


Virtualizing Sales and Marketing: Driving Revenue, Lowering Costs ... and More.


Many businesses have harnessed the unique capabilities of web conferencing to move their outbound marketing programs to the Internet and virtualize their sales activities. On the surface, the apparent benefits appear to include lower costs and increased sales – but do the benefits go deeper? What are the pitfalls? And are there particular steps in the sales process that work better than others?

To find out exactly how web conferencing can work for sales and marketing, how one goes about implementing a virtual sales force, and what to expect for results, Wainhouse Research conducted a number of in-depth interviews with companies that have made the transition. The findings provide direction to any business seeking to improve its sales process.

A photograph of a sunset over a city, with the sun low on the horizon and its light reflecting off the clouds and buildings.

“Web conferencing is our primary vehicle for demonstrations and sales calls. If we didn’t have web conferencing, we would need more salespeople out in the field.”

– CEO, Software Development Firm

A photograph of two business professionals, a man and a woman, in a meeting. The man is wearing a headset and looking at a laptop screen, while the woman is looking at a document.

“Over the course of a day I can be in four different time zones without jet lag – it’s fantastic.”

– Senior Business Development Specialist,
Financial Services Firm

“The return on investment is so gigantic – one flight and you’re done.”

– CEO, Software Development Firm

Traditional vs. Virtual Sales and Marketing *Similar Process, Very Different Tactics*

Sales and marketing professionals are all too familiar with the need to drive the traditional sales funnel: hold a marketing event (typically a road show), follow up to qualify leads, have a salesperson travel to demonstrate the product, set up an onsite trial, revisit the customer to close the sale. The new customer now needs training and support. The traditional approach requires a large investment and is not very scaleable. Events and road shows require physical space and a marketing team. Sales personnel and physical offices are required to cover each geographic region for product demos and follow-up visits. The bottom line: driving the traditional sales funnel is a large investment / high ongoing cost proposition. The travel time required results in lost productivity, extends the sales cycle, and causes potential customers to face delays. While the

virtual sales funnel uses a similar process, the tactics used to achieve each step are very different. Prospecting is typically accomplished using web seminars with an educational topic and subject expert being the draw. Prospects attend from their offices under no sales pressure. The qualification step is a follow-up phone call, with a web presentation ready as needed. The customer visit is done via a personal online demo, with the sales person showing the product in use and controlling the experience. If the product is software or web-based, trial software can be installed remotely, with the prospect being hand-held through their first test drive. An e-mailed proposal and follow-up discussion close the sale; filling out the sales documents can be done using web conferencing as needed. Finally, the newly-gained customer is trained and supported remotely.

Some of the benefits of virtual sales are obvious; the top three being increased productivity and geographic reach with lower costs. Other benefits uncovered in our interviews are more subtle. One mentioned the accomplishment of work that otherwise could not be performed, while another reinforced that the web-based sessions were less intimidating to the customer than meeting in person. Some find value in a greater sophistication of message delivery. Another believes the technology enables them to better serve their customers, which raises their value, creates satisfied customers, and brings in more business. For many the benefits are so profound that the technology now plays a critical role in their sales process.

“Web conferencing increases the number of prospects we reach. They are more inclined to “get on” something in their office; it seems low pressure to them.”

– VP of Technology, Consulting Firm

“Web conferencing allows us to visually present complex topics in a simple way. It allows us to make sure messages are delivered consistently.”

– Senior Business Development Specialist, Financial Services Firm

“Web conferencing helps with early prospecting by removing cold leads with minimal investment for both us and the customer. Salespeople are more efficient qualifying the product fit.”

– VP Operations, Software Development Firm

	Traditional Approach	Virtual Sales & Marketing
Prospect	Event or Road Show	Web Seminar
Qualify	Phone Conversation	Web Presentation
Demonstrate	Customer Visit	Personal Online Demo
Trial	Install Product or Software	Remote Install
Close	Customer Visit	Online Discussion/E-mailed Proposal
Training & Support	Phone or On-Site Visit	Remote Training & Support

“I can now “see” six customers a day versus two before – web conferencing feeds the sales funnel.”

