



SALES LEADERS' BUSINESS PREPAREDNESS SURVEY

How 400+ sales leaders worldwide are responding with positive action



UK





Introduction

The global spread of COVID-19 has been swift and devastating. A COVID-19 response study fielded last month by Freshworks finds strong negative impacts for sales leaders and their organizations around the globe, but also an emerging — much more positive — story of:



Flexibility and rapid adaptation



Strengthening customer relationships



Optimising CRM/analytics and other technology usage



Training & development to augment sales capabilities



Information, process and strategy improvement



Enhanced digitalisation and automation of sales workflows

Complete study results are presented here. We hope you find the report both informative and helpful in fine tuning and evolving your own COVID-19 responses.

Sincerely,

The Freshworks Team



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Revenue forecasts plummet 01

Nearly 7 in 10 (67%) of sales leaders worldwide expect COVID-19 to negatively affect 2020 enterprise revenues.

UK-based sales leaders are even more pessimistic than the global average with 75% predicting revenue declines. Within that group, two thirds (64%) rate the negative impact from COVID-19 as either medium or high, while the remaining one-third sees only a low-negative impact.

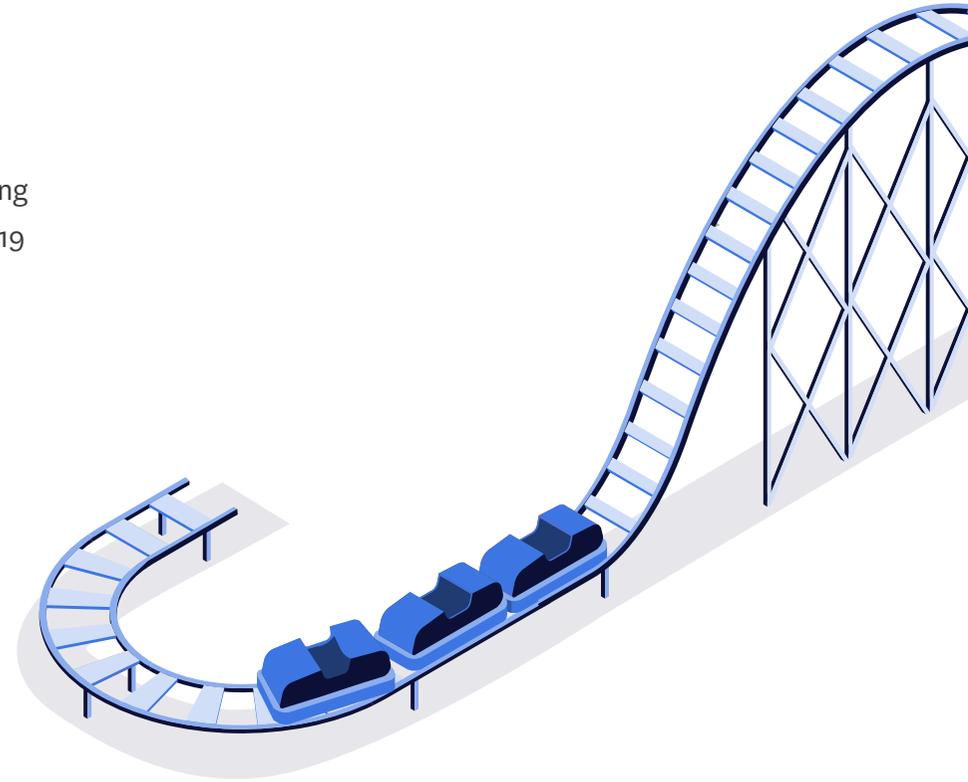
Sales leaders in such EU-based countries as Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands are somewhat more optimistic than their UK-based peers with 68% (versus 75%) predicting COVID-19-related revenue declines for this year. The situation in the U.S. appears more dire with 82% of sales leaders now anticipating revenue declines for 2020 all told.



Percent of UK-based sales leaders who believe COVID-19 will have a negative impact on 2020 revenues



Percent within that group who believe the negative revenue impact from COVID-19 will be “medium” or “high”





Consumer demand shuts down **02**

Nearly half (45%) of sales leaders in IT companies expect revenues to improve due to COVID-19 as business entities across the globe scramble to setup and support remote work arrangements and many companies also use forced downtime to pursue process improvements that involve investments in automation, AI, and other technologies.

Even with consumers shifting to ecommerce for goods purchases, breaking global supply chains, soaring unemployment — which limits spending to necessities — proliferating labour/strike actions, and virus outbreaks amongst workers in these industries all pose serious headwinds for revenue forecasts.

