Virtual Selling 2.0:

Enhance Your Sales With Avatars

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Abstract

Virtual selling is a defining characteristic of the digital age. Brands can easily interact with buyers live using guided product tours, presentations, and sales avatars.

A sales virtual avatar can literally bring any digital platform to life. These avatars possess immense potential for supercharging sales by:

- Mimicking a human sales brain in a digital environment
- Enabling human-like interactions and guiding customers on various products/solutions in the form of voice or text
- Interacting with customers to provide a seamless product discovery journey

Let's dive into the world of virtual sales, powered by AI technology and super-realistic avatars.

This white paper explores the concept of sales avatars and their applications in virtual selling. Avatars, digital representations of individuals, have evolved beyond mere gaming and entertainment tools. Today, they play a crucial role in enhancing the customer experience, increasing engagement, and improving sales conversion rates—let's explore how.

How Selling Has Evolved —
from Traditional to Virtual

Traditional selling methods have long been the cornerstone of commerce, relying on in-person interactions, cold calls, and physical storefronts.

While these methods have their merits, they also come with significant limitations:

- In-person selling, for instance, demands substantial time and effort, making it challenging to reach a broader audience.
- Cold calling can be intrusive and often yields low conversion rates due to its unsolicited nature.

Additionally, traditional selling methods are often constrained by geographical boundaries and can limit the seller's market reach. Plus, their inability to uncover customer insights and drive personalization can double up as a major disadvantage in today's data-driven landscape. This is probably why a staggering **92%** of B2B buyers prefer virtual sales interactions, and around **79%** of sellers are realizing its importance.

Enter: Sales avatars—a way to leverage digital channels to complement or even replace these traditional approaches and unlock greater scalability in sales.

What are Avatars and How Do They Contribute to Virtual Selling?

Virtual sales avatars are basically hyper-realistic 3D models of salespeople who do what a salesperson does offline—sell—only online. The rise of AI has contributed to the momentum of sales avatars.
These avatars can help brands engage with customers in a digital format—a far better upgrade than engaging with passive eyeballs offline.

Benefits of Using Avatars in Sales Interactions

If you want to mimic your customer's alter ego without seeming intrusive or physically stepping into their world, a sales avatar can be your best bet.
When implemented correctly, a sales avatar can help you to:
- Market real-world products/services in a virtual setting
- Tap into the customer's psyche and positively influence their purchase behavior in the virtual world
- Understand your target base's hidden preferences, tastes, and likes
- Engage customers sustainably instead of getting only click-throughs

Different Types of Avatars and Their Applications in Virtual Selling

Types of Avatar	Applications in Virtual Selling
Personalized Avatars	- It can be customized to resemble the user and drive personalized product recommendations - Enhances user engagement through relatability - Example: Conducting guided virtual tours for customers
Chatbots and AI-powered Avatars	Function as virtual sales assistants to: - Provide real-time customer support and answer product inquiries - Automate routine tasks in virtual sales processes
Brand Ambassadors	Act as digital representatives of brands to: - Host virtual events, webinars, promotions, and Q&A sessions - Build brand identity and trust with customers in the virtual space

Types of Avatar	Applications in Virtual Selling
3D Product Avatars	• Enables interactive 3D product visualization and exploration • Assists customers in understanding the product features and boosts user confidence in making online purchases • Reduces product return rates by providing accurate representations
Virtual Influencers	Think of them as human-like avatars with distinct personalities to: • Promote products and services through social media channels and drive virtual sales influencer marketing campaigns
Gamified Avatars	• Adds a fun and interactive element to virtual sales experiences • Helps gamify the shopping process to engage customers • Rewards customers for their engagement and loyalty

How Avatars Enhance the Sales Process: *A Three-pronged Approach*

An effective virtual sales avatar is characterized by three defining traits:

1. Personalization and customization:

A virtual sales avatar empowers brands to meet the unmet needs of consumers at breakneck speed. All this is made possible by driving natural conversations with customers in their own language to:

- Understand their preferences
- Respond with personalized product recommendations using speech and text

2. Interactability and Immersive Experience:

A virtual sales avatar powered by AI can successfully mimic a human sales brain. Companies can leverage these digital sales assistants to drive sales of their physical products/services anytime, anywhere.