– VP Operations, Software Development Firm

“I previously made trips to sell in batches; instead I now hold a webinar billed as an education event. The follow-up is a 1:1 personal demo.”

– Director of Business Development, Software Development Firm

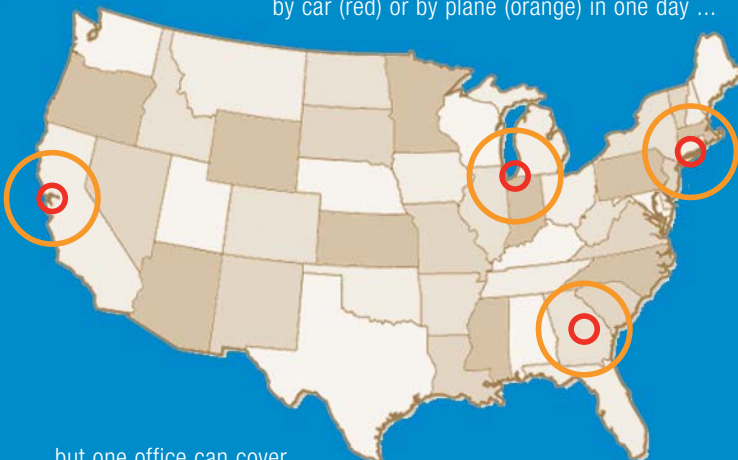
“It’s a critical step in the sales process to show people the product. We use web conferencing to drive a sales funnel. People only buy what they see works.”

– CEO, Software Development Firm

“Web conferencing opens up a whole new world to me. It takes me 45 minutes to do a demo and I have a 100% closure rate.”

– President, Consulting Firm

Physical sales offices can cover only so much by car (red) or by plane (orange) in one day ...



... but one office can cover the entire country using web conferencing.

Making the Transition

Tips from Those Who Have

When it came to making the transition, our interviews revealed that there were two different strands of behavior as represented by two types of organizations. One group, which we call “Planners,” takes pre-determined steps, both large and small, such as holding demonstrations and training to ensure success. The other group, the “Divers,” fearlessly dove into applying the technology, quickly integrating it into the workflow by using it aggressively (and typically needing to get burned once before understanding the importance of practice). We believe neither approach is right for all situations, but instead that one will be preferred depending on the company’s existing technical skills and culture.

Most companies start small by obtaining a few licenses with the goal of gaining an understanding of how web conferencing will fit into their processes – and whether being a “Planner” or a “Diver” works for them. Early success is then built upon. When the time arrives to roll out to sales, be sure to get every salesperson their own license.

Salespeople all need their own licenses. Think of it as a customer visit. You can't book a sales VP into two meetings at once. But other functional areas can share licenses. We've looked carefully at who needs their own licenses and who does not. It becomes a productivity issue when someone can't use it.
– Chief Technology Officer, Financial Services Firm

It is important to appreciate that web conferencing is a different communication medium. Know your audience: they are bringing you into their offices – thus they are in control. You may face “competition” from the phone, email, IM messages, and people dropping in. Thus it is essential to retain their attention by keeping conference sessions short, briskly paced, engaging, and to the point. Paying attention to the following details will also help: slide design (keep it simple, use graphics instead of text bullets, do not read the slides – tell the story “behind” them) and the use of pointing and annotation to emphasize key points. For larger web presentations, ask poll questions and encourage questions via text chat to engage the audience.

A bad webinar can do more harm than good. So have good planning, practice, get timing right, and plan Q&A. It's not technology – that part will work – it's execution!
– Director of Business Development, Software Development Firm

Be conscious of a downside: Know the environment of your audience. They are in their office – they can be distracted, visitors pop in, etc. Be aware – know what you want to say and keep it short (30-45 min max); learn the hints that indicate when they've become disengaged.

