

mindtickle

SKO KIT

2024 Hybrid Sales Kickoff Playbook

Introduction

The ultimate goal of a sales kickoff (SKO) is to bring your revenue team together, celebrate wins, and align on how to tackle the upcoming quarter or year. But in our increasingly digital world, we're seeing more than ever before SKOs that are either entirely virtual or a hybrid of in-person and remote.

Now, does taking the physical togetherness out of an SKO have an impact on its success? It can if you assume the same approach used for an in-person event will work virtually. But if you plan thoughtfully and use creative approaches to compensate for any peer-to-peer engagement potentially lost in a virtual setting, you can create a memorable experience that's just as good — if not better — than in-person SKOs.

With that said, we know tackling a virtual SKO can be intimidating. In fact, it might feel as if you've been tasked with climbing Mount Everest, and you're missing some essential gear. That's why we put together this visual playbook to help you reach the SKO summit — and descend swiftly and safely into your organization's next growth period.

In the following pages, we'll explore how to tackle your upcoming virtual or hybrid SKO, beginning with how to establish a strategy and theme, ways to encourage team members to do prep work before the big day, tips for engaging sales reps with competitions and role-plays, and, finally, how to reinforce learning with post-kickoff certifications and incentives.



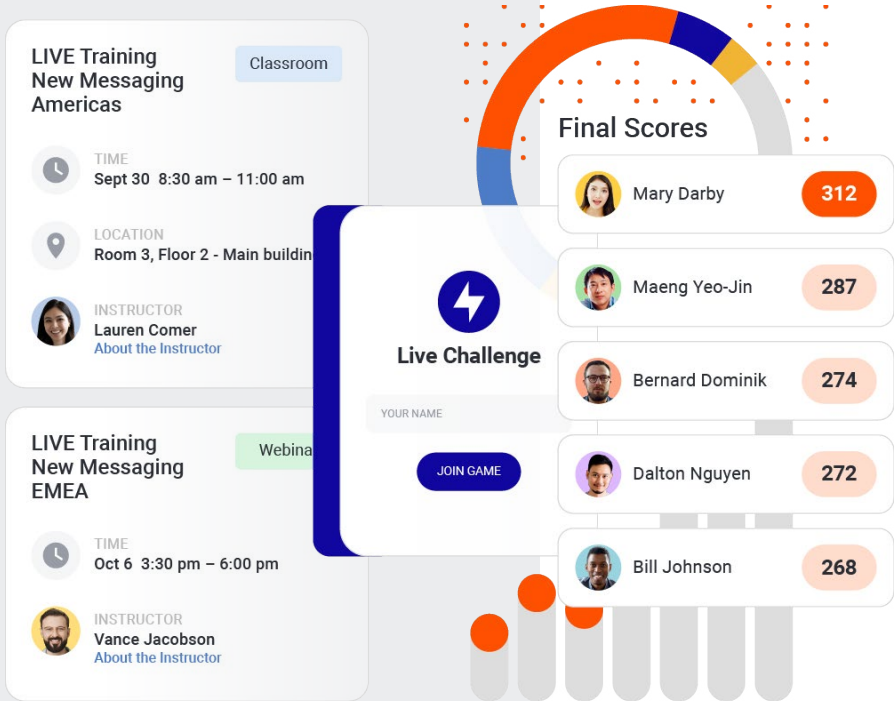


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Planning your SKO journey

Whether it's your first SKO or you're looking to improve on the last one, an SKO — virtual or not — requires diligent planning. That starts with defining objectives and determining the key messages, learnings, and skills your team needs to take back to the field.

In this section, we'll explore what you need to do before the event to make your kickoff as impactful as possible.



Define the theme

The recipe for a winning SKO starts with a great theme because it helps to refine your messaging, solidify objectives, and, ultimately, make the event memorable.

Typically, themes are centered around motivation or growth but are general enough to tie multiple messages and takeaways through the event's presentations and activities. Like our Everest theme for this playbook, your theme will ensure consistency while also engaging sellers.