Customers can immerse themselves in an interactive product discovery experience to gauge products better. For instance, customers can get a 'tour' of a virtual car showroom with 3D car models using AI sales avatars.

3. Global Reach:

The best attribute of a virtual sales avatar is its ability to transcend geographical boundaries and connect with customers 24/7.

Time-Tested Tips on Building Trust and Rapport with *Avatars*

Your sales avatars are not simply for driving sales and calling it a day. These intuitive tools can be used to foster a long-term connection with your customers.

Here's how you can humanize the avatars and make them more 'relatable' to customers:

Inclusivity:
Humanize your sales avatar to showcase diverse races, backgrounds, skills, and more.

Inspiration:
Draw inspiration from your customer-facing teams to analyze interactions and build upon similar characteristics (think: body language cues, tone of voice, etc.) in your sales avatar. Understand what's working for your customer support teams and create an avatar accordingly.

Emotional Intelligence (EI):
To make your avatars seem more human, the interactions must have an emotional touch. Leverage emotional intelligence by programming your avatar to recognize and respond to different

emotional cues and display key EI skills such as empathy, self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills, and motivation.

Interactivity:

A sales avatar can garner more trust and confidence in customers if it is able to drive greater interactivity and solve customer's issues quickly. Experts claim that the sales avatar's communication style must be: task-orientated, self-oriented, and interaction-oriented.

Active listening:

Ensure that your sales avatars gain enough practice in active listening by:

- Asking clarifying questions
- Summarizing what the customer has said
- Showing genuine interest in the customer's concerns

Using *Sales Avatar* Across Industries

Let's now understand how avatars can be used to drive sales within industries across the board, such as:

1. Retail:

In the retail sector, avatars are being employed to enhance the online shopping experience:

- Personalization: Retailers can create personalized avatars for customers based on their preferences, shopping history, and behavior.

Source

- Virtual Shopping Assistants: Retailers can also implement avatars to guide customers through the shopping journey, provide product recommendations, and answer queries.

  - Try Before You Buy: Retailer brands can also allow customers to virtually try on products using their avatars to enhance the online shopping experience.

Example: Gucci allowed customers to create their own avatars and dress the avatars using Gucci clothing styles. Users can do this from within the Gucci app and buy Gucci digital clothing as well as accessories. This allowed the customers to 'express' themselves digitally while the brand was able to capture a younger target audience more effectively:

Source
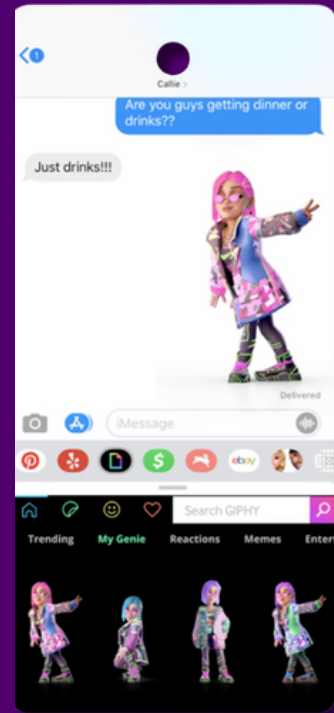
2. Automotive:

In the automotive industry, avatars are being used to simulate the showroom experience online:

- Virtual Car Showrooms: Automobile owners can develop avatars to recreate the stellar in-person car showroom experience.
- Test Drives: Automobile companies can also offer virtual test drives using avatars.
- Product Configuration: Customers can also be allowed to customize their ideal vehicle with avatars and engage in a more immersive buying experience.

Example: Both automobile giants, Fiat and KIA, have launched digital metaverse dealer showrooms so that customers can:

- Shop for cars from the comfort of their homes
- Get their queries addressed in real-time

- Take a tour of the virtual showroom
- Interact with vehicles and view service bays

3. Fashion:

Even in the fashion industry, avatars are utilized for virtual fitting rooms, personalized style recommendations, and outfit creation:

- Virtual Fitting Rooms: Enable customers to try on clothing virtually with their avatars.
- Style Recommendations: Offer avatars that provide fashion advice.
- Mix and Match: Allow customers to engage in an avatar-driven outfit creation process.

