

Changing the Way We Sell

Introducing the IFMA Go-To-Market Planning Program

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IFMA

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strategy set in motion



Changing the Way We Sell

While the response to the pandemic necessitated a differentiated approach, the evolution of foodservice selling had already begun in the years prior to the turn of the decade. Operators are now more time starved than ever before and are consuming information and data in new ways (e.g., social media, videos). Additionally, there has been further consolidation in sales brokerage, reducing the number of “feet on the street,” and manufacturers are now redefining their value propositions towards customers, including more customer support and services (e.g., menu development, innovation, and consumer trends).

Alongside these industry changes, technology has also evolved, making it easier than before for businesses to connect with customers. Zoom has entered the common vernacular due to Covid, but there are many other virtual meeting platforms that allow trading partners to meet and collaborate. Conferences and trade shows now can be conducted virtually and provide opportunities to make connections with business prospects. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has continued to evolve from activity tracking to a single integrated dashboard where sales people can access everything to do with a prospect or a customer.

While other industries have been quick to adopt new go-to-market technologies, foodservice has been slower in its implementation. Besides the long-standing relationships typically found in foodservice, one question remains most prevalent in manufacturers’ minds: “How does a foodservice manufacturer, whose selling approach focused on putting food in a potential customer’s mouth, adapt to take advantage of new tools and technology?”

IFMA Go-To-Market Planning Program

As part of IFMA’s long-range plan its Board of Directors implemented three years ago, IFMA was directed to focus on three key pillars that are driving the industry and its members’ businesses: the Consumer, Operator, and Go-to-Market. Over the course of the last three years, IFMA has invested over \$1 million to develop new insights and tools in these areas, including Phase I of its new Go-to-Market Model, which can be found in the IFMA SCOPE™ online portal.

IFMA Go-To-Market Program Objective

An ongoing program that builds solutions & tools that drive business action to address current go-to-market challenges that Foodservice manufacturers face.

As the next phase of its Go-to-Market journey, IFMA developed the Go-to-Market (GTM) Planning Program, in partnership with Kinetic12 Consulting, to build solutions and tools that drive business action. This program is designed to address current go-to-market challenges, share best practices, build a deeper understanding of operator needs, and create tools that enable members to target, sell, and manage customers more effectively.

Since July 2020, a committee of nearly 30 leading foodservice manufacturers has met monthly to collaborate on go-to-market best practices. One of the first decisions of the newly formed committee was to decide on an initial topic. After much discussion, it was decided that the committee wanted to focus their initial efforts on better understanding how to integrate virtual operator engagement into the traditional foodservice selling process.



Understanding of the Current State of the Industry

Through an initial series of workshops facilitated by IFMA and Kinetic12, the committee identified issues and needs related to how manufacturers are currently interacting remotely with operators. These mediums include online meetings, by phone, through website content and videos, via virtual food shows, through CRM programs, and a variety of other non-face-to-face interactions.

With the committee's direction, Kinetic12 conducted more than 40 interviews with operators and manufacturers and surveyed over 300 independent operators with the goal of better understanding the current state of virtual engagement. This discovery focused on six operator segments (independent restaurants, chain restaurants, colleges & universities, business & industry, K-12 - primary & secondary education, and healthcare). This research investigated the following areas:

- What activities work best in a virtual environment and what activities need to be done in-person?
- What are some of the best practices in virtual selling that you have observed?
- How do operators expect to engage with trading partners going forward?

In addition, technology companies offering virtual engagement tools were evaluated. Some of the technology companies were also interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the applicability of their tools in foodservice.

Learnings from this research were shared with the committee where best practices and activation ideas were discussed.

What We Learned

1. Initial Prospecting and Ongoing Customer Management are the biggest areas for Virtual Operator Engagement going forward.

Most operators expect virtual engagement to continue to be an integral part of how they communicate with existing and potential new suppliers. However, there are certain areas where virtual engagement will continue to play a much larger role.

The first area is the prospecting and identification of new suppliers and products. Outside of food and trade shows, operators are learning about new products online, and it can be expected that the number of operators using the internet to search product information will continue to grow. It will be important for suppliers to have virtual tools that make it easy for operators to learn about their products and their company. Such tools include product websites that are tailored to specific segments, technology that allows operators to ask questions about products in real-time, and full integration into a CRM/Lead Management system so there can be quick follow-up. The meteoric rise of social media will only continue to enable better connection with certain operator segments. Manufacturers looking to benefit from this should aim to develop a social media strategy, especially those focused on onsite operators (e.g., K-12, C&U, B&I, Healthcare).

