

inside the buyer's brain



does *hybrid*
live up to the *hype*?

- ▶ what neuroscience reveals about virtual, phone, and hybrid sales presentations



is *hybrid* the answer?

Sellers today can meet with buyers in several different ways: in-person meetings, online meetings, telephone conference calls, or any combination of these methods.

Before the pandemic, most sellers and buyers met in person, which gave people the opportunity to communicate face to face and build rapport. Because everyone in the buying committee was in the same room, sellers believed buyers were less distracted, and sellers could “read the room” to ensure everyone stayed engaged.

Offices are now beginning to open back up. But those face-to-face meetings—with all the stakeholders in the same physical space—are still almost impossible to pull off. So companies are considering an alternative way to partially capture the in-person experience: hybrid meetings.

In a hybrid meeting, some buyers attend in person, while others join virtually via a platform like Zoom. Proponents of hybrid say it maximizes the benefits of both virtual and in-person interactions.

But are hybrid presentations more effective than fully virtual sales presentations? Or is the hype around hybrid more about what sellers *want*, rather than what buyers *prefer*?

Sellers might be eager to “get back out there” and talk to buyers in person. But choosing the wrong modality could impede your buyers’ attention, engagement, memory, and willingness to act on your message.

With so many different modalities available, which one should you use? And is there a way to develop a presentation that can work in *any* environment?

In this report, you’ll see results from the first-ever neuroscience study to investigate which delivery method—face to face, virtual, phone, or hybrid—is more effective for a persuasive sales presentation.



Dr. Carmen Simon

Chief Science Officer
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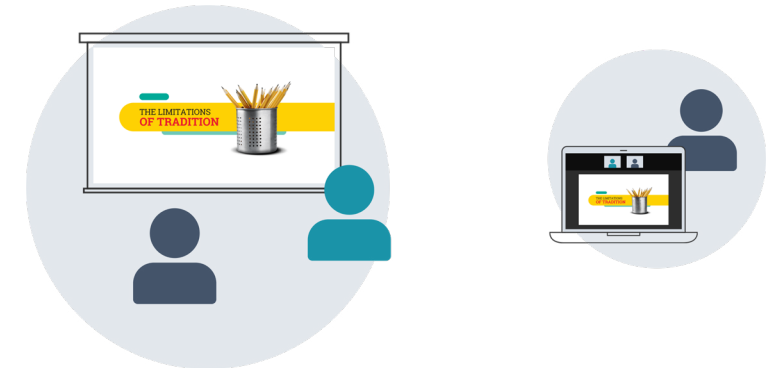
what do your prospects prefer?

For the study, 140 business professionals from B2B verticals were randomly paired, and then assigned to one of four groups to watch a live sales presentation.



virtual

36 participants (18 pairs) watched the presentation via Zoom. Each person in the pair joined from a different room.



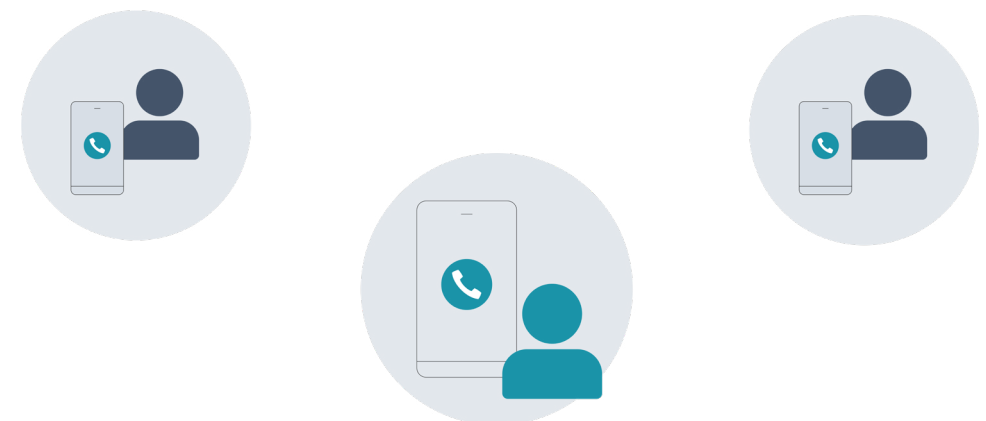
hybrid

32 participants were divided into 16 pairs. One participant in the pair attended the presentation in the same room with the presenter (Hybrid Face to Face) and the other joined via Zoom (Hybrid Virtual).



face to face

36 participants (18 pairs) watched the presentation in the same room as the presenter.