Example: For instance, ASOS's augmented reality feature, "Virtual Catwalk," enabled the brand to showcase how garments fit on various body types using avatars. This feature allows customers to view ASOS' products in a new light (quite literally):

Source

4. *Banking:*

In banking, sales avatars can serve as virtual financial advisors, guiding customers through online banking services and offering personalized financial insights:

- Virtual Financial Advisors: Banks can implement avatars for financial planning and investment advice.
- Interactive Banking: Financial institutions can use avatars to enhance online banking usability.
- Personalized Banking Insights: Banks can also develop avatars for tailored financial advice.

5. *HomeLifestyle:*

Finally, in the home lifestyle sector, avatars can assist customers in visualizing furniture and decor in their homes, planning home improvement projects, and managing smart home devices. A few examples include:

- Interior Design Assistance: You can create avatars for visualizing home furnishings.
- Home Improvement Planning: Lifestyle brands can use avatars for DIY project guidance.
- Smart Home Control: Home appliance brands can also develop avatars for managing smart devices.

The learning: As per <u>Gartner</u>:

- For **60**% of CSOs, the sales force will remain operating virtual
- **74**% are updating their seller skills profile for virtual selling
- **61**% are investing in new technology to enable virtual selling

With widespread applications across every industry imaginable, a sales avatar is the next superhero organizations need in virtual selling.

Success Stories: How Brands Are Using Avatars for ROI-driven Virtual Sales

The objectives:

- To build a virtual reality experience for Brezza and increase ROI
- To enhance in-showroom kiosk experiences through avatar-enabled interactive self-service touchpoints
- To power all Maruti Suzuki web interfaces with a virtual sales assistant - Dave

Source

Maruti Suzuki launched an AI-powered virtual sales avatar as the digital twin of the Maruti Suzuki showroom relationship manager to:

- Offer a 24x7 empathetic experience and relevant assistance
- Help customers tour the offered products without any friction
- Provide proactive support with motivational nudges for customers at periodic intervals
- Learn from customer interaction data and improve accuracy

Powered by speech and NLP, this digital assistant helped offer personalized solutions to customers at every touchpoint:

FAQs
Respond to queries promptly and accurately

Discovery
Assists Customers in a quick product discovery.

Recommendations
Provide real-time product recommendations

Event Engagement
Handle activities other than conversations like navigation, listings, etc

Source

The result: Within 18 months, Maruti witnessed:

- **18** million unique customer interactions

- **25k+** leads qualification

- **84k+** hours dwell time

- **66%** improvement in engagement time

- **35%** improvement in conversion events

- **150%** increase in average session time

Use-Case 2: Karnataka Bank Leveraged DhIRA, a Virtual Assistant, to Drive 40K Live Customer Sessions

The problem: Lack of proper assistance for customers within their digital banking journey is commonplace. Consequently, customers lose interest in the product/service.

Source

The solution: Karnataka Bank rolled out an AI-powered virtual assistant - DhIRA - on their websites and kiosks to take on the role of a Digital Human Interactive Relationship Assistant--one that:

- Guides customers while banking on the brand's digital channels (such as websites and kiosks) and discover products easily
- Helps build trust and delivers a positive experience
- Irons out customer anxiety which is often associated with digital financial transactions

The result:
- **40k** live customer sessions as a cash loan assistant
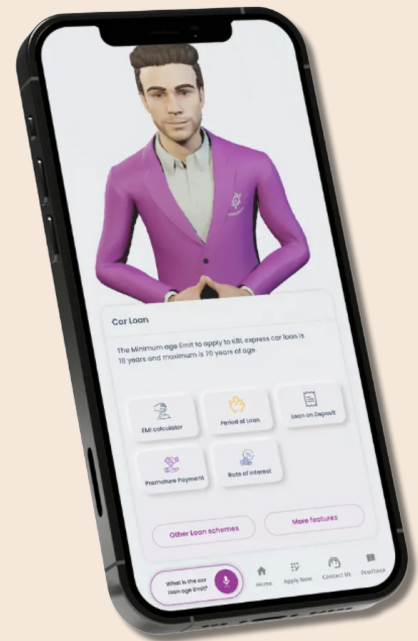
Best Practices for Implementing Avatars in *Virtual Selling*