During this planning phase, you'll need to meet with your Chief Revenue Officer (CRO) and other sales leaders to discuss how to mobilize and energize the team with the highest-impact sessions. Start thinking about collecting sales performance data to benchmark against (from both your team and from across the industry), wins, and customer success stories.

Identify the right technology

While your primary focus during SKO planning is on content and messaging, you need to ensure you have the right technology to deliver on your vision. An effective platform will unify all activities for the event in one place, and make it easy to engage both virtual and in-person attendees. It's important to start with a software solution where you can author and host content, build and manage course sessions for live events, keep reps engaged (gamification, sales competitions, interactive questions, etc.), and enable reps with learning and training sessions both during the event and afterward.

Increasingly, organizations are leveraging digital collaboration technology like Digital Sales Rooms to consolidate content and communication for events like SKOs. By hosting agendas, content, pre-work, and post-work in one persistent portal, you simplify and improve the attendee experience, and get granular engagement data for all participants.

Best-in-class sales enablement platforms have the capability to facilitate the planning and execution of all activities before, during, and after the event. A great solution not only saves on cost and effort but also unifies all event resources in the same location as all other sales content and training materials. This makes it easier for sellers to access content in the future and enables you to better leverage SKO content from year to year. Additionally, sellers won't have to download or learn any new software before the event.





Align expectations

Embarking on an Everest expedition without a clear understanding of expectations would be a risky undertaking. Just as you'd prepare your climbing team for the journey ahead, your sales team needs to know what to expect from your SKO.

Creating a comprehensive agenda will accomplish two key goals: it'll align team expectations and also get reps excited for what's to come. When crafting the agenda, it's especially important to make sure you're integrating interactive elements to keep your audience engaged. Balancing inspirational keynotes, panel discussions, and leadership updates with interactive breakout sessions, role-plays, and challenges will make the team more involved.

A great way to kick things off and generate enthusiasm before the event is to send a short recorded welcome video from your CEO, CRO, or other sales executive along with the agenda. In this message, the leader can generate buzz about the SKO, generate excitement about the fantastic, successful year ahead, and tell sellers to stay tuned for more information about pre-work.

The planning stage is a great time to focus on how this SKO can help you achieve your organizational goals for the year, and compile insights from the field and integrate them into sessions. Survey customer-facing teams about their immediate challenges in lead generation, hand-off, prospecting, and closing opportunities, and compile examples of live prospect calls where sales reps have encountered objections or discussed pain points or potential new use cases of your solution.

Finalize content

With growing excitement and enthusiasm about the SKO, it's time to solidify how each session looks. This means building each session's content, working with speakers on their decks, scheduling time to complete prerecorded talks or speeches, and planning breakout discussions, games, or competitions.

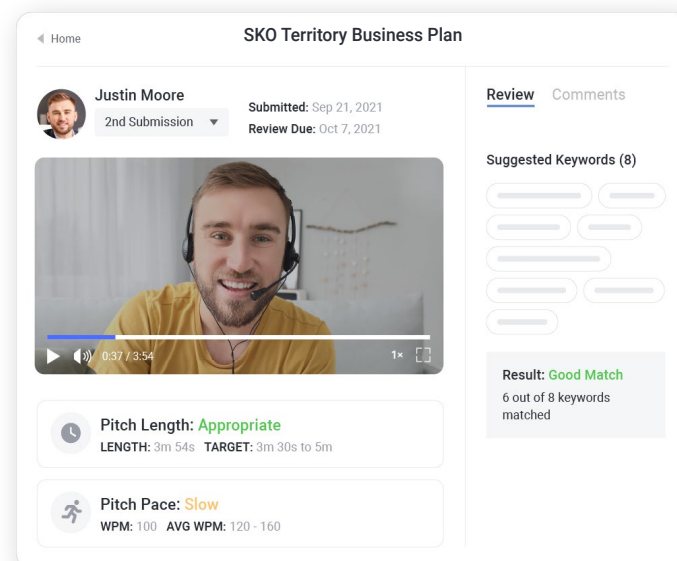
In addition to presentations from sales leaders, an SKO is a great opportunity to engage other teams within the organization to provide updates on their department's goals and initiatives and how they can help the sales team in meeting their revenue goals. Ensure presenters prepare a deck for sales leadership to review ahead of time, and ensure their presentation clearly ties back to the event theme and the sales goals.

