

Adapting to the Digital Centric World

Learn to excel in the future business environment and give clients various options that best suit them.



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DISTANCE AND TIME were once thought to be barriers to the local sales process; that is no longer true. When the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, most businesses will never revert to the same methods they used a year ago. The real winners in our industry see this disruption as an opportunity to excel and gain market share.

Today's technology can provide the tools you need to excel in this business climate. The current circumstances have hurled us into a new reality of adapting to the digital-centric world. You're faced with only two choices — fight or flee.

Physical distancing will continue to be a part of the new way wholesale distributors and retail showrooms must go to work. This is the time to invest in the lessons, processes and tools that will help propel you to succeed in the future. Things changed so much in the past year, it is making everyone's head spin. Without a doubt, the changes will keep happening as this new economy continues to roll out.

Traditional business will not go

back to the way it was before the coronavirus hit, making this the perfect time to be adaptive and flexible. Your organization will not only exist in this new period of commerce but also thrive in the face of many new challenges.

THE REAL WINNERS IN OUR INDUSTRY SEE THIS DISRUPTION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXCEL AND GAIN MARKET SHARE.

With many distributors and showrooms currently using an online catalog and user-focused wish list to help potential customers select products, the majority have stopped there. They are comfortable and confident they have slain the digital

dragon that is on their doorstep.

We know for sure that business competition is intensifying from traditional and nontraditional competitors. Concurrently, enhancements and cost reductions in digital tools used in sales and marketing continue to emulate Moore's rapid change or expansion law, which roughly states that information and communication technologies expand every two years.

Not Ringing the Warning Bell

The time for talk has long passed; businesses that sell products must

get into the digital game. The truth is, clients expect part of their shopping process to be online. With more than 80 percent of home improvement shoppers researching online before they buy, if your clients can't find you easily to do their research, you're not in the game!

To win your clients' eyes in the search contest, your curated content must meet the ever-changing expectations of the people searching and the many, ever-changing algorithms of the search engines. This means that your forward-facing content must lean in on your relevancy related to search engine queries.

"Being found by our local customer is what is important," says Paula Minton, vice president of showrooms at Wiseway Supply in Kentucky. "If you want to be found locally, the online catalog and website help do that. It is the best way to represent our showroom online with products and accurate information for the client to see."

There's no doubt that today's distributors need an online presence to attract buyers, facilitate the selection process and enable clients to easily make transactions online or in-store. Bravo Business Media builds, hosts and manages a product-centric com-

merce platform through MyPlumbing-Showroom.com that is key to turning your online presence into a profitable extension of your physical location. Now is the time to get in the game!

If the customer can't find the information they want on your site, they won't consider visiting the store. They'll simply order from a big box or a more adept competitor. It is better to be online and be an option. Minton shares why being online with a full-service catalog is critical to brick-and-mortar businesses; it makes the phone ring.

"We did not go into e-commerce expecting to sell online, but we have," she explains. "What is amazing is that in any given month, 10 to 15 percent of our phone calls begin with, 'We were browsing your online catalog.'"

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS WILL NOT GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE THE CORONAVIRUS HIT, MAKING THIS THE PERFECT TIME TO BE ADAPTIVE AND FLEXIBLE.

You can no longer avoid e-commerce and limit buyers' opportunities to make purchases when they're ready. Don't think about it as the traditional e-commerce site; think about it as an e-convenience that you provide. The most immediate entry you can make into being digitally dexterous is by offering customers the ability to buy online and pick up in-store, or drop-ship their selections directly from your vendors. It's all about learning to excel in the future business environment and giving clients various options that best suit them.

Customers want easy access to you, which means meeting team members, having their questions answered, and then shopping for and buying the products for their

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Clients want full service, which means they want to engage online or offline. Collaborative wish list selections can be created into a look book. Photo credit: iStock.com/Feverpitched



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projects. At a minimum, they expect any retailer's website to include a catalog and a shopping cart. Customers view visiting a physical store repetitively as an inconvenience. Let them shop online without interrupting their day. It is the time to become a trustworthy omnichannel resource.

Bring Out the Best in Your Showroom

We know many clients complete more than 80 percent of their shopping journey doing most of it online before ever leaving their home or office. This is one of the reasons that through-the-door foot traffic has diminished.

Having a virtual showroom tour helps create an experience that brings your store and products to life when an in-person visit isn't possible. It all happens while potential clients never leave the comfort of their home or place of business. They can view your showroom and get information about the products on display.

Virtual tours of your business also build excitement and increase the desire to visit and create a destination trip with real purpose. This is a case when being an early adopter of this tool will help raise brand awareness locally and digitally.

Take this time to prepare for the new way we connect and serve our clients and trade partners.

Flexibility and Efficiency

Flexibility is defined as the quality of bending but not breaking. We must be as malleable as we can when it comes to critical client touchpoints when competing in a digital-centric sales environment.