The second area where virtual tools play a significant role is ongoing customer management. Operators want to meet with their current suppliers, especially during turbulent times. Using virtual tools does enable manufacturers to meet with operators more frequently as well as involve other cross-functional roles and/or senior leadership, which strengthens those relationships. Surveys and interviews revealed growth in the use of on-demand video for product training. On-demand video enables operators to provide training to new employees as needed and conduct training when the employee's schedule best allows for it.

There are some areas where we can expect to see a shift back to mostly in-person meetings, such as food & trade shows, as well as interactions which ideally require face-to-face connection - selling meetings, cuttings, innovation/ideation sessions, and plant & operations tours.

Moving forward, suppliers now have a greater selection of tools available to them. Developing an integrated approach that combines virtual and in-person strategies will be the most effective course of action for manufacturers looking to optimize their ever-crucial sales efforts.

2. Segments have very different views on virtual engagement, depending on how they engaged with manufacturers pre-pandemic.

One important research observation was that the operator's enthusiasm in using virtual tools to engage with suppliers depended on the current level of supplier engagement. For example, chain operators are less enthusiastic about using virtual tools since they are used to having a high level of in-person interaction with suppliers. However, B&I operators are excited about the opportunity to engage virtually with suppliers, as they currently do not have much direct interaction and desire value-added support that suppliers can offer.

Understanding these differences can enable manufacturers to be smarter about how they invest their limited sales and marketing resources. Suppliers should use virtual meetings for segments that are more enthused about them and use in-person meetings for segments that have grown to expect them. Using this type of strategy will allow manufacturers to call on customers in segments for which they previously did not have the necessary sales and marketing resources to make those face-to-face calls.

3. While opinions vary about the benefits of different tools and platforms, the most important factor is the quantity of engagement and quality of the content.

There were significant differences in how foodservice segments viewed virtual engagement by suppliers, but one theme was consistent across all segments - *operators want more communication with suppliers and care less about the platform through which that communication is delivered*. Given this learning, manufacturers would be better off aligning to a specific online meeting platform as an organization and train their teams on best practices in the broader idea of virtual communication that can be used across any platform. For example, having a basic understanding of how to use the chat feature and how to share documents real-time within the meeting platform will enable more successful meetings.

Virtual tools represent an opportunity to expand the touchpoints that manufacturers have with operators. As mentioned earlier, you can now add virtual touch-base meetings with customers with which you can only realistically do in-person meetings every three-six months. As you expand your customer touchpoints using virtual tools, remember that operators also want quality content. Make sure that you are sharing information that is relevant to them and/or helping them solve their business issues. Please see IFMA SCOPE for more information on types of customer support & services that different segments are looking for from suppliers.

Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit

The collective outputs and learnings of this work has been consolidated into the Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit, which features new content, insights, models, and tools to help Foodservice manufacturers evaluate their current virtual engagement approach and identify areas to invest and optimize.

The tool kit includes:

- Operator Needs Summary
- Best Practices Maturity Model
- Provider Landscape

Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit

The Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit is designed as a best practice that enables improved interaction among all trading partners to foster more effective communication and business results.

The toolkit can be downloaded at <https://www.ifmaworld.com/virtual-operator-engagement-tool/>

Navigating the Portal

The new Virtual Engagement Toolkit portal is designed to provide a wealth of data, insights, and recommendations for manufacturers. Users move through the portal first by choosing a segment in which they are interested.