Sellers value and learn from the successes and challenges of their peers. During SKO sessions, you can leverage conversation snippets from real-world sales calls to bring the presentation topic to life and showcase best practices or pitfalls to avoid. You can use your conversation intelligence tool to identify and earmark these calls during the planning phase, and clips can even be sent to sellers to review as part of their prework.

As you solidify the agenda and accompanying content, centralize all resources — agendas, session presentations, event pre-work, breakout session instructions, and more — in one place to make it easier for attendees to access everything they need before, during, and after the event. Using Digital Sales Room technology for this purpose allows you to create a dynamic and seamless attendee experience.

Assign pre-work

Prior to the event, sellers should start to get their heads in the game and warm up for what's to come. Depending on the SKO's focus, there are a variety of different pre-work activities that can engage sellers before the big day. This type of activity ensures sellers are ready to jump right in, cuts down on the time the sales enablement team needs to spend setting context and giving instructions for different sessions, and helps the event move more smoothly overall. Prerecorded territory planning, research for group breakouts, and on-demand training videos can be assigned beforehand to ensure reps are prepped to participate and engage during the SKO.



Use AI to your advantage

Use the advancements in AI and generative AI to help in your kickoff planning. AI can help with a lot of stages of the planning phase and can also reduce the burden on your team when prepping a large-scale event. There are a ton of uses of AI including content creation, brainstorming, and even visual and PowerPoint design. Below are some prompts to try out:

- Create an inspiring theme for my sales kickoff event, including a title, tagline, and overall explanation of my sales kickoff. Include reasons why my sales team and other go-to-market roles should get excited about this event and theme
- Give me five examples of interactive games I can play with a large sales team that is virtual or hybrid for a sales kickoff. The goal of the games is to relate them to common selling scenarios but also foster healthy competition. Break up the group into smaller teams as part of the games and include all of the materials I will need for these games.
- Create a scenario to test my customer success managers on their upcoming renewals for the year. I want the scenarios to be very specific to a technology organization that is trying to get their customer to renew their existing contract but also add on our newly released product.



A smooth expedition

Even the best sales leaders get a little antsy on the day of their kickoff. The good news is it will go a lot smoother if you've taken the appropriate steps to plan your journey.

To ensure it goes off without a hitch, see below for things to consider doing during your SKO.



Conduct a morning run-through

It never hurts to gather presenters to do a quick dry run of the event prior to the sales team logging on or arriving at the event space. You don't have to go through all the details of each session, but it can be helpful to get together and review the agenda, ensure everyone's tech is in working order, and align on how to execute breakout sessions and role-plays.

Make sure all speaker decks are loaded into your event hosting platform and their presentations are compatible with the tech being used. If speakers aren't joining live, make sure their recorded sessions are accessible within the event platform and the audio and video both work when played for remote audiences.

Reinforce your theme

As you embark on your SKO expedition, reinforce the theme throughout. A theme won't have the same impact if it's mentioned once at the outset and then completely forgotten. Make sure it's not only embedded into the introduction but it appears in every element of the day's events.

It's been said the theme you choose isn't as important as how well you execute it. That means everything from session titles, activities, and even presenters' wardrobes should tie into the overarching theme. Have fun with it. The more you lean into it, the more likely reps are going to get excited and rally behind the theme.





