

# Social Media is No Replacement for Outside Sales



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: [StephenSays@bellow.press](mailto:StephenSays@bellow.press)

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter [@stephenviscusi](https://twitter.com/stephenviscusi), Like [Stephen on Facebook](#), and follow him on [LinkedIn](#).

Dear Stephen,

I own a medium size manufacturing company. Since the COVID-19 crisis I have noticed that more salespeople in every product category - floor covering, textiles, high end European stuff, office and residential furniture - are posting product photos and other mishmash about what they sell on LinkedIn and other forms of social media. They seem to assume that this is the same as a sales call. To me it seems like they are trying to justify their salaries. These people are supposed to be outside sales people, not social and viral media managers! As a corporate strategy we know we need be more visible in front of our customers online so we take care of digital media. It's not a salesperson's responsibility. We do e-mail blasts, and then we advertise extensively in online platforms or magazines like BoF where I read your column. There seems to be no shortage of online resources to get news today. You are all over each other. Now, with NeoCon cancelled, and no real trade shows happening, manufacturers are trying to lure customers to webinars about their products

and brand, to keep it in front of them. The other new thing, companies big and small are all hosting virtual town halls with speakers like you and others, to attract an audience. In my opinion as a business owner we may be on overload, to the point of boring our customers. Enough is enough - it looks like desperation, not good marketing.

Our customers are design firms, dealers and end users and those customers do not want to see us in their offices. I get that. So now outside sales has a new meaning - it could mean just a phone call to chat with a customer, or an invitation to a designer to get out of their house and meet at the showroom. Some free research for you, and not hard to figure out: Our designer customers tell us they hate working from home and want to get out. They want some safe person-to-person interaction. I am reminded daily by my salespeople that customers do not want to see them in their offices, and I keep reminding our sales team we have showrooms all across the country where we can safely socially distance and people can see us...and our products.

## Tell them to get offline and on the phone and invite customers into the showroom.

*I have recently asked my sales people to stop the almost daily posting about our products. I made it clear we are doing all that from HQ. Spend your time elsewhere. Get yourself into the showroom and pick up the phone! If I am sick of seeing our products every day on LinkedIn, I know my customers must be! It's just lazy selling to me and I feel like my sales people are trying to justify their jobs.*

*Can I fire all my sales people and just sell our products via social media? I would be a lot cheaper. Ok, Ok, I know the answer is NO - just asking.*

Signed,

*Puzzled (my salespeople think they are a social media managers?)*

Dear Puzzled,

I feel like we just had a similar question in this same space, yet I keep hearing this from sales managers and owners, so the question and answer is worth repeating here. My entreaty is this: The majority of showrooms across the country are open every day and they are CDC rules compliant - why not use them! It is true that in many cases salespeople are not welcome to visit design/architect firms but what we hear and see is that most designers, and more importantly their clients, are happy and eager to visit the showrooms because people want to see and feel and touch the products being specified. That means they will come to you, if they know you are open. BTW, we invited you to run your ads here and tell them that!

As you mention, corporate strategy has to be explained to salespeople, that activity on social and

digital media comes from HQ. Clarify that you have that covered and that is not what you need them to do. Tell them to get offline and on the phone and invite customers into the showroom. As you have read in this column before, you sell office furniture and if the people selling that product are afraid to be in the office themselves you have the wrong people. No showroom? Maybe now is the time, when rents are cheap and negotiable, to get one.

Also, look at the template of your CRM and re-format it to keep track of data such as which salespeople are inviting customers in for showroom visits and what the customers are telling your sales people. That's the new thing, they are outside salespeople but customers are coming to them; inside. Sales may be sluggish for many companies because of the pandemic, but a great indicator of future sales success is showroom visits, so keep track of them and make sure they are followed up. Designers and their clients want to get out of their houses and most showrooms are large enough so they make perfect venues to social distance. It's not just about a current order it's getting them in for the future orders. If your salespeople do not get that new sales model, or they are just too afraid to go to the showroom themselves, they need to be warned in writing and terminated ASAP if their behavior cannot be modified.

Right now I am seeing COVID fatigue from some salespeople who are afraid to take the initiative and do what the job requires. They are trying to justify their salary by posting on social media and that's not what you hired them for so, sadly, if they can't change they must go. Does that answer your question?

Stephen