Hardest hit industry verticals are ones that rely heavily on consumer demand for goods and services, according to the study. These include:



Manufacturing
(74%)



**Transportation
& logistics**
(72%)



**Construction
& real estate**
(69%)



**Travel
& Tourism**
(68%)

Industry verticals feeling somewhat less impact (at least, so far) include:



BFSI
(58%)



Healthcare
(46%)



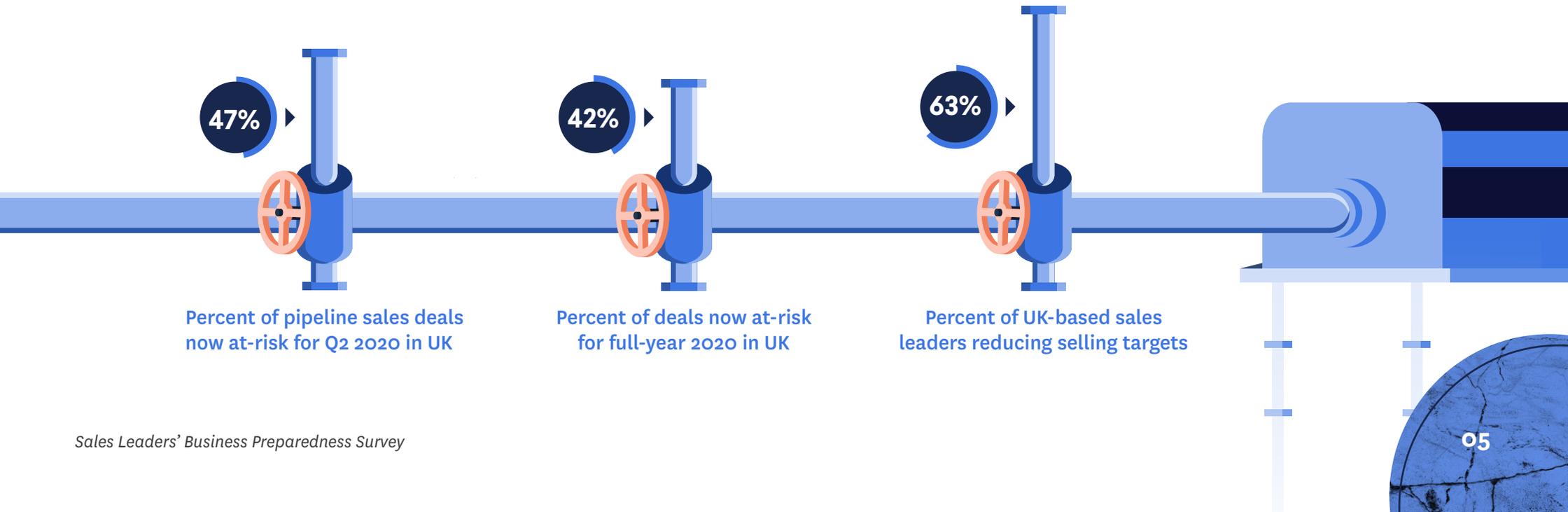
**Information
technology**
(48%)



Nearly half of pipeline deals are now considered 'at risk'

Sales leaders worldwide estimate that some 43% of pipeline deals predicted to close in Q2 2020 may now be at risk. Looking out to the end of 2020, the global sentiment is that 35% of deals in progress could be at risk of turning cold. Looking regionally, both UK and U.S.-based sales leaders are notably more pessimistic for the shorter term (Q2), while UK and E.U.-based sales leaders are notably more pessimistic on the full-year look as well.

As a consequence, nearly two-thirds (63%) of UK sales leaders have reduced selling targets for their teams. The corresponding figure for EU sales leaders reducing sales targets is 61%, while in the U.S. only 45% have done so. Interestingly, few sales leaders seem to be strongly emphasizing a sales pipeline focus. Asked to rank guidance to sales teams at this time, only 15% among the global, UK, and EU-based survey pools rank focus on blocked/stuck opportunities in the pipeline as their number one response. In the U.S., meantime, only 6% rank this as top guidance they are providing to sales teams.



