could be via a collaborative white paper, podcast or (virtual) event. The best ideas are co-created.



Buyers are uncertain and under scrutiny

93% of B2B purchases take place in the context of organisational change, and we're living in a time of change like no other.⁶

A significant and continuing trend in the B2B world is the increase in the number of stakeholders involved in the buying process. According to Gartner, the average buying group now includes 11 active members and up to seven occasional participants. These large buying groups spend around 15% of the buying cycle reconciling different information sources.

Customers are also under heightened levels of COVID-related scrutiny and budget freezes. We're even seeing COVID-19 committees spring up in organisations to ensure all purchasing meets strict criteria.

Buyers are faced with a multitude of stakeholders, swathes of conflicting information to make sense of, and they're doing it all in the

middle of a global pandemic. It's no wonder they feel more unsure than ever about how to move forward.⁶

Lead them through the confusion

B2B companies desperately need a paradigm shift in their sales culture and behaviour to meet and exceed today's buyer expectations. This requires viewing your B2B sales enablement model from the perspective of the customer - switching your mindset from sales enablement (helping your sellers to sell) to buyer enablement (helping your customers to buy).

Buyers value this help. Customers who perceive a supplier's information as useful in advancing their buyer journey are 2.8 times more likely⁷ to experience a high degree of purchase ease, and three times more likely to buy a bigger deal with less regret.

But as well as a shift in mindset, this fresh perspective also requires retraining, and an updated approach to sales enablement, so sales teams can put themselves in the buyers' shoes, opening up new dialogue and better managing customers while serving as disruptive, proactive thought leaders - a trusted guide if you will - to lead them through every stage of their buyer journey.

TOP TIPS!

1. Teach your buyer something new.

Your buyer is likely drowning in data and information. Helping them make sense of it (make it easy), and drawing out insights that lead to action, is a powerful way of sharing your capabilities.

2. Offer advice.

You don't want to tell buyers what to do - that's a surefire way to annoy them. But you should offer advice and recommendations, for each stage of their purchase journey, based on research or case studies.

3. Give practical support.

Help your buyer to act on your sage advice by equipping them with the tools to follow through. This could be a visionary outcome-led deck they can use to persuade senior decision makers internally, or a business case with data that convinces budget holders.



Share novel ways of doing things

“Equip your sales teams to engage and support buyers rather than simply selling to them. Sellers must bring value to the process, deliver insights, and share novel ways of doing things.”

- Mary Shea, Principal Analyst, Forrester⁸



Objection Handling

“Our costs are being scrutinised - we’re in a budget freeze”

Response angles:

- ▶ Sell the risk of doing nothing, so they are forced to change.
- ▶ Make your offer less complex and risky by providing a simple, clear roadmap that shows how you’ll overcome hurdles, where they’ll see value and how you’ll manage the transition for them.
- ▶ Offer skin in the game e.g. with a risk and reward pricing model.

Buyers are more willing to switch supplier

Brand loyalty is quickly becoming a thing of the past. During the pandemic, 43% of buyers have switched to a new supplier for some business purchases, and 20% have switched suppliers for **all** purchases.⁹

71% of buyers who see a personal value in a B2B purchase will end up buying the product or service.

You might be tempted to try and retain these clients by cutting costs, particularly in the current climate of tightened purse-strings. However, competing on cost alone is frankly a race to the bottom! B2B buyers are human too - they just happen to be at work - so they’re not making decisions based on the pure logic of profit and loss. Everyone can cut costs and compete on price. It’s creativity that can give you the competitive edge.

Drive loyalty by appealing to personal values

Your buyer may like to think of themselves as an objective B2B machine acting purely in the best interest of their organisation, but they’re not actually making decisions based on business value alone.

71% of buyers who see a personal value in a B2B purchase will end up buying the product or service. In fact, personal value is twice as important to buyers than business value.¹⁰

Despite what they might claim, their emotions and personal values are more important to them than the bottom line. So make sure you appeal to these drivers at every touchpoint of their buying journey.



Embed and grow in your client accounts

With some 6-10 individuals involved in the average buying group, another – often missed – key strategy is to ensure you extend your insight, and engagement beyond your immediate contacts. Mapping key decision makers and identifying influencers means that you can infiltrate, embed and grow within the customer’s organisation by taking a strategic overview of the entire ecosystem and the personalities within it.