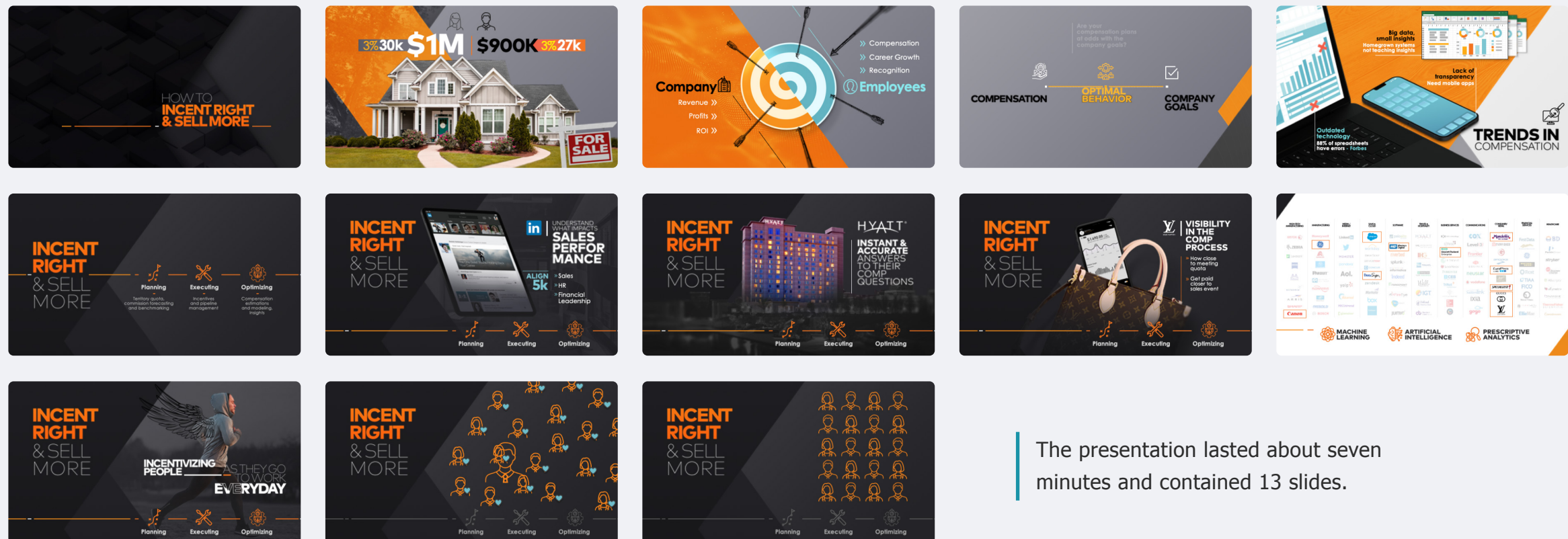
phone

36 participants (18 pairs) listened to the presentation over the phone.

the presentation

All participants watched or listened to the same sales pitch about a software application that helps organizations improve their sales performance. Specifically, the application helps sellers monitor their quota and motivates them with better incentives.

The presenter delivered the sales pitch live to each of the 70 pairs of participants, following the same script every time, and using the same hand gestures and modulation for every take.



The presentation lasted about seven minutes and contained 13 slides.

studying your *buyer's brain*

During the presentation, each participant wore the following neuroscience equipment:

- **EEG** (electroencephalogram) cap for recording brain waves.
- **ECG** (electrocardiogram) for recording heart rate.
- **Eye tracking** for recording the gaze and where the eyes fixate.
- **GSR** (galvanic skin response) for measuring peaks in arousal.



