An Exploratory Examination of the Current State of Online Sales Courses

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The move exclusively to online course delivery has posed significant challenges to many educators, especially those who have never taught virtually, and teaching professional selling exacerbates this. Instructors face the dilemma of aligning objectives, activities, and course technology while maintaining the interactive nature of sales courses. This research examines the array of technologies used in teaching sales courses online prior to COVID-19 and how the mandatory transition has changed the view of sales educators in University Sales Center Alliance schools. Additionally, what tools are needed by students and challenges that companies are facing are provided through insights from Fortune 500 sales representatives. Findings indicate that technology is key in optimizing students' learning experience in virtual sales courses. The sudden transition to online delivery forced sales educators to expedite adoption of online technologies and identify what works currently and what improvements are needed. The contribution is unique in that it presents a software typology along with specific platforms for online sales courses as well as where the discipline is headed and what is still needed.

With the recent transition to online-only delivery in higher education to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus, one of the critical issues facing faculty is the question of what technologies best facilitate the delivery of traditionally face-to-face courses in the online format. Even before the novel coronavirus outbreak, research had shown that the continual improvement of technological capabilities was creating a need for more flexible learning platforms (Lassk et al. 2012) and how sales education had been slow to respond to these demands (Cummins et al. 2013). This pedagogical transition has posed significant challenges to many educators. This is especially true for those possessing little or no experience teaching online and where the course design did not support online delivery.

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This dilemma is even more prevalent in sales courses due to their experiential learning aspects relying heavily on interpersonal interactions. The challenge for sales educators is providing an interactive, experiential learning environment that allows students to develop skills as if they were in a class meeting face-to-face. Effective sales courses consist of role-playing, simulations, sales demonstrations, and networking with professionals (O'Reilly 2015). The way to mimic the in-person experience in online delivery is to use technology. Advances in technology have been transforming the marketplace, which has required rapid innovation by universities and colleges (AACSB 2016). This research aims to examine what best practices and gaps in current practice exist when it comes to online sales education. This knowledge will help sales educators maintain the level of rigor and student engagement expected in face-to-face courses while transitioning to distance education delivery.

Ferrell and Ferrell (2020) noted a myriad of technologies that impact marketing and thus, marketing education including blockchain, AI, robotics, and big data. Given its interpersonal nature, these tools and other technological changes (both in practice and educational arenas) play a role in shifting professional selling pedagogy. In practice, salespeople have had a long affair

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with technology and the forced transition to virtual teaching environments has pushed academia to embrace technology-facilitated learning more fully. For years, industry has used technology as a tool for interviews, training, sales presentations and other enhancements to salesperson productivity (e.g., route optimization, CRM and inventory management systems). Still, no research has examined the technologies used to teach sales online that could prepare students to be more career ready. The study will specifically identify technologies used in sales courses of all delivery types and demonstrate there is room for instructors to improve in converting courses typically taught in class face-to-face to distance delivery methods. With the University Sales Center Alliance's assistance, this exploratory research expands the pedagogical landscape in the following ways:

1. Describing the current situation concerning technologies in use for sales pedagogy.
2. Examining which technologies should be used to optimize the learning experience.
3. Setting an agenda to uncover what technologies are lacking in online sales courses.

This research combines a literature review and both primary and secondary data examination to discuss best practices for online courses, successful resources, structure for sales courses, benefits and challenges of online classes, and current sales educators' practices when it comes to online course delivery. Additionally, it provides a foundation to guide future research on how to optimize students' learning experience with online sales courses using technology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The move to 100% online instruction after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 elevated the need to examine the efficacy of technologies used for online course delivery. While online platform technologies have been used for many years, such as Blackboard and Moodle among others (Kent & McNergney 1999; Beatty 2006), many new technologies have been created and are used in classrooms today to enhance student learning experiences, simulate real-world scenarios, and improve student classroom participation and involvement (Humphrey et al. 2020; Park at al. 2019; Florenthal 2019; Silva et al. 2019). Technologies used in business and marketing courses cover a wide range of user involvement and interaction, including online programs and websites such as blogs and simulations, GIS systems, and marketing gamification. Table 1 below highlights selected papers to demonstrate some of the technologies used in sales and marketing classes in higher education institutions.