Choose the right avatar software:
Personalized and engaging marketing campaigns start with using the right sales avatar software. If these avatars are not realistic and customized, they will not be able to engage customers in any real sense. To that end, ensure the AI avatar is able to:

- Drive an interactive two-way conversation with customers
- Understand the customer's intent as well as the root cause of their problems
- Lend a perception of being personable, sociable, and sensitive to customers

Design and customize avatars to align with your branding and target audience:
Truly effective avatars stem from machine learning algorithms that can analyze thousands of data points and create avatars that convert. With the data collected, you can further align your avatar to reflect your customer's habits while demonstrating the brand ethos.

Train your personnel to effectively use avatars in sales interactions:
Sales avatars can also be used to gather customer data and streamline workflows. However, if your team members don't know how to use--and extract--this data in the first place, all that effort can be in vain. This is why training your personnel can equip them to leverage this compelling tool and enhance customer engagement.

Integrate the avatar across channels:
Your sales avatar can be deployed across relevant social media channels, kiosks, websites, and online stores to build an omnichannel and consistent presence.

Train the sales avatar to engage in data analysis:
Your AI sales avatar is only as good as the data it collects--be it their wants, pain points, purchasing habits, and preferences. Leveraging this data, you can target customers better and drive personalized marketing campaigns.

Key Challenges in Virtual Selling with *Avatars*

Virtual selling is not one without any limitations. Here's what the data tells us from the seller's viewpoint:

- Gaining a buyer's attention and keeping buyer engaged virtually — **91%**

- Changing buyer's POV on what's possible/how to solve a problem. — **89%**

- Developing relationships with buyers virtually — **88%**

- Connecting with buyers and building rapport — **87%**

- Overcoming objections and dealing with resistance — **87%**

- Collaborating and interacting with buyers virtually — **82%**

- Prospecting and filling the pipeline virtually — **81%**

- Making the transition to virtual selling — **80%**

Source

- Leading virtual needs discover — **80%**

- Educating buyers with new ideas and perspectives — **79%**

- Differentiating from other sellers — **79%**

- Negotiating with buyers — **77%**

- Making a professional impression with buyers virtually — **76%**

- Communicating value to buyers — **75%**

- Making the return on investment (ROI) case clear to buyers — **73%**

- Using tools to make a case to buyers — **72%**

- Dealing with technology when leading a virtual sales meeting — **64%**

- Dealing with distractions when working from home — **62%**

Source

Keeping the buyer engaged is a top concern, and for good reason. Most virtual selling tactics lack the coveted 'personal touch,' which can make the interaction seem incontextual or, worse, hollow. Furthermore, virtual selling often lacks opportunities for building trust as opposed to face-to-face communication and offline interactions.

Other paralyzing concerns related to virtual selling with avatars include:

1. Privacy and security concerns:

When conversing with sales avatars, customers may understandably have concerns about their personal data and information being at risk. As robust mitigative measures, companies must:

- Implement robust data protection measures, such as encryption and secure data storage, to protect customer data from potential cyber threats.
- Obtain clear and informed consent from customers regarding the use of avatars in their virtual sales interactions by demonstrating transparent data usage policies and service agreement terms.
- Stay compliant with data protection regulations, such as GDPR or CCPA.

2. Potential resistance or skepticism from customers:

Introducing avatars into the sales process without any priming may be met with resistance or skepticism from customers who prefer human interactions. To overcome this challenge, businesses need to:

- Design avatars to mimic human behavior and expressions to make customers feel more at ease.
- Create relatable and friendly avatars to bridge the gap between technology and human connection.
- Provide resources and tutorials to educate customers about the advantages of avatar-based virtual selling.
- Offer customers the choice between avatars and human agents to cater to their diverse preferences so that customers feel more in control of their buying journey.

3. Inability to seamlessly integrate avatars with existing sales processes and technologies:

The lack of integration with existing processes can disrupt your team's workflow. To accelerate the adoption of avatar-based virtual selling:

- Invest in systems that allow for the seamless integration of avatars into your customer relationship management (CRM), e-commerce platform, and other communication channels.
- Offer self-paced training so that the team is proficient in managing avatar interactions and has access to relevant data.
- Ensure that your sales avatar is able to handle higher volumes without compromising the customer experience.