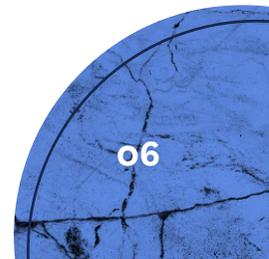
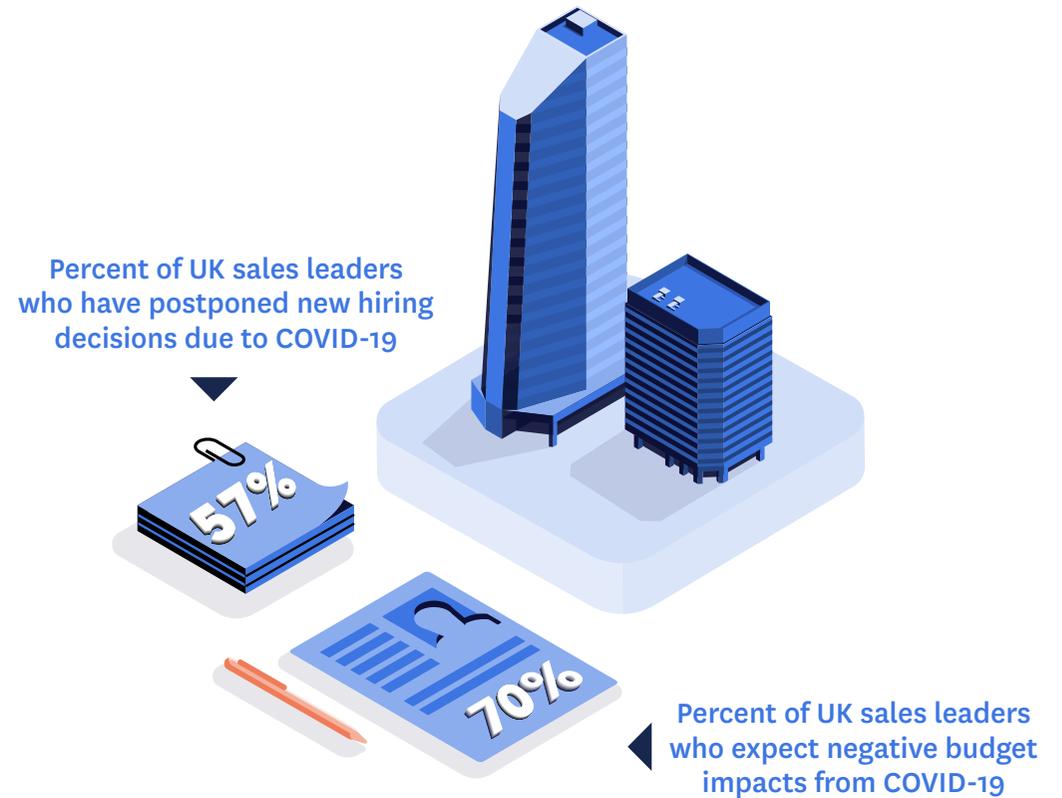


More than half postpone new hires ⁰⁴

Headlines are full of soaring unemployment claims, but for the time being at least, those trends appear to be more confined to retail stores, restaurants, gyms, travel/hospitality, and other types of businesses that have been most directly affected by government lockdown orders.

Where sales teams are concerned, the emphasis seems to be more on freezes than furloughs. More than half (57%) of UK-based sales leaders say they have postponed new hiring decisions until the economic fallout from COVID-19 becomes clearer. That compares to 75% in the U.S. and 62% in the EU. Small and mid-size firms are slightly more likely than larger companies to be freezing hiring activity within their sales functions.

With that said, there is plenty of reason to fear that furloughs may become necessary for sales teams. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of sales leaders worldwide expect negative budget impacts from the COVID-19 crisis. In the UK, that figure rises to 70%, making it difficult to imagine that job totals will not eventually be affected.





05 Decision makers become less accessible

Some 68% of sales leaders worldwide say the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to access key decision makers for selling and closing deals. The figure is even higher at 70% in the UK and the EU, and slightly lower at 64% in the U.S. This might be, at least in part, a function of growing pains as corporate enterprises have been forced to shift suddenly from office to work-from-home (WFH) setups and lockdowns/shelter-in-place orders are preventing field sales reps from meeting in-person with clients.

But it is quite likely those unavailable prospects are simply laser focused on rescuing their own company's bottom lines. There is also plenty of evidence both in mainstream and social media that business professionals are struggling mightily to remain productive while coping in lockdown with demands of homeschooling and entertaining children, a lack of private/quiet workspaces, virtual-meeting fatigue, and simply providing for their families in a climate of unprecedented fear and anxiety.