Humphrey et al. (2020) explored the use of electronic badges based on marketing course learning outcomes. Salesforce.com offers Trailhead as a learning experience platform that includes educational content customized to course learning objectives (Training: Salesforce 2021). The badges component is a faster way to credential trainees compared to certifications. The gamified platform is used to teach students the skills they need by means of hands-on experiences.

Park et al. (2019) explored the use of multimedia technology in online and blended classes. They define multimedia learning as "a process of learning through multimedia instructional messages, which are communications using more than words, such as picture, animation, narration, and video that are intended to promote learning" (Park et al. 2019, p. 289). The study found that multimedia technology positively influences users' perception of fit in technology and the adoption of multimedia in learning. Gender differences were found to have a moderating effect on multimedia adoption.

Ifinedo (2017) investigated students' intentions to continue using blogs in their learning. Several factors were found to be related to student blog use, such as perceived self-efficacy, personal outcome expectations, and perceived support for enhanced social ties. Students' perceived blog use playfulness and their attitudes towards blogs were found to significantly affect its use.

Martin et al. (2017) explored the use of social media as a pedagogy by implementing Yellowdig, a "collaborative, immersive digital learning platform that complements the traditional educational experience" (p. 57) in marketing classes. Yellowdig is similar in experience to Facebook where students can share pictures, links, videos, and like what others have posted. The researchers found student engagement and learning outcomes increased when students and faculty created

Table 1: Technology Examples Used in Business and Marketing Courses

Study	Synopsis	Technology Implemented
Humphrey, Laverie, and Muñoz (2020)	Explored the use of Salesforce Trailhead digital badges as a learning platform in marketing classes.	Salesforce.com Trailhead
Park, Kim, Cho, and Han (2019)	Studied the use of multimedia technologies in online and blended learning.	Multimedia technologies
Silva, Rodrigues, and Leal (2019)	Examined the effects of using gamification in undergraduate accounting and marketing classes on increasing the performance of students.	Marketing gamification
Ifinedo (2017)	Investigated factors that might influence undergraduates' use of blogs in a management information systems course.	Blogs
Martin, Martin, and Feldstein (2017)	Examined the use of Yellowdig - a private collaboration network that aims to enhance student engagement using videos, news articles, blogs, and other resources – in marketing classes.	Yellowdig
Miller, Mangold, Roach, Brockway, Johnston, Linnhoff, McNeely, Smith, and Holmes (2014)	Describe the web-based RacerGISOnline GIS (Geographic Information System) and its implementation and evaluation in marketing classes.	GIS
Lowe, D'Alessandro, Winzar, Laffey, and Collier (2013)	Used the augmented TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) to understand the factors that influence students' adoption of Twitter as a Web 2.0 technology in their learning.	Web 2.0 Twitter

content together. They also found that students become more active learners and take more responsibility for their own learning.

The studies listed in Table 1 demonstrate technology use in classrooms to enhance student learning outcomes, engagement, and participation. Some of them are game-based, where users engage in mini- or full games within a platform to learn one or more concepts (Trailhead), while others explore the use of social interaction technologies (blogs) or platforms (Yellowdig) to increase student class performance and can inform best practices for using these technologies in online sales courses.

Benefits and Challenges of Online Courses

Online courses have many similar benefits and challenges as face-to-face courses. Good course design can ensure an effective online learning environment (Crews et al. 2015). According to Crews et al. (2015), educators can transfer the principles for good practice for face-to-face teaching to the online environment by designing and developing appropriate online learning spaces, constructing appropriate instructional strategies, engaging students in learning, and communicating more effectively with students. Online courses offer quick dissemination of knowledge and information opportunities as well as providing education anytime and anywhere through various technology devices (Crews et al. 2015). The integration of active learning to engage students is crucial for online courses and face-to-face classes (Khan et al. 2017). Creating a community of learning is one of the most critical components with clear expectations shared at the beginning of the course (Khan et al. 2017). Online courses also help to prepare students for jobs in the sales area as they will be required to utilize technological tools to interact with clients (i.e., virtual meetings) as well as to enhance efficiency (e.g., call planning optimization, CRM, etc.) and ensure value delivery (order tracking, inventory management, etc.).