Select Your Segment



Chain Restaurants

[Explore](#)



College and University

[Explore](#)



Independent Restaurants

[Explore](#)



Healthcare

[Explore](#)



Business & Industry

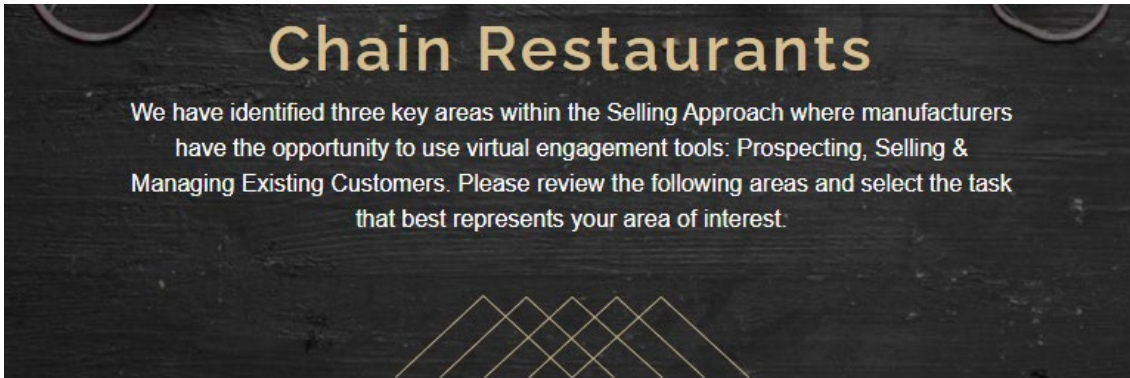
[Explore](#)



K-12

[Explore](#)

The user then chooses a task. Tasks are organized by the three main areas of a general selling approach: 1) Prospecting or Identifying Potential Customers; 2) Selling or Converting a Prospect to a Customer; 3) Managing Existing Customers Relationships. Examples of tasks include: Trade Shows, Selling Meetings, Cuttings, and Product Training.



Chain Restaurants

<p>Prospecting</p> <p>The task of identifying and qualifying new account and new business opportunities.</p>	<p>Trade Shows Product Portal / Website Social Media / YouTube Lead Management</p>	
<p>Selling</p> <p>Demonstrating your products and their point of difference, use and value in order to close new business.</p>	<p>Selling Meetings Innovation / Ideation Cuttings / Samples Tours (Plant or Operations)</p>	
<p>Managing</p> <p>The ongoing job of servicing existing business, building loyalty through demonstrated value and building a long-term win-win relationship with your customers.</p>	<p>Business Updates & Reviews Product Training CRM Supply Chain Management</p>	

On the task webpage, you will see content organized into three areas: Operator Needs, the Best Practices & Maturity Model, and the Provider Landscape.

Toolkit Components



Operator Needs

The Operator Needs component of the portal provides an understanding of their current needs and what they are seeking from suppliers regarding virtual engagement. The feedback has been organized around specific engagement tools, such as online product portals, web meetings, and trade shows.

Based on the feedback, recommendations on what a manufacturer should do are also provided in the tool. These recommendations can help turn the learnings from the tool into specific business actions manufacturers can implement.

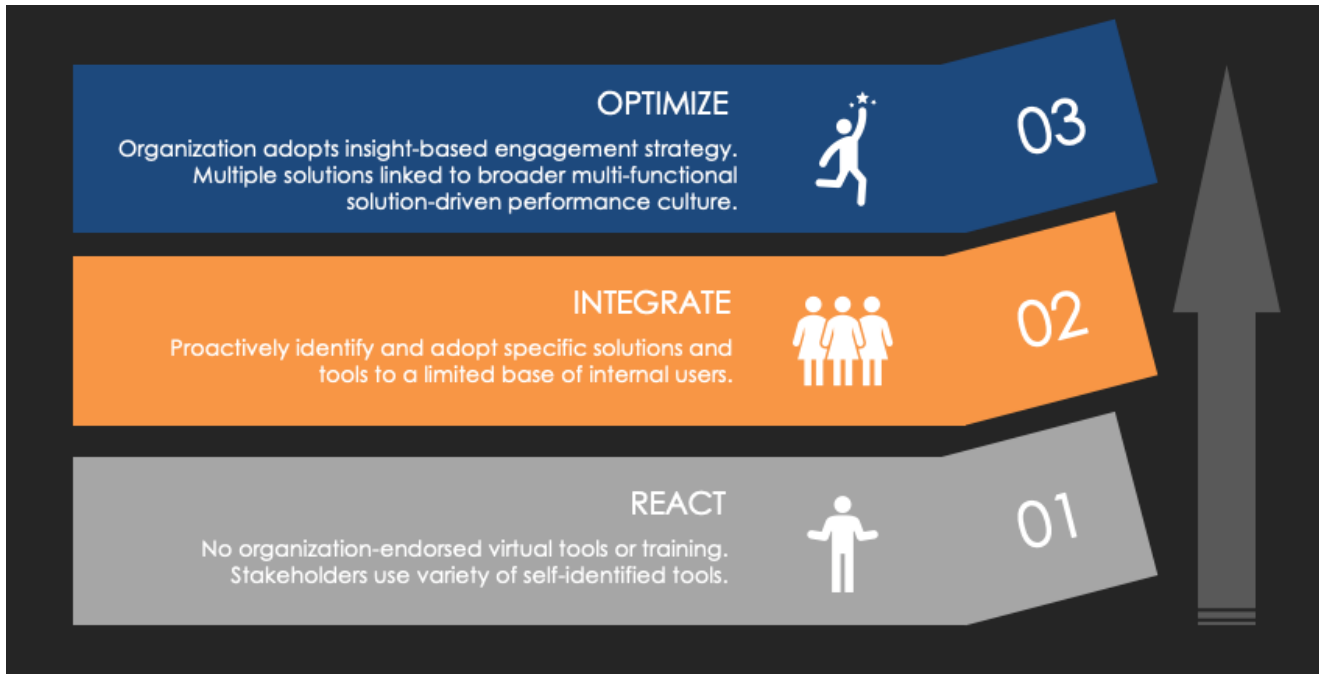
Virtual Engagement Toolkit – Portal snapshot for Chain Restaurant’s / Operator Needs / Trade Shows