what we *measure*

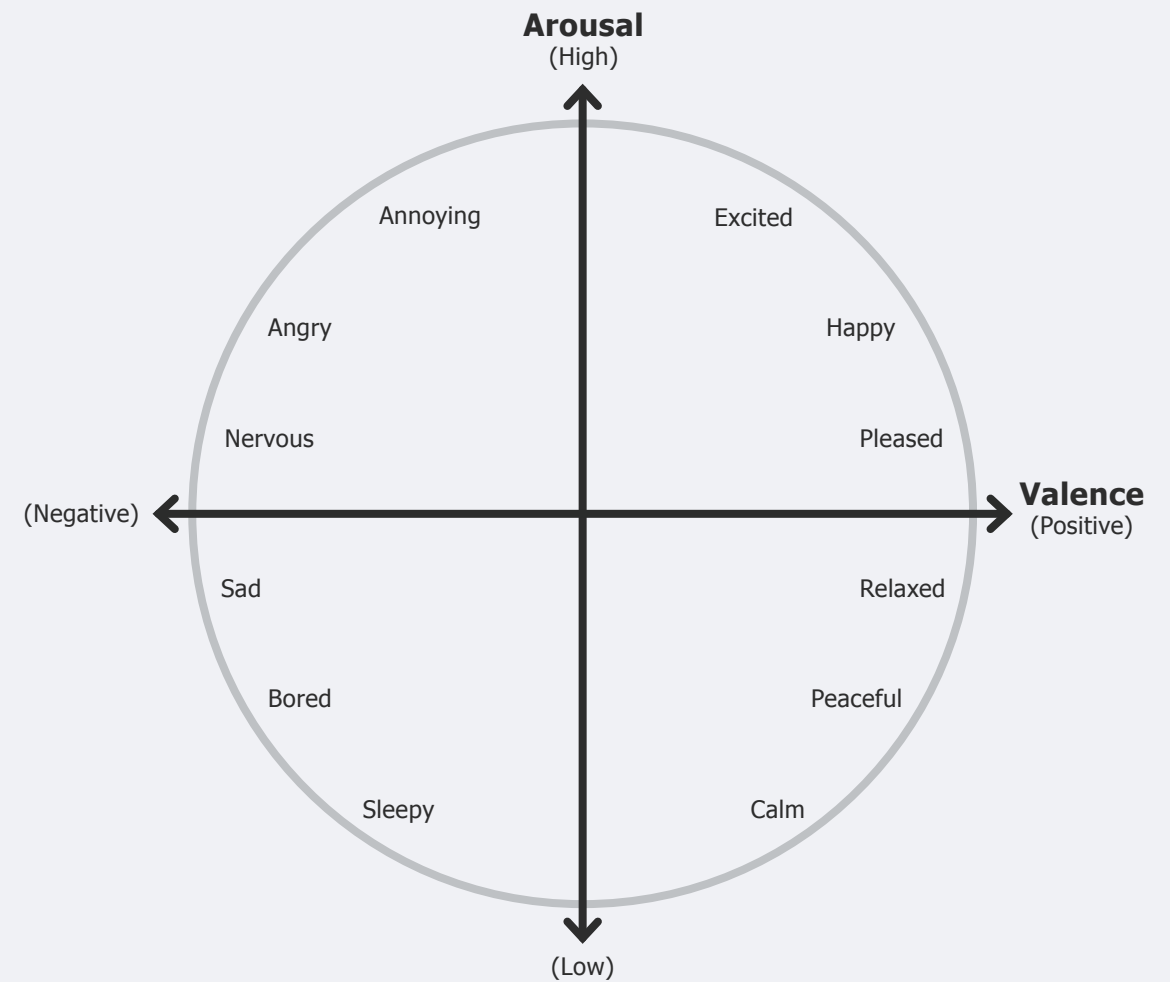
After removing some unusable data, researchers analyzed subsets of data from the groups of participants to study the following variables:

► Cognitive variables:

- **Attention** – a state of focused processing, concentration, or persistent focus across time.
- **Motivation** – the desire to approach a stimulus to obtain something.
- **Working memory** (cognitive workload) – the storing and manipulation of information in short-term memory until completion of a cognitive task.
- **Fatigue** – a decrease in alertness that can impair efficiency, performance, and memory retrieval.
- **Approach/Withdrawal** – the emotional response to positive or negative stimuli.
- **Memory** – the process of encoding, storing, and retrieving information.

► Affective variables:

- **Valence** – an emotional state within a pleasure-displeasure continuum that ranges from positive to negative.
- **Arousal** – the general level of alertness and wakefulness of a person, ranging from calm to very intense.