Online courses tap into both national and international markets that are not as accessible with traditional face-to-face classes. Appana (2008) described the potential benefits of online courses as new markets where geographic limitations are minimized or eliminated, economic benefits as economies of scale will decrease online course offerings costs, foster international partnerships, and reduce time to market. Additionally, Abu-Shanab and Musleh (2018)

reported that the adoption and use of online courses would benefit busy professionals, allow access for geographically dispersed people, and reduce the economic toll on educational institutions. In a study of faculty perceptions of MOOCs' (massive open online courses) tangible and intangible benefits, Baker et al. (2015) found that students who had more access to educational opportunities experienced better time and scheduling flexibility and improved self-paced learning. Institutions reached a wider audience, course quality was improved, and faculty professional development was enhanced. Davey et al. (2019) note that "digital learning can permit different elements and priorities, such as personalization, self-directed learning, and co-creation of content" (p. 1). All of these facets of digital learning enable the realization of the potential benefits. As described in Appana (2008), personalization is essential to understand online courses' challenges to then identify solutions. Kebritchi et al. (2017) identify the three major categories of problems as online learners, instructors, and content development issues. Issues for learners included learners' expectations, identity, readiness, and participation. For instructors, issues include the change in faculty roles, transitioning from face-to-face class, time management, and teaching style. Content development issues include the instructors' role in content development, instructional strategies, content development considerations, and multimedia integration. Success in online courses relies on students to engage in the learning process actively and autonomously (Wang et al. 2013).

Best Practices for Online Courses

The transition to 100% online teaching created many challenges to educators and students, especially for classes that were not designed for online learning, and for instructors and students who did not engage in online learning. Two recent studies (Acevedo 2020; Birk et al. 2021) that were conducted after the shift to online learning shed some light on best practices for online teaching and learning.

Birk et al. (2021) describes the best practices for an online robotics course that took place during the pandemic in 2020. The researchers found that asynchronous online teaching is superior to synchronous online teaching because students preferred the asynchronous method flexibility in terms of time and place, were less able to focus in synchronous online meetings, and found videos to be of great value. While online asynchronous learning reduces social interaction among students and with the instructor, students can mitigate that effect with small group interactions in self-organized study groups like GroupMe, Snapchat, etc. (Birk et al. 2021).

Acevedo (2020) describes best practices for teaching quantitative classes online based on a broad review of the literature. These include "(1) design and implement the class to meet learning goals using online strategies specifically; (2) create an open, inclusive, and welcoming online environment that promotes a sense of learning community; (3) acknowledge the diversity of talents and learning strategies; (4) use real-world examples and assessments; (5) account for gaps in knowledge; (6) emphasize the modeling cycle process; (7) focus on developing ideas rather than tools or procedures; (8) if needed, introduce computational tools thoroughly before combining them with mathematical or statistical concepts; (9) evaluate the course constantly; and (10) put your heart and soul into the class" (Acevedo 2020, p. 12457).

While online courses are more cost-efficient for students and universities, there are growing concerns about deficiencies in education quality (Bowen 2012). A recent survey of over 3,000 students by Top Hat (2020) noted that 78% of students find online classes unengaging. De Paepe et al. (2018) found that students perceive engagement and collaboration enablement as challenging. Technical and pedagogical skills are essential for online delivery since online educators should focus more on a learner-centered teaching model.

Creating an online course requires a change in pedagogy where research and best practices should serve as a guide to make transformations that are often unclear to some faculty (Stevens 2013). The use of technology and multimedia enhances instruction to achieve effectiveness, efficiency, and engagement (Outlaw & Rice 2015). The development of an online course is a collaborative effort where subject matter expertise and instructional design are required to create an engaging course (Outlaw & Rice 2015). Instructional design is the systematic process of translating instruction principles and learning into content conducive to

learning (Smith & Ragan 1999). Instructional designers assist with technology and multimedia integration and ensure assignments align with objectives. While educated in their discipline, the subject matter experts still need adequate training to integrate and teach with technology to transform their classroom strategies into an online platform.

Successful Resources and Structure for Sales Courses

Sales education plays a pivotal impact in preparing students for sales careers (Weilbaker & Williams 2006), especially when the sales courses are part of a comprehensive sales curriculum. Research indicates that effective sales programs should be robust and offer fundamental sales, advanced sales, advanced valuations, sales management, business communication, and sales technologies (Fogel et al. 2012). The ideal design for these courses should be multi-modal, including one-to-one methodologies, multi-buyer methodologies, analytic processes for customer development, channels and individuals, personal and group skills, and sales-effectiveness tools (Fogel et al. 2012). Research also shows that offering a formal sales education curriculum such as those sales programs accredited by the University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) can result in more career-ready students and a higher demand for program graduates (Weilbaker & Williams 2006). Additionally, corporate partnerships give students a glimpse into what sales jobs look like in the field, provide industry input for courses, and connect students with job opportunities (Fogel et al. 2012).