The screenshot shows a web page with a red header containing the text 'Trade Shows'. Below the header is a breadcrumb trail: 'Introduction / Chain Restaurant / Trade Shows'. The main heading is 'Operator Needs'. The text below reads: 'Overview of operator needs and manufacturer recommendations on virtual operator engagement as well as prioritization of investment areas for manufacturers by segment.' There is a legend for priority levels: High Priority (dark tan), Medium Priority (medium tan), and Low Priority (light tan). Below the legend is a table with two columns: 'Feedback' and 'Recommendations'.

Feedback	Recommendations
Operators like trade/food shows that allow them to efficiently gather information from many suppliers and are open to doing this virtually. While many chain restaurants are focused on optimizing their current menu and ensuring consistent supply to its units, they did express interest in the following new product development areas: 1) Off-Premise 2) Quality / Value-added Ingredients 3) Multi-Use Ingredients	Manufacturers should highlight how their products address the areas of focus as well as their overall value proposition for chain restaurant operators.
Chain restaurants do appreciate that virtual trade shows enable better time management by allowing them to focus on specific areas of interest or only attend when they have a booked meeting. Chain restaurants are also seeking ways to create a more personal engagement with manufacturers at virtual trade shows.	Manufacturers should consider trade shows with advanced features, such as scheduling and the ability to immediately go into a one-on-one room. Adding detailed product information with links and drop down options is also a best practice.

Best Practices & Maturity Model

The Best Practices and Maturity Model outlines three levels of organizational development to help manufacturers assess their current level of virtual engagement sophistication and to understand what best-in-class looks like. The top level of the Maturity Model, called “Optimize,” outlines best-in-class strategies, processes, and tools that a leader in virtual engagement would have adopted.



Virtual Engagement Toolkit – Portal snapshot for Chain Restaurant’s / Maturity Model

The Maturity Model is a useful self-assessment tool to understand where your organization is today in terms of virtual engagement expertise and where it must invest and improve to become more effective in its prospecting, selling, and account management efforts.

The IFMA portal provides customized views of the Organization Maturity Model, including how an organization evolves and is defined across the three levels. This evolution is defined by several characteristics including:

Development State, Training Approach, Functional Involvement, as well as how they have adopted and used the various virtual engagement tools, such as use of online meeting services and virtual trade show services, to name a few.

Organization Maturity Model

Outlines three levels of organizational development to help you advance your virtual engagement capabilities and success

<p>Level 1: REACT</p> <p>No organization-endorsed virtual tools or training. Stakeholders use variety of self-identified tools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely following the customer lead and utilizing their designated ideation tools/venues • No org-driven top down virtual approach
<p>Level 2: INTEGRATE</p> <p>Proactively identify and adopt specific solutions and tools to a limited base of internal users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of some elements of virtual collaborative innovation and ideation • Ad hoc use driven by individual preferences
<p>Level 3: OPTIMIZE</p> <p>Organization adopts insight-based engagement strategy. Multiple solutions linked to broader multi-functional solution-driven performance culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad adoption, across all key functions, of virtual tools for ideation, culinary demos and collaborative innovation • Integrated approach linked to online/web, videos/demos and sampling kits

Provider Landscape

The Technology Provider Landscape is a detailed list of the top virtual engagement service providers. It is organized by the type of virtual tool provided, such as online meeting service, online trade show management, or CRM.