Valence and Arousal are considered two independent neurophysiological systems at the foundation of all other affective states. Varying degrees of valence and arousal impact emotions, which are essential to memory and decisions.

avoid hybrid presentations

Hybrid sales presentations might seem like a reasonable way to engage your buyers. But this research shows you shouldn't buy into the hype. Follow these three science-backed guidelines to build and deliver a persuasive sales presentation your buyers will remember.

- ▶ **GO VIRTUAL FOR HIGH-LEVEL PRESENTATIONS**
- ▶ **DON'T DISREGARD THE PHONE**
- ▶ **TRANSCEND MODALITY WITH DESIGN**





avoid hybrid presentations



go virtual
for high-level
presentations

the virtual advantage

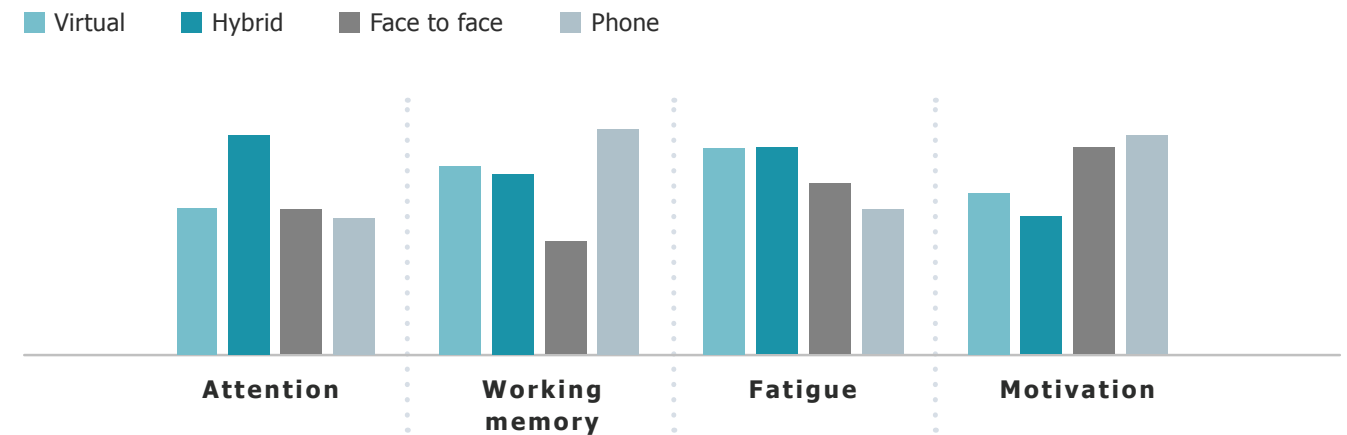
There were no significant differences between the four participant groups in terms of cognition and long-term memory.

However, when researchers analyzed participants' affective state during the entire presentation, they noted that **the Virtual group enjoyed the presentation much more than the other groups.**

By contrast, the Hybrid group was in a significantly more unpleasant affective state than all of the other groups. The affective states of the Face to Face and Phone groups were similar and remained in a neutral, slightly unpleasant state.

