

Making Your 2021 Sales Kick-Off A Knockout Success

THE CHALLENGE

Sales Kick-Off (SKO) events are a familiar part of the professional landscape to most people who have carried quota, and are an annual source of acute anxiety to sales leaders. These events typically cost a lot of money, require a ton of preparation, and create plenty of internal friction – and the return on all this investment of time, energy and money is hard to calculate.

Despite all these drawbacks, Sales Kick-Offs remain an essential part of the sales calendar, a punctuation mark to close out the last sales year and start the new. The challenge now is to create a virtual Sales Kick-Off that will retain as much of the positive impact of a traditional event, even as sales teams face real economic headwinds.

KEY OBJECTIVES

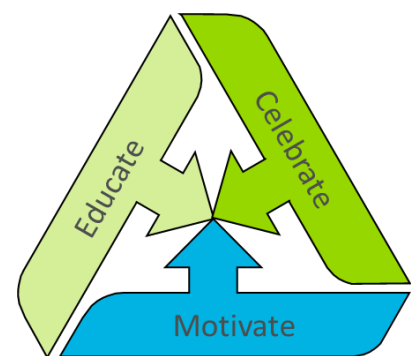
Ask salespeople what they like about Sales Kick-Offs and they'll tell you it's the networking and opportunity to hear directly from senior leadership. Ask them what they **don't** like, and they'll roll their eyes and talk about death by PowerPoint.

This isn't because salespeople have short attention spans. It's because Sales Kick-Offs often lack clear objectives. We often see a three-way battle for agenda priority between:

- ✓ Celebration
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Motivation

This is difficult to resolve because:

- Non-sales functions (Marketing, Legal, Product Management) want to use the SKO event as a short-cut to educate all the sales team at once.
- Senior Leadership have strong views about shortfalls in sales performance and how to fix them.



Our view is that SKO events should be squarely centered on **motivating the sales team**: all other goals should be subordinate to this. That includes choosing what is celebrated and how, as well as eliminating the 75-slide product presentations from the agenda.

In other words:

- ✓ The primary objective of the SKO is to improve motivation and confidence, not competence or knowledge.
- ✓ Salespeople should leave the event filled with energy, feeling that they are doing an important job for a worthwhile organization that fully supports them.
- ✓ Motivate first, celebrate second, educate a distant third.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

The format and techniques that worked well in a hotel near a major airport – lots of networking breaks, bursts of loud music, fancy dinner, late-opening bar – can't be translated directly into a virtual SKO event.

The key challenge is now to maintain excitement and engagement with your remote participants. With that in mind you should:

- ✓ Send out preliminary questionnaires to the sales team to get them engaged and help define what should be on the agenda.
- ✓ Select technology that's right for the event scale – making sure that you can manage breakout rooms and live feedback questionnaires/polling.
- ✓ Budget for 'swag' to be delivered to peoples' homes ahead of the SKO – salespeople will be well aware that the company is saving a ton of money by not having a traditional SKO event. Don't be mean!
- ✓ Structure the agenda on the day so that no slot longer than 30 minutes, 20 minutes probably better.
- ✓ Budget for some follow-up training that reinforces the key messages. Remember that you are not trying to deliver education during the event.

Your virtual SKO will be complex to deliver – and will require plenty of rehearsal to get right. It's essential that you have a clearly identified programme manager with a well-defined plan.

AGENDA STRUCTURE

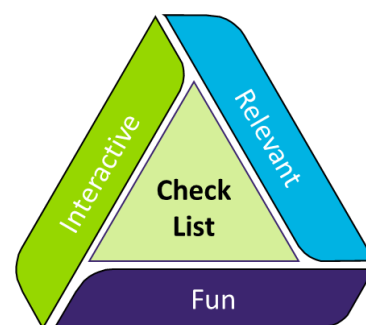
So, what might the Virtual SKO Agenda look like? This obviously depends on the scale of your business, critical challenges, time zones etc. Here's a template agenda for a half-day Virtual SKO that may be a useful starting point.

- **12:30 Welcome & Introduction.**
This should include a summary of inputs received from the sales team as well as laying out the agenda for the day.
- **12:45 Review of the Year.**
Obviously a focus on the results and big successes (which implicitly gives all the sales team up-to-date case studies) but also updates on important changes both internally and external.
- **13:05 The Value We Bring our Customers.**
This could use a Q&A format with a major customer
- **13:25 Communicating Value Exercise.**
5 minute Video of a virtual customer call, followed by 10 minute break-out sessions and a moderated feedback session
- **13:45 Coffee Break.**

- 14:00 **Live Poll.**
Could be the single biggest skill you're going to develop in 2021, building a real-time word cloud on everyone's screens
- 14:15 **Commission Scheme.**
Presentation of the FY2021 scheme with several worked examples
- 14:35 **Inspirational Video/Speaker.**
Obvious topics to focus on include resilience and persistence in tough times. Check to be sure that the speaker/video is cross-culturally relevant if you have a multi-national team.
- 14:55 **Coffee Break.**
- 15:10 **3 Big Wins.**
Have three salespeople present how they won important deals, not just scale but also strategic importance (e.g. new solutions in the portfolio), cross-selling etc. 1 slide, 10 minutes each.
- 15:40 **What's Coming up in 2021.**
Special emphasis on things that will help sales, so not just new products but also sales enablement, process improvements, training initiatives, ending with live poll on what the team liked most.
- 16:00 **New Product Demos x 3.**
Live demos or at least videos of them, followed by Q&A with Product Managers on Features/Functions/Benefits. No slides.
- 16:20 **Coffee Break.**
- 16:35 **My Biggest Deal in 2021.**
Exercise – break-out groups with sales and supporting functions, brainstorming, senior leadership in each break-out, moderated feedback session.
- 17:05 **Live Poll Feedback on the Day & Wrap-Up.**
Make sure that all the topics raised by the sales team ahead of the event have been ticked off. And of course, finish on a high note.
- 17:20 **Break.**
- 18:00 **Virtual Drinks & Quiz.**
Drinks should be delivered as part of the "Swag Hamper". Quiz should be funny and bonding – baby pictures of senior management are always humanizing and hilarious.
- 18:30 **Break-Out Groups for Cooking Together with Online Chefs.**
More from the Swag Hamper. Lots of pictures to be shared during the Awards Ceremony (particularly of cooking disasters).
- 19:00 **Dinner in Break-Out Groups.**
- 19:30 **Awards Presentations.**
Important that this focuses on activity as well as results – and on teamwork as well as individual performance.
- 20:00 **Close.**

Use different formats for the different slots to eliminate long stretches of one-way presentation. No more than three slots between breaks. Make sure that the audience knows when they will be able to provide live polling reactions.

Whatever you decide, test each agenda item to be sure that it's going to keep your audience engaged. The magic formula is Fun, Interactive & Relevant. Alt-Tab is your enemy ...



THE PAY-OFF

It's been a tough year. Lots of salespeople have missed their targets, others have been on furlough. The incentive trip has been cancelled. And the Sales Kick Off – one of the highlights of the sales year – isn't happening either.

But the good news is that a well-thought-through Virtual Sales Kick-Off can still deliver a great motivational boost. You just need to make sure that it's engaging, punchy - and generous.

Bill Bauer, Director of Product Development

Contact Bill on bbauer@sbrconsulting.com if you'd like to know more about integrating sales compensation plans into sales transformation. Or call us on +44 (0) 207 653 3740

You can [sign up](#) to receive regular updates and join over 4,000 others who enjoy access to our unique research insights, expert guidance and advice.

 **SBR Consulting**