Universities have been expanding their sales curricula by offering majors and minors in professional selling and creating sales centers to meet the increased demand for graduates seeking a sales career (Cummins et al. 2013). The Sales Education Foundation's 14th Annual Magazine (2020) shows the growth trend with 146 US-based universities and 19 international universities now offering some form of a sales program. According to Healy et al. (2011), sales educators have used exercises, simulations, coaching, and other active techniques and role-plays to train students. This highly interactive environment creates dynamic challenges with teaching sales online.

Online Sales Courses

For online sales courses, not much recent literature exists, which supports this paper's goal to fill that gap. The literature that does exist recommends faculty become prepared to teach sales courses online as universities offer more courses online to increase enrollment. Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy (2011) explore perceptions of online sales education and suggest commercial sales training programs could guide online class development. Wachenheim (2008) identified no significant difference in performance between an in-person agri-sales course and the online version.

A more recent proposed method for teaching online sales courses is known as TONS (Teaching Online Sales) (Rippé et al. 2016). This guide assists instructors with the transition from in-person courses to online courses. Explicitly developed for an introductory sales course, the TONS course structure contains a weekly overview framed around the sales process steps or learning outcomes, active learning assignments such as readings, video lectures, and YouTube video links, and culminates with a final paper and closing presentation. The research found that TONS successfully offered an adaptable roadmap for moving a course online while still providing experiential learning and saving time for faculty. Since many sales instructors are unsure how to transfer their in-person courses to an online format, TONS provides a guide for instructors to either adapt their current in-person class to an online environment or start from scratch to create an online sales course. Yet more is needed in terms of best practices beyond TONS. Thus, in order to better assess the current state of online sales education to capitalize on the benefits of online sales course delivery and to see what current challenges are most pressing, a survey was conducted in addition to analysis of secondary survey data among the members of University Sales Center Alliance and the results are discussed below.

METHODOLOGY

The study considers information from the literature review alongside data collected from the University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) members. The USCA is a consortium of sales centers connecting faculty members from universities across the nation, with

nearly 60 members from universities across the United States. The data collected comes from a survey asking these members if they offer online sales courses, which aligns with this paper's purpose and why this data was shared to further enhance sales curricula (USCA 2020). The research conducted addresses the knowledge gap in sales course offerings using online delivery. As mentioned in the literature, sales courses are still relatively new, as are online courses. Over 90% of USCA members responded to the survey with a sample size of 55 and the respondents (sales center directors) answered on behalf of their entire program. Another area of inquiry covered what the respondents wanted to learn about teaching sales online.

In addition to the initial survey prior to COVID-19, a follow-up survey with USCA members was conducted to better identify how they view technology use in sales courses and teaching sales courses online in a post-pandemic environment. Given the short timeframe to bring the material to press, only 10 members of the USCA responded to this second survey. The brief survey allows further understanding of the impact of the pandemic on online sales course delivery.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Pre-Pandemic Survey

According to USCA members' responses, 17 (31.09%) of the respondents reported teaching currently one or more sales classes online. In comparison, 5 (9.09%) of the professors identify as not currently teaching sales online but had in the past. The remaining 33 (60%) of professors have never taught a sales course online. Of the professors teaching sales courses online, all of those included an introductory sales course, nearly one-third taught an advanced sales course, and roughly half taught sales management online.

When asked about resources provided by their university for teaching sales online, respondents reported the following:

- 69% for training on how to teach online
- 67% for video recording facilities or equipment to record lectures or other content
- 62% for support from an instructional designer
- 47% for additional compensation to develop online content
- 38% for specialized software for creating online content
- 33% for additional compensation to teach online courses.

While many online assignments mirror in-person courses, respondents also noted using the following tools when teaching online: collaborative-based role-plays, video-recorded presentations, text-based commentary, web conferencing, role-plays via phone calls, interactive training modules, discussion boards, elevator pitches via YouTube, virtual role-plays via video conferencing, student-to-student sales calls, sales shadowing, podcasts, Respondus Lockdown Browser to proctor online exams, and HubSpot Academy.