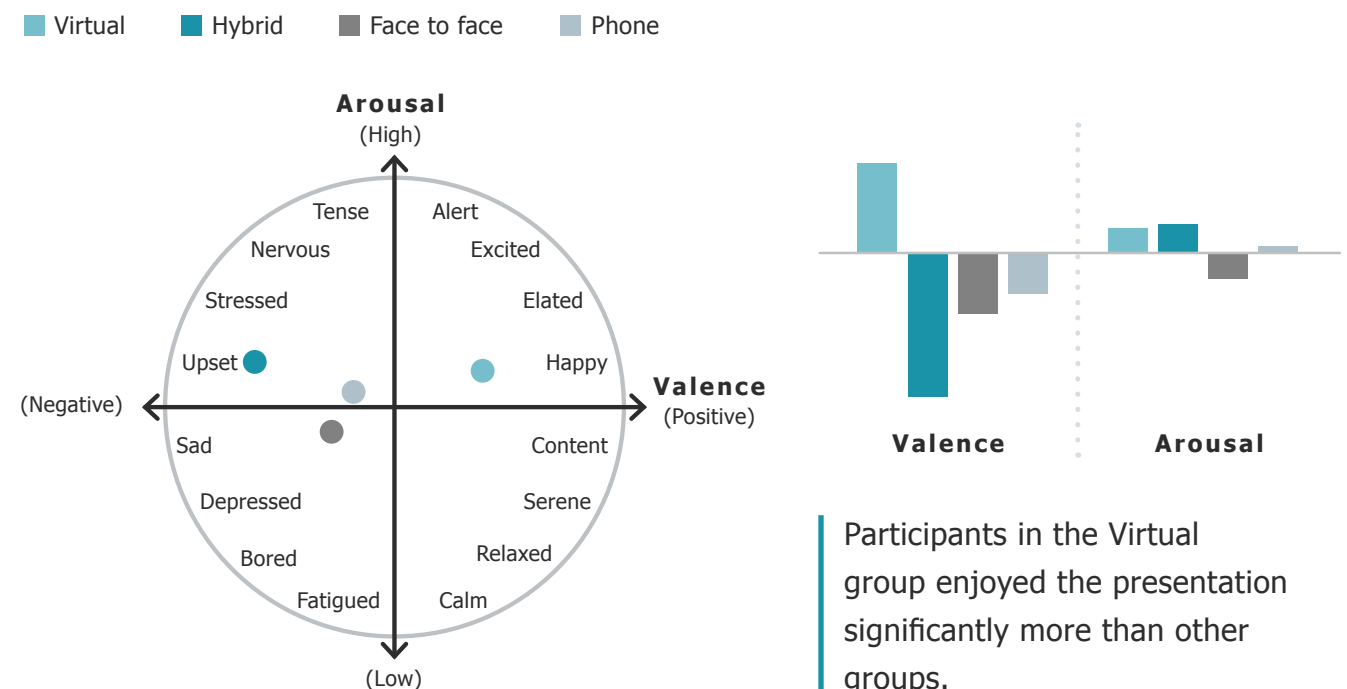
Even though participants in the Hybrid group seemed to pay more attention, their focus did not lead to better memory two days later. Motivation was also qualitatively lower for the Hybrid group, which might relate to the more unpleasant affective state this group experienced.

Cognitive state during the entire presentation



Researchers noted no significant differences in cognitive variables between the four participant groups.

Affective state during the entire presentation



Participants in the Virtual group enjoyed the presentation significantly more than other groups.

presenting the solution

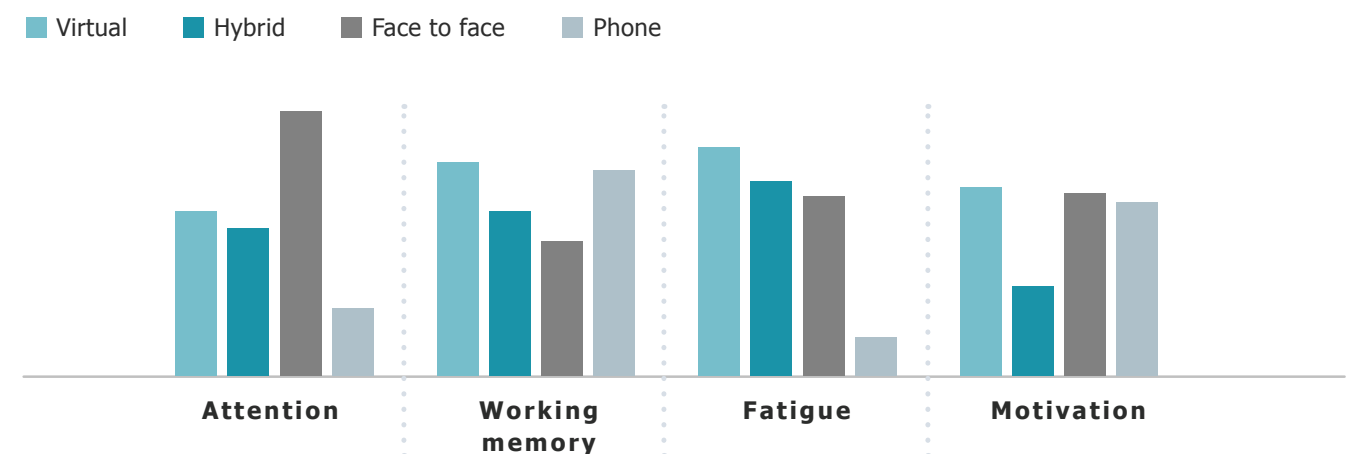
When researchers looked at results for only the Solution section of the presentation, they noted that the Face to Face group experienced the highest attention of the four groups, even though they were in an unpleasant affective state.

