

# Create a Virtual SKO Like a Design Thinker

PREPARED FOR SOMERSAULT

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## Sales kickoffs may never be the same again—and that's okay.

In fact, it's better than okay. So much of the planning, effort, and budget of a traditional SKO goes into the logistics of travel, hotels, and venues. When these no longer apply, there's more room to focus on what really matters most: what your sellers need to do to win more business and how.

If you're like most companies then you're running a virtual SKO for the first time ever. We've heard concerns from companies of all sizes struggling to reimagine their biggest sales event of the year with the biggest question being, how do we make it engaging?

At Somersault Innovation, we teach salespeople how to engage with customers as trusted advisors. We apply three principles in design thinking to sales: empathy, curiosity, and customer-centricity. In the case of a SKO, your own salespeople are your customers. You can use these same three principles to create a virtual SKO that satisfies the needs of your salespeople and your organization.

In this guide we'll show you some best practices from a network of experts and real-world examples of a successful virtual SKO from VP of Global Enablement, New Relic, Marcela Piñeros, who is quoted throughout.





# “Everything needs to tie back to the what’s-in-it-for-me.”

## TIP ONE

### Know your SKO customer

Designing an effective virtual SKO begins by empathizing with your salespeople. Just as salespeople need to take the time to understand their customers, your organization needs to put itself in the shoes of your salespeople. You can take the pressure off yourself by sharing the responsibility of designing the agenda with sales. Involve a salesperson to present, run sessions or be part of your planning team. Salespeople are especially protective of their time, so the value of your content and activities needs to be apparent from the start.

Here’s how to make the agenda and content of your SKO relevant:

→ **Address the concerns, challenges, and requests from your salespeople.**

Anonymous surveys and polls are useful for getting the most candid insights. These findings can be used to develop purpose-built activities.

→ **Hear from your salespeople.**

Seek seller stories from across the team to gain a deep understanding of their experience and what kind of SKO content will meet their needs.

→ **Ask for a demonstration from your salespeople**

Ask your salespeople to show you how they run a sales call, research a competitor, or whatever else their day-to-day consists of. Use what you learn to construct the SKO content.



“We’re trying to recreate the intangible, warm and fuzzies to give a video conference a real shot in the arm.”

**TIP TWO**

## Redesigning time and space

In the case of a virtual SKO, there needs to be a degree of empathy for the remote nature of the event itself. While an in-person SKO may have required 3-4 full days, is that same amount of time necessary now?

### → Minimize distractions and fatigue:

- Help your salespeople take care of distractions from their children by sending them movies to download or a kit of activities for their kids.
- Offer enough break times between sessions and warm-up activities.
- Package programming for global teams in different time zones with pre-recorded sessions.
- Stagger start times that begin earlier in a day for one time zone and later in the day for another.
- Run multiple localized SKOs.

### → Save company announcements for later

So often we see SKO agendas that are dominated by one-way company announcements. These topics tend to simply be FYIs, things that could have been communicated in an email, or any other time other than your SKO. A key differentiating factor for including a topic is whether you can instill interaction, giving people an opportunity to ask questions, share their

reactions, and so on. To maximize the time you have with your salespeople all together, reserve memos for internal communications via email or your internal chat app.

Here’s what to consider including and removing from your SKO agenda:

INCLUDE	REMOVE
New leadership	New systems
New compensation plans	New processes
New territory assignments	New product or service releases and features

### → Empower space-making

Every salesperson’s remote office situation is different. Help your sellers create the optimal virtual SKO experience by allocating a budget for them to personalize their space. You can set parameters and standards around eligible items to expense, such as better mics, cameras, an external monitor, to set the “home stage.” These investments can also help boost team morale and productivity long after your virtual SKO ends.

# “It was an opportunity to rethink everything.”

## TIP THREE

### Design an experience

Creating engaging sessions for your salespeople is just like creating engagement with your customers. It's all about the experience. Think about the entire journey you want to take your salespeople on before, during and post-SKO.

#### BEFORE YOUR VIRTUAL SKO

##### → Market your SKO internally to build up anticipation

Treat your salespeople like customers—woo them with a splashy awareness campaign that has its own theme, tagline, and a look and feel that ties into your company's brand identity.

The impact of an internal marketing campaign:

- Increase attendance and engagement
- Reinforce the unity of your sales teams
- Boost interest and excitement
- Enhance the legitimacy of your programming

##### → Create contingency plans

For any SKO, but especially a virtual SKO that wholly relies on technology, things

don't always go according to plan. Take time with your team to think through every possible opportunity for things to go wrong, and decide how you're going to solve problems that could arise. By planning for as much as you can ahead of time, you'll have the brain and bandwidth to

handle the things that you didn't plan for if they happen.

Your salespeople also need an actionable contingency plan. What happens if someone's internet goes down, or their cell phone gets locked out, and they have no way to get back into your virtual SKO? Provide a sense of safety and security by sending an emergency “parachute” kit that includes instructions for how to contact someone who can troubleshoot. There should be a clear line of communication, so no one ever feels completely out of touch.

#### DURING YOUR VIRTUAL SKO

The number one challenge of virtual SKOs is recreating the engagement level of an in-person event. And yet, done well, a virtual event makes it easier to scale activities and share content in an engaging way. Here are the top ways salespeople want to engage during any SKO:

##### → A friendly competition of sales knowledge with gamification

The competitive nature of salespeople makes games a highly effective way to engage with them. For the purposes of a SKO, the most useful games are those that test recall and connections.