Respondents were also asked to share what they believe are the critical challenges to teaching sales online. Table 2 below highlights issues identified by the respondents:

Table 2: Key Challenges Associated with Teaching Sales Courses Online

Key Challenge	Count	Percentage
Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction	11	20%
Quality of Role-Plays	8	14.5%
Coordination of Real-Time Activities	3	5.5%
Student Engagement	2	3.6%
Cheating	2	3.6%
Ability to Demonstrate Skills	2	3.6%

When asked where there is a need for more information about teaching sales online, respondents had various answers with many including how to conduct virtual role-plays.

Table 3: Areas of Teaching Sales Online Respondents Want to Learn About

Theme	Count	Percentage
What Tools/Techniques Work	7	12.7%
How To Use Virtual Role-Plays	7	12.7%
Course Development	2	3.6%
Student Engagement	2	3.6%
Courses To Complement Current Curriculum	2	3.6%

The variety of answers align with the different stages that instructors are at with teaching online sales courses. The survey provided respondents an open-ended question to address any other thoughts they had, which mostly came in the form of advice from professors already teaching sales courses online. These responses include the belief that more professors will be required to offer online classes, and some are already in the process of providing sales courses online. The central theme of these responses included the need for technology capabilities, as the goal is to offer the same experience provided in the classroom. One response says, "The course facilitator should endeavor to become fluent in multimedia creation to help guide and stimulate the class." Online sales courses offer a unique opportunity to flip the classroom where students can be more involved in the co-creation of the learning content and activities. Combined with the response of how sales students need to prepare for a more global perspective, online sales courses add value for sales students. Another suggestion for sales courses offered online was to get students involved in sales with real-world experience.

Post-Pandemic Survey

For the second survey, USCA members were asked open-ended questions in order to learn about how the perspective and use of technology has changed after COVID-19 forced them to transition to online only course delivery. Ten USCA members participated in our post-pandemic survey. When asked how thoughts have changed about technology in sales education, a common theme identified from 50% of respondents is how collegiate educators are more open to online delivery of sales courses after learning the value of technology can create in sales scenarios. When asked what advice they would have given themselves prior to being forced online, the common theme that emerged from 50% of respondents as taking the adequate time to prepare and learn the best practices for using technological tools.

When asked what the biggest technological challenge has been when teaching online sales courses, the themes identified included complications with the loss of social interaction noted by 40% of respondents and lack of technological preparation noted by 30% of respondents. When asked what insights should be shared with sales center directors in regard to technology in the sales curriculum, 40% of respondents shared how leveraging technology needs to be a core component of future sales curriculum and sales competitions as employers have transitioned to more virtual sales meetings. Nearly all of the respondents (90%) shared that they have incorporated at least one of the technologies listed below in the discussion in response to the shift to teaching sales courses online.

DISCUSSION

From the literature review and secondary data, technology is crucial to optimize students' learning experience. Since teaching sales online is still new to most educators, it is understandable why there are so many concerns. The first step to online instruction is overcoming the fear of change. The sales curriculum

is still under development at many universities to best prepare students for sales careers. Instructors need to understand the challenges and benefits of teaching a sales course online. They can use this knowledge to capitalize on the benefits and provide solutions for these challenges through technology. Instructors are familiar with various technologies, and the comprehensive list below shares how instructors can capitalize on these products to optimize online sales courses specifically. The contribution of the section is unique in that it presents a software typology along with specific platforms in use and how they can enhance pedagogy based on their use by members of the USCA, which makes sales education best practices one of its core values.

- Most colleges and universities make use of a learning management system (Blackboard, Canvas, Google Classrooms, Brightspace, SAP Litmos, etc.) These can be leveraged in an online environment to facilitate assignments, content delivery, collaboration tools, quizzes, exams, grades, etc., providing a smooth transition for delivering content for an online course. The functionalities of the learning management systems enhance online sales education by providing engagement and communication opportunities while serving as a hub for the distribution of the technologies needed to replicate the effects of an in-person learning environment. For example, sales courses emphasize the need for simulation and role-play in developing sales students' basket of experiences. Many LMSs include live video conferencing modules such as Zoom, Collaborate, Yuja, and others to facilitate these simulations and role-plays. More about video conferencing below.