Participants in the Hybrid group were also in a negative affective state—bordering on upset. They were also significantly less motivated than the virtual group during this section of the presentation.

Meanwhile, the Virtual and Phone groups both enjoyed the Solution section, although the Phone group experienced the lowest attention.

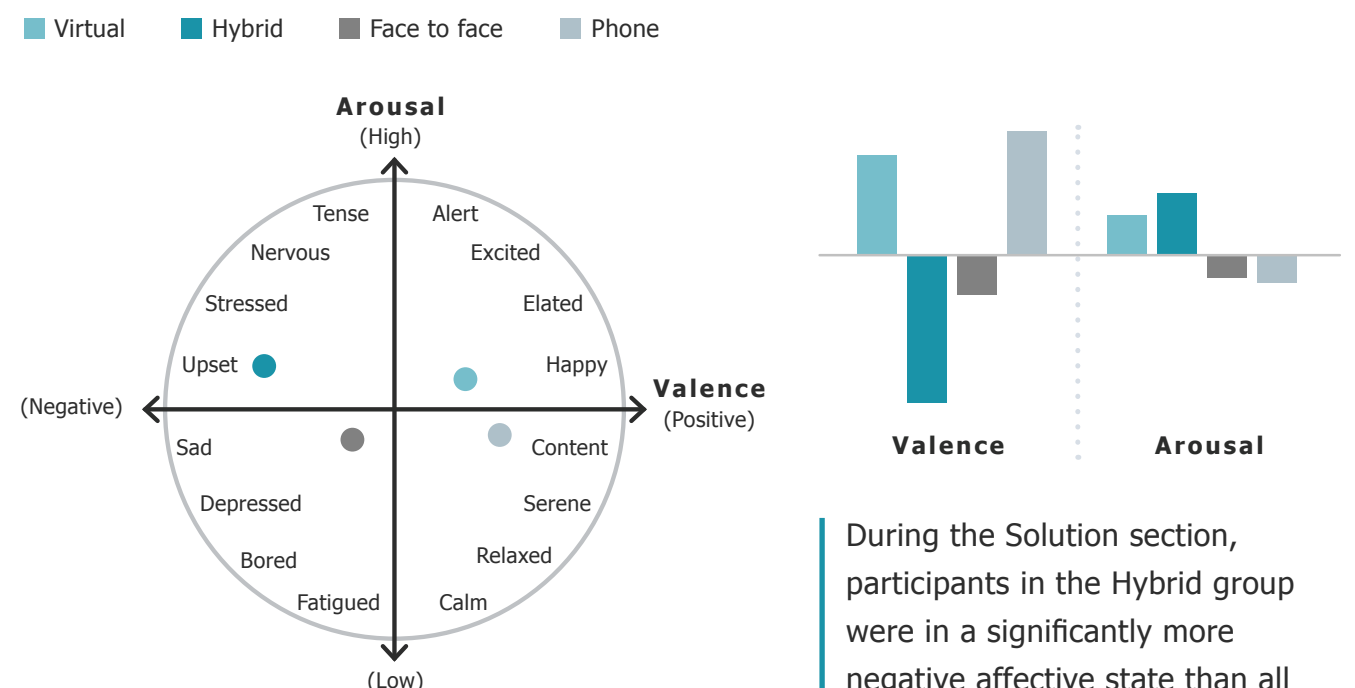
Taken together, these results suggest that **if you're presenting only a high-level overview of your solution to potential buyers, avoid hybrid.** The virtual modality is the most effective.

Cognitive state during the Solution section



Participants in the Phone group paid significantly less attention during the Solution section, while participants in the Face to Face group experienced the highest attention.