Consider self-paced learning

Traditionally, SKOs include hours (or days) of presentations. And while it's possible to take this approach for virtual events, it might not be the most effective for your team. Be mindful that, in a remote environment, reps' attention spans tend to diminish after about 45 minutes, which is why taking more frequent breaks is often encouraged.

On the other hand, those are a lot of breaks to schedule, which poses a challenge in adhering to the agenda and, on top of that, losing some of your audience with every break.

A self-paced approach for some SKO sessions could combat this. Giving virtual attendees some control over how they consume information could make a big impact on how they digest the day's learning outcomes. This may be especially helpful for teams whose sellers are dispersed across a wide array of time zones. However, self-paced learning shouldn't be adopted at the expense of any interactive, collaborative content like role-plays and breakout activities. So identify which, if any, components lend themselves to self-guided, on-demand activities, and incorporate a few. Just ensure there's a way to hold sellers accountable for completing this work during the SKO timeframe and assess their knowledge after completion.

Keep your sellers engaged

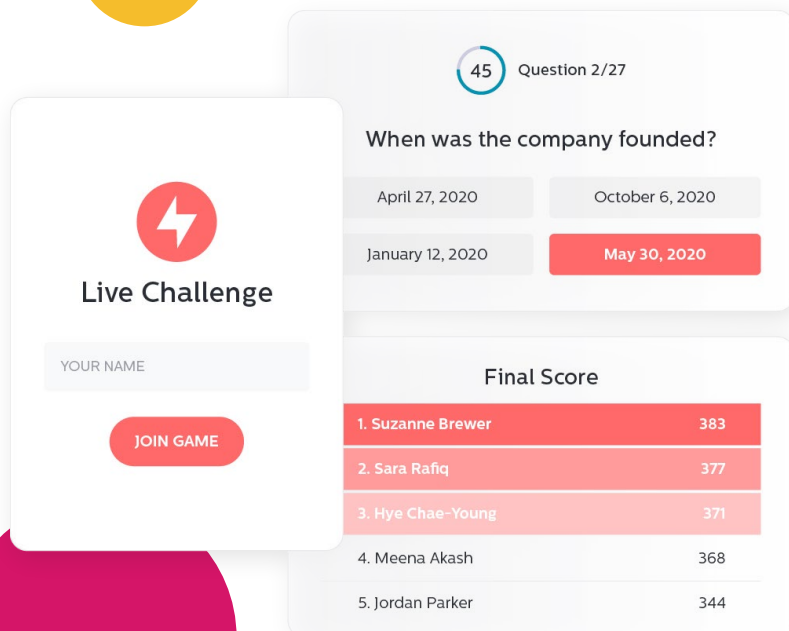
One major challenge with a virtual or hybrid SKO is keeping your remote audience engaged. According to **Gartner** sales reps forget up to 87% of the training content they receive just one month after their sales kickoff, and poor engagement rates are probably to blame.

With virtual events especially, someone's inbox is just a browser tab away the minute they get bored. There are, however, a few strategies you can employ to keep sellers attentive.

First, promote open dialogue throughout sessions. Conduct short surveys and quizzes after every session to measure engagement and gather reactions from your field team. This not only encourages participation but also affirms their feedback is valued. You may also want to collect questions that can be addressed during a dedicated session.

Depending on the platform you're using to host the event, you may also have the ability to gamify the entire SKO experience. Throughout the day, pose challenges to drive engagement while distributing points and badges. Track your team's progress on a leaderboard and reward the winners with prizes at the end.

Also, ensure that you host all your SKO content in a place that allows you to monitor, track, and reward engagement, like a Digital Sales Room.



Take different paths with breakout sessions

There are at least 17 different routes to reach Mount Everest's summit, reminding us that, depending on your skill set or area of expertise, different roads can be taken to get to the same destination. For your SKO, you shouldn't shy away from creating multiple tracks for different revenue teams, regions, roles, or tenures.