Where's Virtual Selling with Avatars Headed?

The future of virtual selling with avatars is promising to say the least. Bill Gates predicts that in the next few years, virtual meetings will move from "2D camera image grids to the metaverse, a 3D space with digital avatars."

Sriram P H, Co-founder and CEO, DaveAI mirrors the same sentiment and talks about the immense potential of virtual selling:
"63% enterprises lack assistance in online discovery while 82% customers expect immediate responses to their queries while looking to buy a product or service, creating a $90 billion opportunity in digital commerce for retail and BFSI."

Thanks to the ease and convenience with which customers can shop, an avatar shopping assistant is often viewed as a guide in the customer's eyes--one that helps them with structured tasks and influences their purchase choices positively.

Needless to say, avatar-enhanced virtual selling shows no signs of slowdown. Moreover, advancements in AI-powered avatar technology are leading the way and empowering businesses to sell more and sell smarter.

One such application is DaveAI's sales avatars that combine speech and NLP, 3D visualization, Computer Vision, and an AI affinity engine to curate powerful selling experiences. Here's how it works:

STEP 1:

DaveAI's sales avatars collect product data and customer interaction data to build an affinity graph.

STEP 2:

Customers input the data to drive personalized recommendations at scale.

What's most interesting is that these sales avatars are:
- Industry-agnostic
- Used to drive offline and online sales
- Able to create affinity graphs specific to individual companies
- Scalable and can work with minimal data in the beginning

The results? Reportedly, DaveAI's customers witness:
- An 18% boost in lead qualification rates
- 24% optimization in product mix sold
- 30% improvement in customer experience quotient

The writing is on the wall:

With AI-enabled sales avatars, there's immense scope to influence sales virtually and physically while catering to each customer's needs on a granular level.
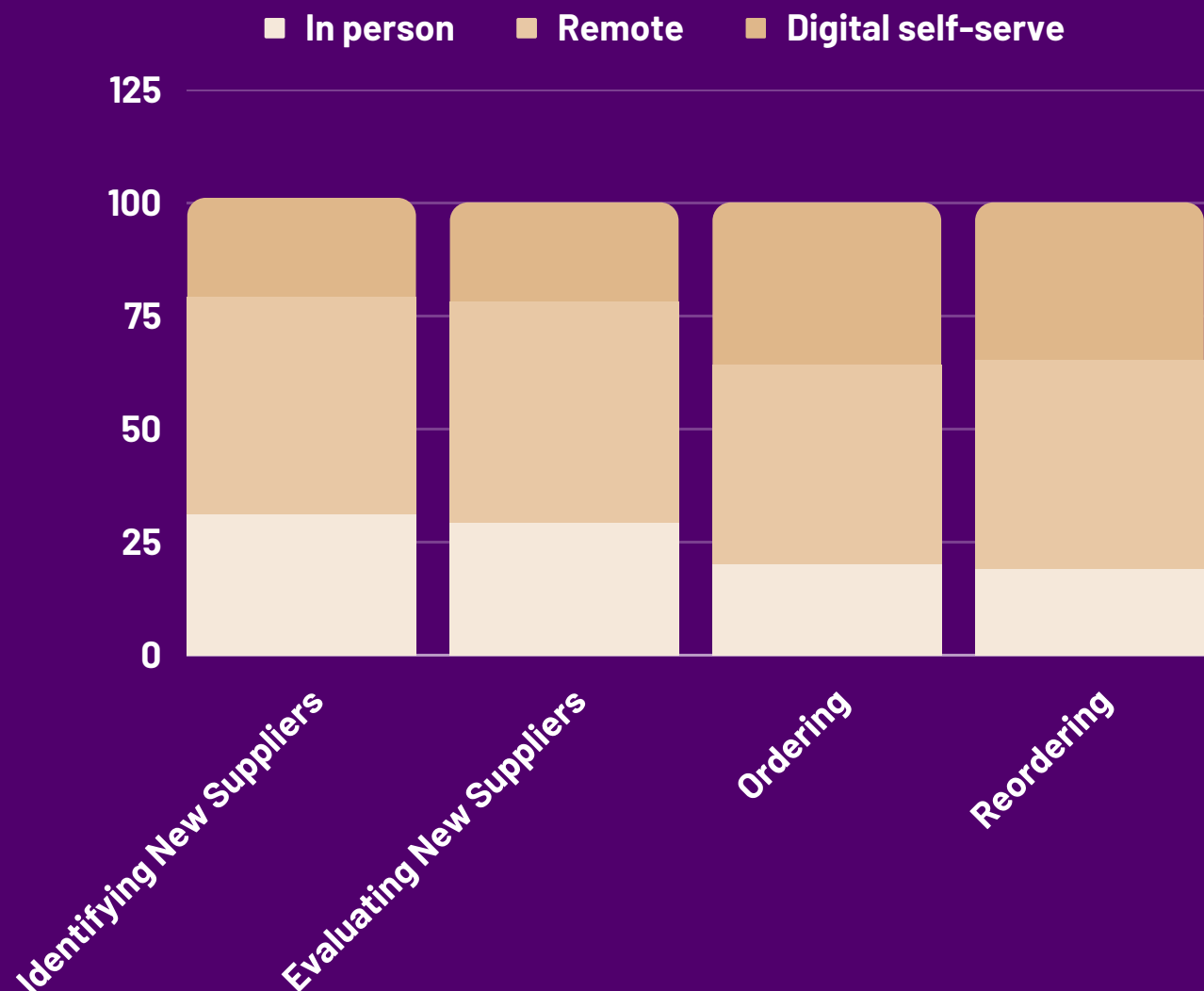In fact, selling will no longer be confined to the physical walls of a store--it will evolve into a digitally enhanced ecosystem, one where customers will 'try on' items and buy them using avatars.

