

# 7 sales predictions for 2021



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Most salespeople and sales leaders are positive and optimistic by nature. They don't let obstacles worry them or delay their mission. They understand that negativity and rejection are just detours on the way to their ultimate goal. Well, the last nine months have tested even the most positive salespeople in ways that no other obstacle ever has.

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For some, 2020 presented new opportunities. For others, the door was completely shut. Even if you fell somewhere in between those two extremes, the last year was a roller coaster of activity, emotion, and .... sometimes, results. Sales goals went out the window, right next to most compensation plans. The best organizations held on to their best salespeople but regardless of the market or industry you are in, things look different entering 2021.

We reached out to two of our leaders who work closely with sales teams to ask if they would offer some predictions for 2021. Here's what they believe sales teams will experience in the coming months.

### Prediction #1: **Goal-setting will return.**

2020 has been confusing and chaotic but 2021 promises a return to optimism for many customers and industries. Our belief is that salespeople will be more confident about setting and pursuing sales goals. Year-long comp plans and long-term quotas are still taking shape so we expect short-term sales incentives and contests to be an excellent way to get back into the habit of goal-setting for leaders and sales reps.

Over the last year we saw a return to activity- and behavior-based goals, such as completing sales training programs, sharing marketing content and staying in touch with customers whose budgets may have been cut or reduced. As you continue to set goals for yourself and your team in the new year, remember that your reps may have re-adjusted what they believe is realistic (re-setting targets) and may need a short-term "nudge" to get out of their comfort zone.

### Prediction #2: **Rewards will be more adventurous.**

Over the last nine months, most incentive travel disappeared. Our prediction is that it will return in 2021 but will look different. Right now, the best sales awards are things that are practical or entertaining you can use in the safety of your own home. As salespeople return to goal-setting, they'll start achieving bigger and more meaningful goals – and will want a reward to match.

As 2021 begins, sales reps will be more confident taking part in an individual or small group experience in their own city, state or region. In the latter half of the year, we anticipate President's Club programs will start to be measured and promoted for travel in 2022. But that's a long time away. To motivate sales performance now, a variety of virtual reward experiences and adventures are available to inspire your team.



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## Prediction #3: **Connecting and working remotely will continue.**

Supporters of in-person meetings quote research that says a majority of communication is non-verbal. However, much of this research is open to interpretation and hasn't been proven out over the long-term. If you are in inside sales or online customer support, you understand the importance of building emotional connections over a phone line or chat window.

But the fact remains that many top salespeople are most effective when they are face-to-face with their customers. They can pick up on non-verbal cues that help bring better solutions and ultimately build relationships that will last into the long-term. Our prediction is that 2021 will bring a balance of virtual and in-person customer meetings. And no matter which you prefer, the same rules of clear, organized and relevant communications will be key as you keep your teams connected.

## Prediction #4: **Innovation will fuel growth and grab market share.**

Companies without new products and services will be left behind as the world sprints to innovate in 2021. There have been many creative ideas developed during the pandemic but we believe new product launches and re-launches will be widespread in 2021. The first six months of any new product are critical to its adoption.

One of our academic partners, Dr. Michael Ahearne from the University of Houston, has talked about a performance vs. learning orientation when launching a new product to sales reps. You may be tempted to expect a burst of immediate activity and sales but ensuring reps have the knowledge and passion to sell are the most important first steps on a new product's journey.

## Prediction #5: **Technology is everyone's department.**

It's easy to say that technology "isn't my thing" or "it's someone else's department" but if you are relying on someone else to train you on new technologies or you expect your company's help desk to solve all of your problems, you are in for a wake-up call. (Actually, you may miss the wake-up call but you get the idea.)

Our prediction is that we'll look back on 2020 as a defining moment all around the world. In some way, all jobs now have a technology component, whether it is selling it, using it to do your job or simply reporting your activities, accomplishments or results on some kind of platform or portal. Most sales leaders have already experienced this in the past decade but the coming decade will move even faster.



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## Prediction #6 **Change becomes a way of life.**

If the challenges and disruptions over the last few months have taught us anything, it's that we all need to be change agents — especially managers. Rather than waiting for change and being good at adapting to change, successful leaders in 2021 need to create change for themselves and their teams.

For sales leaders, the most basic rule we can share is “change is inevitable, so get on with it!” We admit that this quote is borrowed from our company's values, and it certainly isn't a new thought, but hidden in comments about the “new normal” and “we need to pivot” is a fundamental human bias toward the status quo. For many, this means returning to the same processes and approaches that were in place before 2020. Salespeople are no exception to this rule.

## Prediction #7: **The future ain't what it used to be.**

Whether you are a fan of the Yogi Berra quote or the Meat Loaf song, you can't argue that looking into the future is more uncertain than ever. As we return to work in 2021, it seems there are more questions than answers. And as we look back on 2020, it's tempting to want to forget about it. But sales leaders who learned from last year and are currently applying those lessons to 2021 are already ahead of the competition.

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