Flexibility must be focused on people first — your business's internal teams, trade partners and clients. Having various ways to interact with them throughout a project is critical and requires it to be efficient.

Regular business hours have been augmented with scheduled availability for human interactions and 24/7 availability for digital interactions because most clients expect a portion of the sales experience will be online. Being accessible for any purpose during the sales process has never been easier than today using the correct technology and procedures.

Pricing flexibility is a requirement to be a viable business, and the transparency of the Internet has made this both a new challenge and a bastion of competitor information.

There is never a good time to lose a project because of competitive pricing. Using price guarantees combined with the appropriate well-rehearsed sales conversation will keep your showroom winning more. In the past, keeping track of — and applying — a tiered pricing matrix was a cumbersome task. A digital platform allows you to express your various dynamic pricing levels to client types based on their login and lets clients always see "their" price in the vein of efficiency and flexibility.

YOU CAN NO LONGER AVOID E-COMMERCE AND LIMIT BUYERS' OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE PURCHASES WHEN THEY'RE READY.

The personalization of pricing to the login credential builds bonds with your trade partners.

Process flexibility begins by acknowledging the changes that have happened and how they will impact how you will do business in the future.

Now is the time to evaluate all sales and marketing processes you have in place to determine which ones will work and will be brought forward into this new reality. Discard old, worn-out procedures to make way for the new ones.

Welcome to business unusual. Businesses can realize efficiency in many forms; time-savings is the easiest to understand and quantify. Virtual meetings and design consultations are a part of the standard sales process. Using technology to sell and service is no longer a distant dream or the fad of the moment; it is the way of the future. Now is the time to be adapting your current business sales and marketing processes to be a part of the digital norm.

Businesses can use specific industry-related technology to reduce the time it takes to produce quotes, presentation books and installation manuals. The old, tedious process of searching, clipping and pasting is over. The clients I work with see increased productivity in these areas when they adopt a platform with every tool they need at the touch of the screen or click of the mouse.

Save Time, Be Professional

Stop trying to force the analog processes in a digital world. Introducing new procedures and incorporating

new digital tools into a sales team can be met with frustration.

Everyone in their daily lives is impacted by the changes brought on by what life has thrown at us. Working with a SAAS (software-as-a-service) provider that demonstrates it puts clients' businesses first is the partner you need to ensure maximum accuracy while minimizing downtime.

"Our system is great!" explains Caitlin Skags of Wiseway Supply. "We used to have to make the document by copying and pasting photos into Google Docs. It was truly awful. With Bravo Business Media's SPEX Builder tool, we can now add images, specification sheets, and installation information; it makes a lot of work dissipate with a click of a button. Sharing is easy. Ensuring customers receive the project information is helpful, so if we aren't familiar with their installer, they can give them the information as well."

Clients want full service, which means they want to engage online or offline. Collaborative wish list selections can be created into a look book, a sales order, a pick ticket, a packing slip or provide the tradespeople with appropriate documentation. The ability for increased efficiency is how businesses will maintain and even increase margins.

Having the correct SAAS partner focused on the industry can save your sales associates hours of valuable time while increasing your customer service levels to plumbers, builders, designers and homeowners. The changes you put in place today will provide success for the long haul. Invest the time now to increase your efficiency and flexibility. Close the loop with a "browser-to-buyer" shopping ecosystem so you can maximize your sales opportunities.

The Timeframe Is Short

The agility and tools required to sell in the "homebody economy" must now be put into place. There is no time to wait.

If you thought there was still enough time to make the critical changes and implement new strategies, you are mistaken. Stop avoiding the outcome. There are sector disruptors that have been unleashed due to the coronavirus' national economic response.

To continue to play an important and relevant role in your channel or maintain your competitive advantage, you must take action now! Let me put this in proper perspective: There will still be a need for a business such as

yours and the professionals who staff them — just not as many.

Change has been around since the dawn of time, and successful stores don't go backward. If you think we will return to the way things were, maybe you would like to buy an excellent fax machine; I hear typewriters are all the rage.

In all seriousness, there will be a thinning throughout the home sector in general: a loss of showrooms and vendors, and shrinkage of viable clients. While this is a bit of doom and gloom, the result is that the players left standing — no matter their role in the channel — will be the best in their fields.

The real industry professionals who continue will be expected to know more about their products and processes. They will be expected to be more efficient, effective and impactful with time — both theirs and their clients.

Businesses positioned to succeed in 2021 and beyond must have defined goals with actionable plans. These initiatives include reducing selling friction with customers while increasing sales performance across the board and building everlasting relationships. The businesses that will thrive will partner with companies that have the resources needed to win in this new economy.

Embrace the new technologies available to you; don't shrink away from them. Help clients on their buying journey quickly and smooth out the entire sales process.

In the words of the immortal Zig Ziglar, "You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want."

I agree, this seems a tremendous amount of work to do, yet it is necessary to stay relevant in these changing times. Do it one chunk at a time.

As always, happy selling. 🍀

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