Beside each provider is an overview of the service they offer, including how they describe their “Provider’s Positioning,” their website, a description of their key services, and comments from operators and manufacturers interviewed by the IFMA/Kinetic12 team.

This is a comprehensive tool for manufacturers seeking to understand what service providers are available for each virtual engagement task.

Virtual Engagement Toolkit – Portal snapshot for Chain Restaurant’s / Technology Provider Landscape showing Lead Management service providers.

Technology Provider Landscape				
Overview of technology service companies currently available to facilitate operator-supplier virtual engagement.				
Provider	Provider's Positioning	Website URL	Description of Services	IFMA Interviewee Perspective
Food Sales Enablers	"Sales Enablement Solutions For The Foodservice Industry"	https://www.fsenablers.com/	CRM, Master Data Libraries, Sales Call Management, Opportunity Management, Initiative Management	A CRM system unique to foodservice makes a lot of difference.
SalesForce	"Get back to growth with the world's #1 CRM, powered by Customer 360"	https://www.salesforce.com/	CRM	Use to better connect and manage a sales team as well as keep tabs on customer touch points. Best to link virtual meeting capability with CRM system.

What Should a Manufacturer Do Next?

One of the most important elements of the GTM Planning Program is creating solutions & tools that enable business action by manufacturers. While research is an important part of the process, the committee’s goal was also to focus on activation. The committee spent a significant amount of time discussing the application of the Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit to a manufacturer’s business.

As you review the Toolkit, we recommend you ask yourself the following questions:

1. What changes need to be made within my organization to integrate virtual engagement into our customer prospecting, selling, and management approach?
2. What type of support will we need to make these initial changes, as well as to ensure that these changes become an ongoing part of how we go to market?

As you look to integrate virtual operator engagement into your selling approach, here are some specific recommendations you should consider:

- View virtual operator engagement as a way to more efficiently identify, sell, and manage customers even as face-to-face meetings return.
- Benchmark your organization’s current virtual engagement using the Organization Maturity Model tool found in the virtual operator engagement toolkit.
- Build a virtual engagement strategy and integrate virtual operator engagement tools into your selling process as well as into your CRM system.
- Rethink your current ROI on virtual engagement investments based on your priority segments and your Organization Maturity Model self-assessment.
- Use virtual operator engagement tools to target and sell segments that you have not traditionally had the resources to call on.
- Identify at-risk customers and use virtual engagement tools to increase your touchpoints with them.
- Provide training on virtual operator engagement to the sales & marketing teams, while sharing the business case for operator engagement with the broader organization.

In addition, there are “activation recommendations” found within the Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit which can be found at <https://www.ifmaworld.com/virtual-operator-engagement-toolkit/>.

Interested in Joining the Go-To-Market Planning Program?

While we have completed the work on building the Virtual Operator Engagement Toolkit, the committee continues to discuss how to activate this work within their organizations, including exploring the opportunity to conduct pilots with interested operators.

Moving forward, the Go-to-Market Planning Program will focus on developing new actionable resources and tools to help IFMA members with their sales strategies and planning. Committee members will direct the focus of future projects, and will have exclusive access to the tools that are built.

If you have an interest in joining the GTM Planning Program, please contact IFMA for more information.

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Contact us to learn more about how your organization can activate the Virtual Operator Engagement Tool Kit, the GTM Planning Program, and other go-to-market tools & best practices available from IFMA & Kinetic12.

The International Foodservice Manufacturers Association (IFMA) is an established trade association serving foodservice manufacturers for over 65 years to improve industry practices and relationships while equipping every foodservice manufacturer with the tools to navigate their future with confidence. By providing insights, developing best practices and fostering connectivity through events, we enlighten members and motivate change that leads to betterment for the individual member organization and the industry at large. For more information, visit IFMAworld.com.