Dividing teams into different tracks is an excellent way to combat virtual meeting fatigue. In smaller groups, some sellers may be more likely to speak up and participate, and engaging breakout exercises and virtual role-plays are a good way to start applying what they've learned during the earlier sessions.

Recognize top performers

An SKO wouldn't be one without a celebration. It not only fosters a culture of recognition within your sales organization, but it'll also keep sellers on the edge of their seats waiting for their names to be called. For virtual attendees, follow up with a physical token of appreciation in the mail after the SKO. Just because your event is virtual doesn't mean reps don't want to take home their trophies.



Post-trek takeaways

You did it! You led an entire virtual SKO expedition — and that's no easy feat. But what comes afterward is almost as important as the event itself. Consider the following steps to make sure your sales team not only gets motivated during kickoff but stays energized all year (or quarter) long.



Make content available for reference

After the SKO is complete, ensure all content covered is available so your team can review and reference it at any time. It's best to host this information in a centralized digital location like a Digital Sales Room so you can see how many people are actually using and engaging with it. Ideally, if you used your sales enablement solution to host the event, all SKO materials will already be there for easy access and future training.

Another great way to disseminate this information post-event is by pushing bite-sized takeaways such as messaging, value propositions, or competitive intel directly to sellers' mobile devices. This way you can make sure your kickoff's highlights remain top of mind.

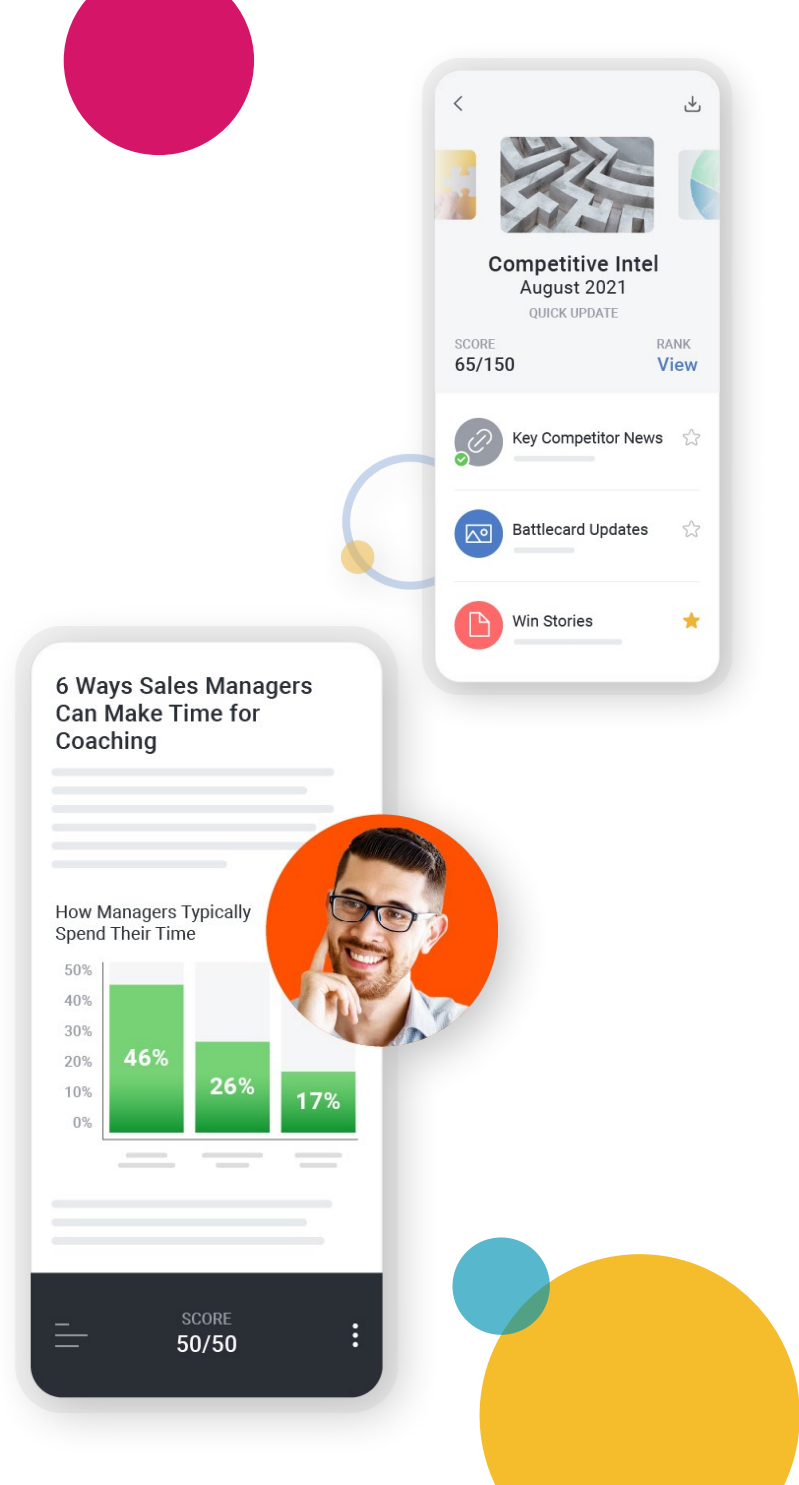
Repurpose SKO materials for just-in-time learning