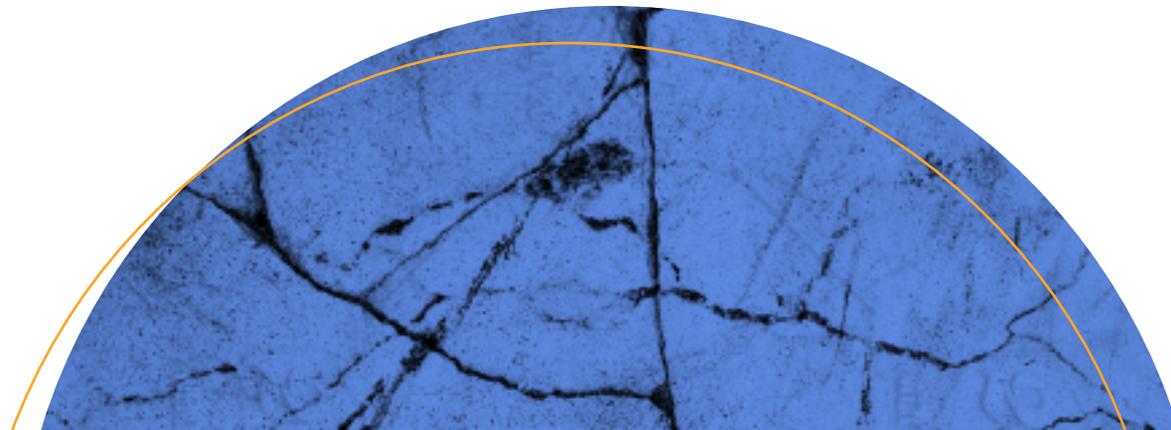
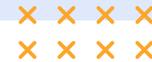


70%

Percent of UK sales leaders who say COVID-19 has made it more difficult to access key spend decision makers



Now, for the
good news!





Strengthen customer relationships ⁰⁶



83%

Percent of UK sales leaders guiding their teams to focus on building deeper relationships with existing customers

An overwhelming eight in 10 (83%) of sales leaders in both the UK and the EU say they are currently guiding their sales teams to focus on building deeper relationships with existing customers. That global figure is slightly higher at 87%, while in the U.S. it stands at 92%. Nearly four in 10 (38%) of UK-based sales leaders also say they are asking reps to engage more with current customers; that is on par with the EU average of 37%, but four points

lower than the global average of 42% and nine points lower than in the U.S. (47%). Asked how they are guiding sales teams to maximise ROI at this time, the number-one ranked response among sales leaders worldwide is to focus on service implementation and achieving key milestones for existing customers.

Recommended actions:

- Utilise CRM analytics to identify preferred/highest-value customers
- Prioritise preferred and high-value customers for well-being/check-in types of calls (with zero selling)
- Ask preferred customers to describe emerging and evolving pain points related to COVID-19 and related economic fallout (see more on page 13)
- Collaborate with marketing to create supportive content (COVID-19 related or otherwise) for use with both automated drip campaigns and personal outreach



Clean up CRM + and dive deep into analytics

Cleaning up CRM and glean insights with analytics are two other ways many sales leaders are wisely choosing to use the downtime caused by COVID-19. On a global scale, roughly seven in 10 (73%) are encouraging their reps to dig deeper into CRM analytics and to clean up records and files at this time. Corresponding numbers stand at 68% in the UK, 62% in the U.S., and 74% across the EU.

Recommended actions:



Add contacts to various digital content drip marketing campaigns
(and/or revise which campaigns people are associated with)



Reach out via email or SMS with personal 'check-in' notes, especially in cases where CRM notes suggest clients may be socially isolated at present



Mine external databases or use personal outreach to fill in missing data fields
(such as LinkedIn)



Percent of UK sales leaders using COVID-19-forced downtime to clean up their CRM records and to optimise their use of CRM analytics



Ramp up training & development 08

Some 67% of sales leaders worldwide say the number one strategy for keeping sales forces productive and engaged at this time has been to increase their focus on sales enablement & training. In the UK, the figure is slightly lower at 55%, while 64% of EU-based sales leaders and 59% of U.S.-based are doing the same.

A potential roadblock for some in this area may be a lack of prior digitalisation in terms of how training is delivered. Half of sales leaders worldwide say they are currently engaged with shifting in-person training over to virtual/digital formats. The figure is slightly higher at 52% in the U.S. and notably lower at 43% in the EU and much lower in the UK (35%), suggesting that Europe-based companies may be well ahead of the general curve in terms of digitalising training for sales personnel.