Mastering the technology is the easy part. Appreciate that web seminars are “showtime.” Just like a physical event, practice is critical. Script who will play what role, run through what they will present, and rehearse any presenter hand-offs.

Internally, we've tried to make sure everyone presenting is comfortable with the technology. We run through a mock webinar session prior to the event, work out any logistical bugs e.g., how to show the screen properly, and make sure the presentation goes smoothly in terms of delivery.
– Marketing Specialist, Consulting Firm

I should have practiced once or twice, but I didn't. Fumbling on practice time, not real-time is important.
– President, Consulting Firm

Lastly, remember that web conferences are only a part of a larger selling process – they are a means to an end. Send a reminder 24 hours before scheduled conferences and be sure to close the loop afterwards to gather feedback and suggestions for improvement.

After every webinar we survey our attendees; we have them rank it, then ask for comments for improvement. For those who weren't satisfied, we try to dig in to see what we could do to improve. We also make sure it's valuable to our members: we survey them to find out what they want help with, provide info about how webinars will be held, and we market in different ways.
– Marketing Specialist, Consulting Firm

And don't hesitate to use the technology to assist with the close.

When we are about to close a customer, we have signup docs, open up a web page and show them the forms, then email the document. They get the call to action right away.
– President, Consulting Firm

What to Look For *The Features That Make a Difference*

A Wainhouse Research survey of 1,500 small business users revealed that the most important web conferencing features were ease of use, ease of booking and starting a meeting, and screen performance and speed. These findings were reinforced by our interviews.

The performance of real-time screen sharing is very important for online demonstrations.

– Director of Business Development, Software Development Firm

Often when customers call us, I right click, and within 2 seconds we're online. That feature is very nice. No need to log-in on a website.

– VP of Technology, Financial Services Firm

The ability to pass meeting control is important for multipresenter seminars, while remote control can help with hand-holding customers through a hands-on demonstration. In addition to the listed features, “all-you-can-eat” pricing that is charged on a per seat basis gives your staff the ability to use web conferencing at any time without worrying about any cost penalties.

It's Not Just about Replacement

Virtualizing your sales and marketing process is not about simply “replacing” the traditional sales funnel. Web conferencing is a different tool with its own set of unique advantages. Implemented correctly, the result can be better than traditional selling – especially in decreasing process time and involving the people with the right expertise regardless of where they are located. The net result is increased customer satisfaction.

More important: We give better service to our customers – which gets the word around the industry. Satisfied customers get us more business.

– Director of Business Development, Software Development Firm

About Wainhouse Research

Wainhouse Research, www.wainhouse.com, is an independent market research firm that focuses on critical issues in rich media communications, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, and streaming media. The company conducts multi-client and custom research studies, consults with end users on key implementation issues, publishes white papers and market statistics, and delivers public and private seminars as well as speaker presentations at industry group meetings. Wainhouse Research publishes a variety of reports that cover the all aspects of rich media conferencing, and the free newsletter, The Wainhouse Research Bulletin.

About Citrix Online

Citrix Online, a division of Citrix Systems, Inc., is a leading provider of easy-to-use, on-demand applications for Web conferencing and collaboration. Its award-winning services include GoToMeeting Corporate, a complete collaboration solution that satisfies all Web conferencing needs ranging from large Webinars to small online meetings. With GoToMeeting Corporate, organizations of any size can use GoToWebinar for do-it-yourself Web events and GoToMeeting for smaller, more interactive online meetings. GoToMeeting Corporate allows users to easily present, demonstrate and provide training online to anyone, anywhere in the world. GoToMeeting Corporate can make businesses of any size more productive by reducing travel time and costs and enhancing communication, ultimately leading to faster decision making and more efficient workers. For a free evaluation of GoToMeeting Corporate, please visit www.gotomeeting.com/s/WRReval.

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What web conferencing features are most important?