Affective state during the Solution section



During the Solution section, participants in the Hybrid group were in a significantly more negative affective state than all the other groups.

the *hybrid* (in)difference

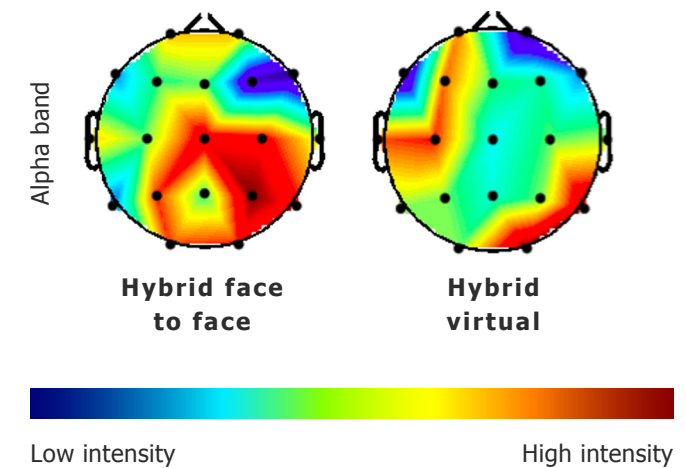
Analyzing a topographic map, or scalp map, of EEG activity in the Hybrid group, researchers observed that these participants seemed to emotionally withdraw from the presentation. When participants exhibit withdrawal emotions, they're less likely to act on what they're seeing.

The GSR analysis underscores the disadvantages of hybrid—the Hybrid group experienced less excitement (fewer peaks) than the Virtual group.

Notice, too, that participants in the Phone group were more excited by the presentation than both the Hybrid and Face to Face groups. This is the first surprising evidence to support the Phone methodology, but it's not the last.

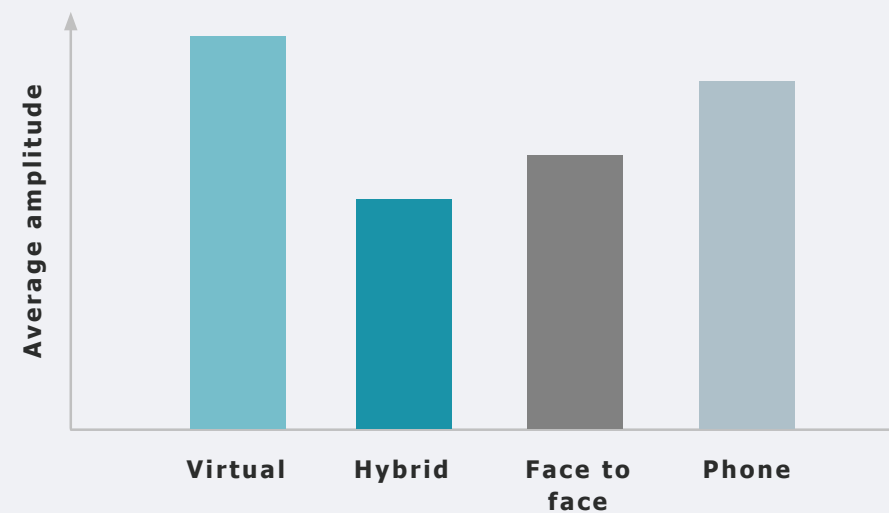
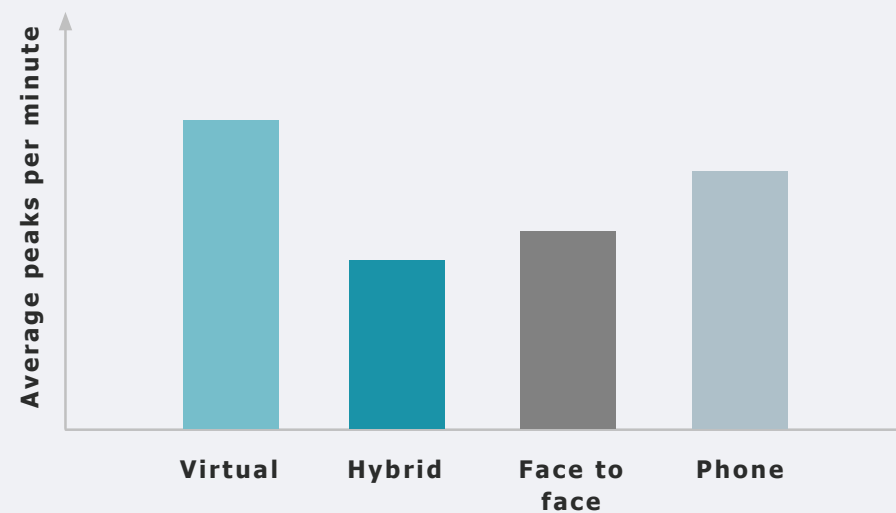
In fact, **results show that audio-only presentations are more persuasive than most people might think.**

Scalp maps of cognitive activity from Hybrid group



Participants in the Hybrid group who watched the presentation face to face showed cognitive activity that's consistent with withdrawal emotions.