You won’t be stuck always talking to the same old people as you can develop personalised entry points for each stakeholder based on what keeps them up at night, and how you

B2B decision makers in the UK on average rate digital channels approximately three times as important now as they were before COVID-19.

can help in a way that speaks directly to their human drivers: their fears and aspirations.

Help current customers

“Sales leaders are prioritizing customer retention more than ever and quickly reorganizing their organizations so that their salespeople are in position to help current customers.”²

Buyers see digital as more important than ever

B2B decision makers in the UK on average rate digital channels approximately three times as important now as they were before COVID-19, according to research from McKinsey.

They now expect the same instant, personalised and easy experience in their B2B life as they get in their consumer life. That’s why suppliers who provide outstanding digital experiences are more than twice as likely to be chosen as a primary supplier than those who provide poor experiences.



TOP TIPS!

1. Do your research.

It’s easy to say you’re going to appeal to your customer’s self image, but by definition this means different things to different people! Look at their social media feeds to see how they present themselves to the world, then find ways to play into this image with your offering.

2. Reassure your customer.

They’re taking a considerable personal risk when they make buying decisions. Their job could be on the line, so recognise the pressures they’re under and make it as easy as possible for them.

3. Make case studies genuinely personal.

Your case studies should include times when you saved people’s jobs and won them promotions, as well as helping them to make and save money at an organisational level. Help them to visualise the value you bring.





Bridge the gap between digital and physical.

In the age of social distancing, digital may be the new physical - but that doesn't mean you should give up on physical experiences completely.

Instead, you need to bridge the gap and come up with innovative ways to create the closest thing to a physical experience in a digital - or virtual - way, drawing on tech to enable new ways of connecting in the digital space.

For example, here at JPC we've created digital 3D worlds and events that clients and their stakeholders can step into and explore together, even when they're physically located on opposite sides of the planet. This gives customers that 'wow' moment that takes them out of their business as usual mindset, priming them for your paradigm-shifting solutions.

Despite all the advanced tech available nowadays, it's important not to lose sight

of what really matters - connecting with your customers on a human level. Whether you leave a personalised message via a 3D hologram of your CEO, or video link to global experts in your customers' industry, tech should only be used to enhance this connection, never as a substitute for it.

**“Tell me and I forget.
Teach me and I remember.
Involve me and I learn.”**
- Benjamin Franklin

Immersing your customer in a world that's designed specifically for them and their needs, with opportunities for collaboration and interactivity is a surefire way to spark their imagination. It's worlds away from yet another death by video conference or passive PowerPoint presentation!

Build relationships through digital channels.

“Everything has shifted to virtual selling, using video conferencing, sending emails, creating webinars and info sessions. It is a big adjustment for many direct sellers. The most successful reps will adjust more quickly and learn to build relationships through different digital channels”

- Joseph DiMisa, Sales Effectiveness and Rewards Leader, Korn Ferry ²

“Even as B2B buyers increase their reliance on digital activities, tools, and routes, they crave deep, human connections. In fact, I would argue that empathetic and highly tailored interactions are now more valued than ever.”

- Mary Shea, Principal Analyst, Forrester ⁸

Sources:

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- 3 <https://www.gartner.com/en/documents/3982949/covid-19-bulletin-executive-pulse-3-april-2020>
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TOP TIPS!

1. Use tech to be more human.

Your messages may be conveyed in a new way, but the principles are the same as ever: Your client is craving personalised, empathetic communication that speaks to them as a person, not just a number in a database.

2. Enhance your digital intimacy

with virtual client lunches or information sharing sessions that reach beyond the boundaries of yet another dull Zoom session. Even in the post-COVID world, clients will appreciate the convenience of connecting digitally, and this will help to subconsciously position you as a tech leader.

3. Seamless customer experience is key.

Prioritise your digital experience all the way through your customer journey, from the messages delegates receive inviting them to an event all the way through to follow up materials you share with them afterwards.



About JPC

Inspire. Engage. Convert.

We create hyper-personalised experiences that help you sell better and win more.

A strategic sales and marketing consultancy; dedicated to helping complex and disruptor brands humanise and focus their message in order to engage better and win more business. Put simply; we are obsessed with your customer, and what they need to buy from you.

Over the last 23+ years we've helped our ambitious clients target, pursue, win and retain some of the most sought after customers, key accounts, sales opportunities and bids in the world.

23+

years proven track record.

80%

average win rate.

£12B+

in ICV won.





Need help getting closer
to your customers?
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