Recommended actions:

- Setup direct mentoring relationships between more and less experienced sales personnel; ask mentors to emphasise high-level, consultative sales techniques
- Create incentives for product/service subject matter experts/ reps to either create or curate and share helpful content with less knowledgeable reps
- Identify and recruit CRM power users to demonstrate both best practices and how to best utilise advanced CRM functionality



Percent of UK sales leaders using COVID-19 downtime to shore up sales training and development



Re-engineer/improve sales processes

Sales/product training and development is the number one area of long-term focus among sales leaders at present; a close second is undertaking comprehensive review and re-engineering of standard sales processes. Some 49% of sales leaders worldwide, 47% in the UK, and 50% across the EU say they are looking currently at sales process review and re-engineering. The corresponding U.S. figure is much lower at 29%.

Recommended actions:

[Click here for Freshworks' recently released step-by-step guide on this subject](#)





Improve go-to-market strategy ¹⁰

4 in 10 (43% of) global sales leaders say they are using forced downtime from COVID-19 to revisit go-to-market strategies — that is, re-identifying customer pain points and adjusting standard sales and marketing messaging accordingly.

PERCENT OF SALES LEADERS WHO ARE:	GLOBAL	UK	U.S.	EU
Revisiting go-to-market strategies	43%	34%	26%	39%

Relatedly, 32% of global sales leaders say they are changing account plans, 32% are making changes to product discounting policies, and 29% are shifting product scope.

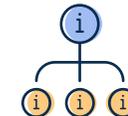
Recommended actions:



Set up direct client research into new and evolving pain points that can be promoted via CMS-based email or SMS campaigns
(using Survey Monkey or similar tools)



Add specific pain-point questions to customer check-in call scripts



Ensure that information gleaned from the above activities is properly aggregated, analyzed, packaged, and communicated to both marketing and new product/service development personnel

34%

Percent of UK sales leaders using COVID-19 downtime to revisit go-to-market strategies



Re-define buyer-seller interactions¹¹

It may be too soon to draw firm conclusions on this, but the Freshworks COVID-19 impact study finds evidence that the present move to more digital/virtual interactions between sellers and buyers could be long-lasting (even permanent). A few relevant data points:

PERCENT OF SALES LEADERS WHO:	GLOBAL	UK	U.S.	EU
Say their sales personnel are ready for a switch to remote selling	70%	60%	73%	68%
Are encouraging sales personnel to meet virtually with clients versus in-person	68%	65%	71%	64%
Are canceling or postponing major in-person customer meetings	65%	68%	77%	61%
Believe their customers are ready for a switch to remote seller-buyer interactions	64%	50%	65%	61%
Are reallocating marketing spend to emphasize more digital types of communications with customers	37%	33%	24%	36%



Recommended actions:

- Consider replacing in-person customer events with webinars/virtual conferences
- Add training around best practices, professionalism, and etiquette for small, medium, and large group virtual meetings as well as digital presentation skills
- Budget for, equip, and assist sales personnel with enhancing professionalism of home workspaces (for example, increasing WIFI bandwidth, green screens/professional meeting backgrounds, high-quality microphones and lighting for video conferencing, access to applications for handling large file transfers to and from clients, and so forth)





Conserve cash with more digital/remote and automated sales workflows

Even before COVID-19, there was a move afoot among global corporations to conserve cash by allowing — even encouraging — more remote work setups and by investing in process automation solutions. Supporting work from home (WFH) not only liberates substantial cash from office real estate, maintenance, and utilities, it is often preferred by younger generations and can improve employee morale, retention, and productivity by eliminating long/traffic-heavy commutes and adding flexibility for people coping with child/eldercare and other heavy personal obligations. A few relevant data points from the Freshworks COVID-19 impact study:

PERCENT OF SALES LEADERS WHO ARE:	GLOBAL	UK	U.S.	EU
Asking sales teams to work from home	75%	78%	77%	68%
Using regular virtual meetings to keep their sales forces engaged and productive	88%	87%	83%	88%
Cancelling or postponing major in-person company conferences, training events	67%	67%	71%	63%

Recommended actions:

- Create incentives that target full adoption and consistent/advanced use of CRM and other systems, which enable consistent interactions with and monitoring of remote workforces
- Add training on how to make optimal use of automation capabilities built into CRM, digital marketing, and other tools already available to sales teams

About Freshworks

Freshworks is a leading cloud-based customer engagement company, offering a suite of products that is transforming the way world-class organizations collaborate. Our products are used by over 175,000 organizations across the world including NHS, Honda, Rightmove, Hugo Boss, Citizens Advice, Toshiba, and Cisco. Freshworks has offices in US, India, UK, Australia, and Germany.

To learn more, visit www.freshworks.com