SKO presentations and breakout sessions are typically jam-packed with rich content. While posting and sharing all the event resources is the first step in preparing content for long-term use, the second should be pulling clips from presentations or sessions as just-in-time learning content. This just-in-time content can also be reused in future learning programs, creating more value from the hard work that went into executing a successful SKO.

Reinforce learning outcomes

Just as you should take every opportunity to engage your team during SKO, that approach should carry over into post-event follow-up. The Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve tells us that people forget approximately 50% of new information within an hour and 90% after 30 days, so it's vital to implement continuous post-kickoff training for learning outcomes to stick.

You can even offer post-kickoff certifications to team members who have gone through and completed all post-event training modules. It's a simple way to show their efforts are valued and for reps to show off their hard work.





Move SKO learning to long-term memory

Another way to reinforce the learning outcomes covered during your SKO is using your sales readiness platform to reinforce new messaging, strategies, or techniques via AI-powered virtual role-plays. This approach feeds your team's culture of continuous improvement and knowledge-sharing – and the pressure is off when a seller can re-record as many times as they need before sharing with their managers and peers.

One major benefit of conducting post-event reinforcement within a sales readiness platform is that you can access team results and benchmark data to see trends on learning outcomes.

To do this, create quizzes or certifications to test seller knowledge and understanding of the information communicated during kickoff. This will identify areas where more training is required.

Gather and analyze feedback

No matter how many times you've hosted an SKO it's always a good idea to gather feedback. To do this, send out a short survey immediately afterward so your reps can provide candid opinions on what they liked, what they didn't like, or any areas where they felt the format could have improved.

As a sales leader, it's crucial to take this feedback and action it next time. The insights sellers provide are integral to the success of all kickoffs moving forward – virtual, in-person, or hybrid – so make sure to take their suggestions into account.



Wrapping up the journey

Conducting hybrid or virtual SKOs doesn't have to be daunting. It can be an exciting new initiative. As our world becomes increasingly digital-first and team members are spread out across the globe, these new formats will become even more commonplace.

What's important to remember is you don't have to sacrifice interactivity, engagement, and impact because your event is taking place partially or completely online.

With the steps outlined in this playbook, you'll be well on your way to hosting your own virtual sales kickoff expedition. Get started today by downloading our SKO Checklist, which outlines each phase of your event, starting from pre-event activities to the kickoff experience and post-event follow-up.

Ready to host a virtual sales kickoff of your own?

Request a demo to see how the Mindtickle Revenue Productivity Platform can help your team reach new heights!

[Get a Mindtickle Demo](#)