Avatar-driven Virtual Selling is the Future—And The Future is Here

Let's now understand how avatars can be used to drive sales within industries across the board, such as:
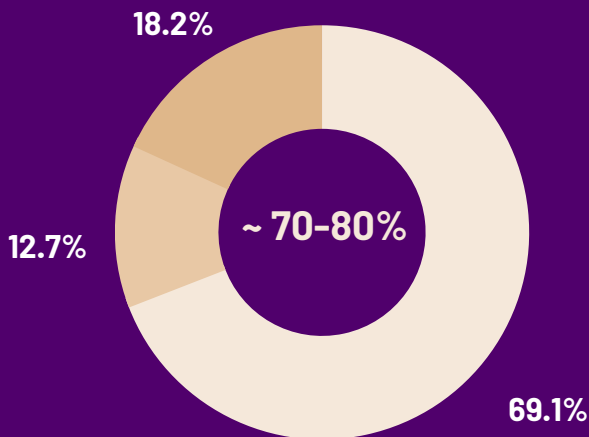
More B2B seller interactions have moved to remote or digital….

Current way of interacting with suppliers' sales reps during different stages (% of respondents)

Legend: ■ In person ■ Remote ■ Digital self-serve

Categories: Identifying New Suppliers, Evaluating New Suppliers, Ordering, Reordering

Source

... and that's exactly what customers want.

18.2%

12.7%

~ 70-80%

69.1%

of B2B decision makers prefer remote human interactions or digital self-service

Source

Why?
- Ease of scheduling
- Savings on travel expenses
- Safety

"More than three-quarters of buyers and sellers say they now prefer digital self-serve and remote human engagement over face-to-face interactions."
As per McKinsey, the Gen Z of today prioritizes truth above all else as opposed to the millennials, who are known as the "me generation." Organizations that are able to analyze valuable customer insights like these--and integrate them into their sales avatars--can benefit from a deeper relationship with their customers and increase their sales. Want to drive virtual sales, ask probing questions, and identify customer pain points in a virtual setting? It's time to include avatar-driven sales strategies in your organizational agenda.

About DaveAI

DaveAI is a visual AI platform that bridges the gap between self-assisted online discovery & salesperson-assisted offline discovery.

We help brands drive sales with advanced product discovery experiences using an interactive Virtual Sales Avatar that mimics a human sales brain, understands customer requirements & provides hyper-personalized product recommendations.