- Respondus Lockdown Browser is a custom browser that locks down a testing environment within a learning management system. It prevents cheating as students complete a quiz or test by restricting access to any other pages or applications. The custom browser prevents students from copying exam contents, taking screen captures, or printing the exam. The instructor can also choose to have students recorded during this proctored exam. These measures help address the concerns of many instructors to combat cheating. Instructors can require students to record their environment before taking the exam, scan or present their ID on the camera, or attend a proctored lab to complete an exam. Despite the restrictions RLB imposes on exam takers, it is flexible enough to allow the instructor to permit students to access specific online domains or websites, use a mobile app for taking the exam on a mobile device environment (phone or tablet), and enable some functionalities such as printing or using the calculator.

- Video conferencing provides the opportunity to have a live visual connection between two or more parties. This connection allows sales professors to establish contact with or between their students for various purposes, such as conducting synchronous role-plays or for a sales presentation, which also provides the opportunity for screen sharing. This virtual environment provides more of a face-to-face connection for students while using a technology often used in the workforce, such as the following options: Zoom, Skype, WebEx. Video conferencing can serve as a powerful tool for enabling students to role-play sales interactions to practice various sales skills. Video conferencing also provides the opportunity for virtual sales and elevator pitch competitions or virtual career fairs, which allows for more accessibility for students across the country. Given the recent transition of many businesses to these platforms for internal and external communications, moving students towards practicing sales skills is an exercise that closely mimics reality.

- Phone calls allow students to establish a connection with or between students to build their communication skills when there is no visual connection. From cold calls to following up with clients, phone calls are typical in a sales role. These activities allow students to practice via role-plays, a client conversation, or a prospect call. Students can connect with employers via phone calls for an informational interview. Students can also practice cold calling with sales center corporate partners and sponsors to gain valuable feedback and build their network. For example, Central Michigan University partners with State Farm to

train students in cold calling and then allows them to make calls using their prospect lists to practice sales skills, and this technique can be applied to online sections as well as in face-to-face courses (Dingus & Hoyle 2019).

- Sales training apps such as the one used in the RNMKRS Virtual Sales Competition (rnmkrs.org) allow sales students to compete by giving their sales pitch to intelligent animated bots that respond in real-time with answers reflecting students' input. Students receive feedback on their performance. Another app example is GoReact, where participants can self-record their sales presentations and receive real-time feedback in different formats such as text, audio, and video comments and allows for self, peer, and instructor feedback (GoReact 2020).

- Information delivery systems include a variety of ways to get content to the learner. Professors can utilize YouTube and other web-based video sharing services to deliver lectures or connect students to other video content produced by other entities. Various videos provide training opportunities and supplementary information on a specific topic with videos like Ted Talks. These services also allow videos to be uploaded to provide a way for students to share presentations or upload an elevator pitch competition, for example, where they present on the given topic. This competition mimics the business world as the Miami Dolphins have required an elevator pitch to be posted to YouTube by students applying for their ticket sales internships.

- Cloud storage provides storage to gain access to files from anywhere with internet access. This storage option is increasingly used by organizations to reduce physical hardware costs, protect data, and provide remote access. There are various options for cloud storage, such as Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive, that allow for synchronous work to improve group work and collaboration.

- Sales technology/CRM training is also available for professors to assign grades or share for further development. These tools can allow students to learn about current sales technology such as a customer relationship management (CRM) system through Salesforce Trailhead, where students can learn skills, earn skill-based credentials, and connect with other Trailblazers. Hubspot Academy offers online courses and comprehensive certifications for business skills. Ted-Ed is an online training tool that allows educators to use existing lessons or create questions, discussion prompts, and additional resources.

- The post-pandemic survey confirmed the findings of the first round of data collection that technology is critical in practice and in sales education and that this importance has been underscored by the forced transition to online educational delivery as well as online only recruitment, selection, training, onboarding, and sales processes that companies have been forced to adopt since spring of 2020. The common theme of fear to teach online sales courses discovered from the pre-pandemic survey results has drastically changed as educators were forced to transition to online courses and learned more about how to further incorporate technology. Some educators even stated in the post-pandemic survey that teaching sales courses online can be just as successful when properly prepared for and equipped with a variety of technological platforms. They also noted some challenges in the transitions as epitomized by one respondent as follows: "Initially, the move to virtual with older (some outdated) equipment. Still have many computers that are 10+ years old, limited cameras that mandated immediate investment. We are also in process of updating/revamping the call center---it was put on hold with the needs across the campus. Seriously, the biggest challenge was reduction in head count supporting our program that we are just now addressing at the college level." In addition, some noted that the movement to a hybrid situation presented its own challenges as stated by one respondent: "I have {been} teaching in-person to a small number of students while the rest attend online. This is the worst possible scenario. It limits the technology options and in-person options. Sections should be either in-person, synchronous online, or asynchronous online. As is often the reality. Being everything is doing nothing well."