You'll also want to be mindful about how teams are organized. Include a role on the team that will drive adoption, and give each team their own channel to communicate for team building.

Games should be kept simple and not require learning unfamiliar rules to play. For example,

reinforce session sales knowledge by having each session begin with a rapid-fire test in a virtual arcade. Regions can compete against each other—how many correct answers can they get in one minute, 30 seconds, 15 seconds? Be sure to have enough questions to allow for playing repeatedly. You'll know you're successful when your engineers start to hack the game!

Honestly, they might hack it, so make sure to have a plan for what to do when your game gets hacked by your own people. Perhaps you will repurpose the hackers to upgrade the game!

Games can also be franchised for different sales teams, customized to suit their particular use-cases and knowledge.

To encourage full participation, ask your sellers to decide what the prize should be and don't reveal what they are until the very end. The longer you wait to reveal the prize, the more engagement you will create.

For those who don't like games, offer different ways to earn points throughout SKO such as participation in breakouts.

It's more than likely that participants will want to track their score and compare it to others. Having more opportunities for salespeople to earn points means your leaderboard should be able to update scores frequently. Not of caution, don't offer more opportunities for points than you can update on a leaderboard on a regular basis.

Personalizing the leaderboards, and also rewarding those who beat their personal best encourages participation as well. And don't forget to track engagement with the game so you can measure how it impacted sales performance after SKO.

## Gamification expert Gabe Zichermann has created an easy mnemonic to capture the key reward schemes that motivate participants, called "SAPS."

### STATUS

top of leaderboard, email a badge or announce to SKO

### ACCESS

you get to join lunch with the CEO for career advice

### POWER

peer judge for others, co-facilitators

### STUFF

receiving a tangible reward, like AirPods

**VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

**SPINNIFY FOR LEADERBOARD SERVICES**

**DATA STUDIO TO CREATE DASHBOARDS**



### → Putting training into practice

Salespeople are eager to learn whatever will help them close more deals faster. Opportunities to put their training into practice are both highly valuable and appreciated. Get your teams practicing their demos, stories, objection handling, and account planning. Every practice is subject to feedback from peers, making the activity more engaging and helpful.

### → Putting their feedback into action—fast!

Request rapid feedback from the participants after each session. Whether it's a speaker, a game, a training, or some other kind of interactive activity, a quick anonymous survey, can be used to collect just-in-time information on your SKO. Conduct debriefs among your SKO planning team between sessions (and at the end of each day) to review input and provide tips for improvement to session leaders, and adjust content in the following sessions. Any and every improvement you make based on participant feedback will be noticed and will positively impact engagement.

It also takes the pressure off the planning motion, and gets more fingerprints from the participants on a shared experience.

### AFTER YOUR VIRTUAL SKO

The SKO doesn't end on the last day of the event. It will serve you in the long-run to treat the event as a kick off to an ongoing learning process. .

### → Track key performance indicators (KPIs)

Your SKO is just a kickoff to the behaviors that you're trying to influence. Be thoughtful about what you're measuring. In addition to getting to know what your participants have to say about your SKO, there are common types of quantitative metrics that can help give you a more complete picture, such as:

- Session and web analytics to see what content is being engaged with most
- Session tracking data track to ensure employee attendance and compliance
- Engagement scoring metrics based on completion of activities and attendance
- Self-reported increase in confidence to tell your organization's sales narrative and knowledge of customer needs and problems before and after the event

### → Keep SKO alive beyond the event

Once your SKO ends it's helpful to have follow-up sessions that ensure the learning continues with additional training and reinforcement. After all, SKOs set the tone for the rest of the year. So, it's only natural that content from your SKO extends into ongoing efforts to improve sales performance. The ultimate indicator of a successful virtual SKO is sales performance.





# “We pulled away from the ‘open up your brain, we’re going to dump stuff into it’ way of thinking.”

## TIP FOUR

### Inspirational examples

Here are ideas for reimagining your virtual SKO to inspire, engage, motivate, and teach your salespeople unlike ever before.

#### → Blurring the physical and digital

- Allow every participant to expense meal deliveries to make it feel more like an event and less of a video conference call.
- Mail every participant physical cards to use in a team exercise or as a physical substitute for emojis. (Our gift to you - see pdf companion card set to this guide)

#### → Activate participation

- Allow participants to shape the agenda of your SKO, using a poll or voting system.
- Offer different versions of the SKO agenda, and allow participants to “choose their own adventure” to build an agenda most relevant to them.
- Bring inspirational speakers from outside the company with a live Q&A. company.

#### → Facilitate social time

- Organize happy hours, allowing participants to expense their beverage delivery, with breakout rooms that each have a theme. Participants can move from room to room.
- Offer wellness programming, such as yoga or guided meditations, that enhances break times.
- Create smaller breakout rooms for topical group discussions.

#### → Learn from your customers

- Invite customers to share what their experience of the virtual sales cycle was.
- Have your top salespeople share their virtual success stories and actionable strategies that their peers can use.
- Roleplay your target customer, to help salespeople empathize with their pain points.

**And, give yourselves a break. Perfection is the enemy of good! Experiment with a few things and know that it won't all go swimmingly, but you will learn, and be surprised by those that do.**

### ABOUT SOMERSAULT

Combining our years of experience in sales, and Design Thinking, we created Somersault Innovation to put the tools and practices of Design Thinking into the hands of sales professionals. Our The Sell by Design™ methodology not only reduces the time it takes to get the first meeting, build pipeline, and increase deal size, it also fosters creativity and drives deeper human connection in an era of automated response.