- Respondents also noted that corporate partners have fully embraced technologically facilitated options when it comes to interacting with students. These include attending virtual panels and career fairs; however, they have noticed that the level of interaction between students and partners is not as great when the setting is virtual. Some respondents attributed this to Zoom (virtual meeting) fatigue coupled with "sore butt" syndrome for both students and professionals. Others noted that it is easier to bring corporate partners in to share with or train the class in a virtual environment given the reduced burden on the corporate presenter in terms of travel and time. Most also noted that virtual role-plays and competitions were events that corporate partners found engaging. The respondents also noted that several of the identified technologies like GoReact, the media functionalities in learning management systems and of course, the video meeting softwares are useful in bringing together students and corporate partners. This is especially true when the tool the instructor is using mirrors tools the partner firms are using as well. One respondent noted that, "Virtual sales meetings will now be much more common, and in some cases, becoming most of some salespeople's jobs. SO... virtual sales competitions and virtual selling will be in high demand by employers."

IMPLICATIONS

This research guides sales professors who currently teach or are planning to teach sales courses online. The combination of the literature review and findings from the secondary data provides what challenges instructors could face with teaching sales online and what the solutions are, which revolve around a variety of technologies. The technologies proposed should mostly be familiar with instructors with new ways to utilize them for course optimization. Students should also be familiar with these technologies to allow for a better overall experience. In combination with TONS, identifying these technologies will further assist in course design and structure for a better overall experience. As educators transition to more online course formats, optimizing students' learning experiences using the outlined technological methods is crucial.

CONCLUSION

Just as a face-to-face class occasionally needs a course design, so does an online class. Based on the literature review, pre-pandemic secondary data, and post-pandemic primary data, technology is the key to optimizing students' learning experience in online sales courses. The technologies suggested to optimize students' learning experience in online classes include learning management systems, Respondus Lockdown Browser, video conferencing, phone calls, sales training apps, information delivery systems, cloud storage, and sales technology/CRM training. These technologies allow professors to design their online courses similarly to their face-to-face courses through different channels that best prepare students for a career in sales. The learning management systems provide a core for the course as it allows for better engagement with students and tracking of progress, including grades. Respondus Lockdown Browser enables professors to provide a testing environment in lockdown to prevent cheating. Video conferencing and phone calls allow for better communication between the instructor and between students or employers and allow for sales competitions. Sales training apps, information delivery systems, and sales technology/CRM systems enable students to engage in supplemental training to further their knowledge and prepare for the workforce. The cloud storage provides the opportunity for collaboration on group assignments. These technologies can optimize online sales courses for both instructors and students. This information provides a solid foundation relating to the technological tools that professors can use to design their online sales courses thereby emphasizing the benefits and overcoming the challenges.

For faculty members that are teaching an online sales course, one of the first decisions that needs to be made is what technologies will be incorporated into the course and how these technologies can strengthen the students' learning experience. Once the technology use decisions are made, professors then need to set about designing the course content in a way that allows the chosen technologies to maximize student engagement. The technology used needs to align with the coursework for the best results. While technology solutions are not necessarily new to professors, the methods of use might

be, thus there is a need for the professor to have a firsthand understanding of the online course's technology.

To compare what sales educators are doing to what is happening in the corporate setting, the authors reached out to Scott Ingram, the host of the Sales Success Stories podcast along with the Daily Sales Tips podcast. In these roles, he talks with top sales reps at Fortune 500 companies about their experiences and how they do their job. He was asked to share how COVID and the move to virtual selling have changed what his guests are doing and what challenges they are facing so that those responses could be compared to what sales educators are doing in their online course to prepare students for the reality of their careers. One of the biggest insights he had is that there is a challenge in terms of creating relationships virtually since the more informal parts of an in-person sales call, what he terms "water cooler talk," do not occur. On the other side, he notes that top sales performers from Fortune 500 companies are finding that virtual sales calls make it easier to get more of the stakeholders and decision makers in the room at once since the time and travel commitments are drastically reduced. He says of virtual sales calls, especially in enterprise sales, "there has been this great leveling of the playing field where a lot more people have voices. It's much easier to be inclusive." He also notes that prior generation's distance sales calls, over things like phone bridges, did not allow a sense of those at remote locations were truly a part of the call but were "rather second-class citizens" with little voice or input. This fits with the shifts shared by faculty toward relationship building can completing group sales calls. Scott also brought up new areas that the industry is using smooth the virtual selling space such as digitizing proposals and making them interactive using products like Proposify to enable customization of the solution and get customer commitment via electronic signature which speeds up the negotiating and customization process. This is not something that any of the respondents in our survey noted and is an area that sales educators should incorporate to enhance sales courses and prepare students for careers.

Another area that his guests have emphasized is getting comfortable in the video conferencing space because this new aspect of the sales process is not going to go away though it may become more of a hybrid. He notes that students should begin identifying and using quality hardware (cameras, microphones, and speakers) and software (e.g., noise filtering such as krisp.ai) to create a good virtual sales environment. Additionally, one of the commonly identified challenges of video conferencing is working on looking at the camera rather than the screen to create the connection with other party without being able to look directly at their responses. Scott suggests students and salespeople need to work on creating a customized layout of their virtual environment to support this is a skill set. Based on the follow up study responses, it appears that the forced shift to online learning due to COVID-19 has led sales educators to do many of these things, but they need to ensure that they are teaching students to practice correctly.

Finally, he shares that virtual sales calls enable more feedback and the ability to review more recorded calls with a sales manager to help salespeople improve their performance. Some faculty were doing this previously with their recording labs in person, but now online sales courses provide the tools to capture, store and allow for review of any sales call through any one of the myriads of video conferencing platforms in use. These recordings are excellent tools to improve student performance just as they would with their employer which makes them that much more career ready.

While COVID-19 may have hastened how some in academia approached the use of technology in online sales classes, the unfortunate reality is that academia overall is behind the curve on incorporating sales technologies into the classroom. For our students, they need to have exposure to the variety of technologies used in the sales industry thus enabling them to seamlessly transition into using whichever technologies their new sales role uses in its sales stack. COVID-19 and the transition of not only classes but also in many industry sales teams to virtual meetings have magnified the necessity of incorporating technology into both face-to-face and online sales classes. Our research outlined what faculty are currently doing to incorporate various technologies into their online sales classes. Additionally, it highlights the challenges faced by faculty in teaching online sales courses. As we are in the job of working to facilitate the success of our students, it is of paramount importance

that we continue to find ways to better incorporate the use of technology into our online sales classes.

There are several steps that can better enable faculty members to use technology:

- Faculty members need to stay current on the new sales technologies that are being used and examine how they might be used in an upcoming class.
- Faculty members need to develop a working relationship with an online instructional team at their university.
- Member associations such as USCA need to develop a framework for the increased sharing of information about the use of technology in online sales courses.
- Faculty members need to maintain a continuous two-way dialogue with corporate partners about what technological skills are needed as students transition into their first sales roles.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this research paper include the collection of secondary data from USCA members. Furthermore, only about one-third of respondents indicated they currently teach an online sales course. This suggests future research areas as both the sales curriculum and online sales courses are emerging. Additionally, the data only focused on what the faculty was currently doing, not what worked well or engaged students. Future research should examine various course delivery platforms in terms of how well they enable faculty to deliver the types of experiential learning interactions at the heart of effective sales education (Alvarez et al. 2015) and activities and technologies students find engaging. Additionally, research into specific functionalities in the various technology platforms that assist faculty and students in optimizing their interactions (including role-plays, class activities, and skill development exercises) would be of use to faculty as they design online courses in the sales arena. It would also be of interest to investigate how students in these online courses perform relative to students in traditionally delivered sales classes when it comes to sales competitions. A longitudinal study comparing the sales career trajectories of students from each delivery method would also be enlightening for the field of sales education. Another area for future research is how to enhance group participation in online sales courses where social loafing and disconnection are easily done by shutting down cameras and claiming connectivity issues. Another fruitful area for future investigation would be to examine how to utilize and optimize flipped classroom methodologies that many sales instructors have effectively utilized in an online course setting. This descriptive paper summarizing the survey responses provides the foundation for future research to improve online sales courses using continuously advancing technology.

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