GSR signals during entire presentation



Participants in the Virtual group experienced more excitement during the presentation than other groups.



avoid hybrid presentations

don't disregard

the phone



studying **consensus**

When multiple people's brains synchronize as they process information, it leads to better collaboration, shared understanding, and cooperation. These are all essential for guiding consensus among decision makers—especially when they can't all be in the same location.

Typically, researchers observe synchronization by scanning two people simultaneously—a method called “hyperscanning”—which has been growing in popularity, especially in academic settings. But in this study, researchers went beyond the “two-person neuroscience” typically used to measure social cognition.

To better understand the similarity between people's experiences within each group and across modalities, researchers computed a complex correlation matrix and compared every participant's neural signals against all other participants'. This allowed them to interpret potential scenarios that weren't physically part of the experiment, like a Virtual + Phone presentation.

different channel, same goal



Jarod Greene

VP Product Marketing
Highspot

For many sellers, the global pandemic turned selling on its head.

Sales conversations now happen almost exclusively on virtual channels. But just because the modality has changed, it doesn't change your goal. There are still multiple decision makers involved in every deal, and you have to meet them all where they are.

With so many stakeholders engaging virtually, it's more important than ever to follow the right steps and keep your story straight.

As this research shows, the virtual and phone modalities don't translate to less effective sales conversations. That means the long-term success of a seller still hinges on their ability to consistently articulate value in every conversation, in every meeting environment.

To deliver that level of value consistently, your sellers need reliable guidance. Enablement tools like playbooks can help with this, while providing sales leaders with tracking and analytics to ensure sellers are executing accurately and effectively.

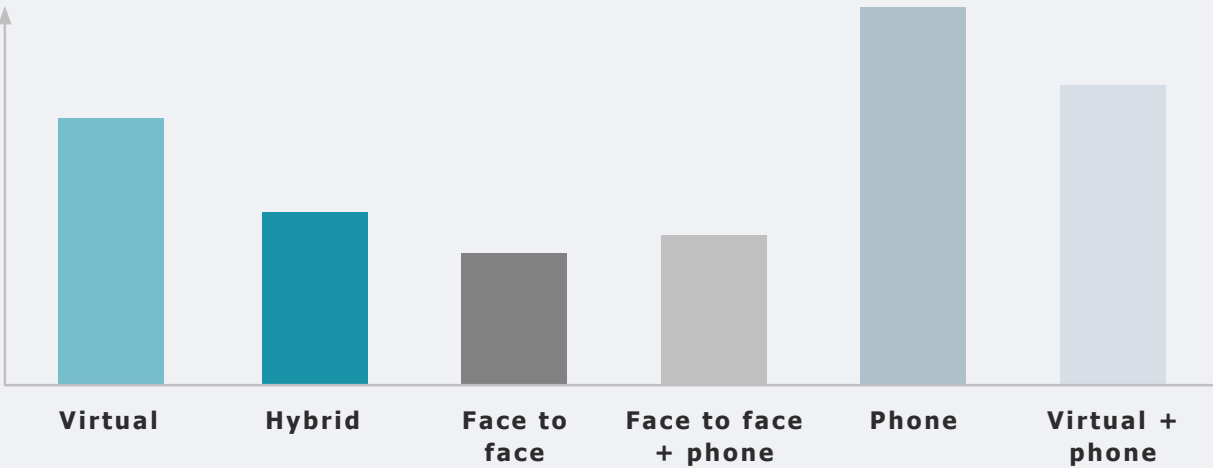
synchronized experiences

Examining the results across all possible presentation modalities, researchers were surprised to see that **participants in the Phone and Virtual groups had the most similar experience in terms of engaging with the content** throughout the presentation.

On the other hand, groups where some or all participants watched the presentation in person didn't share a similar experience.

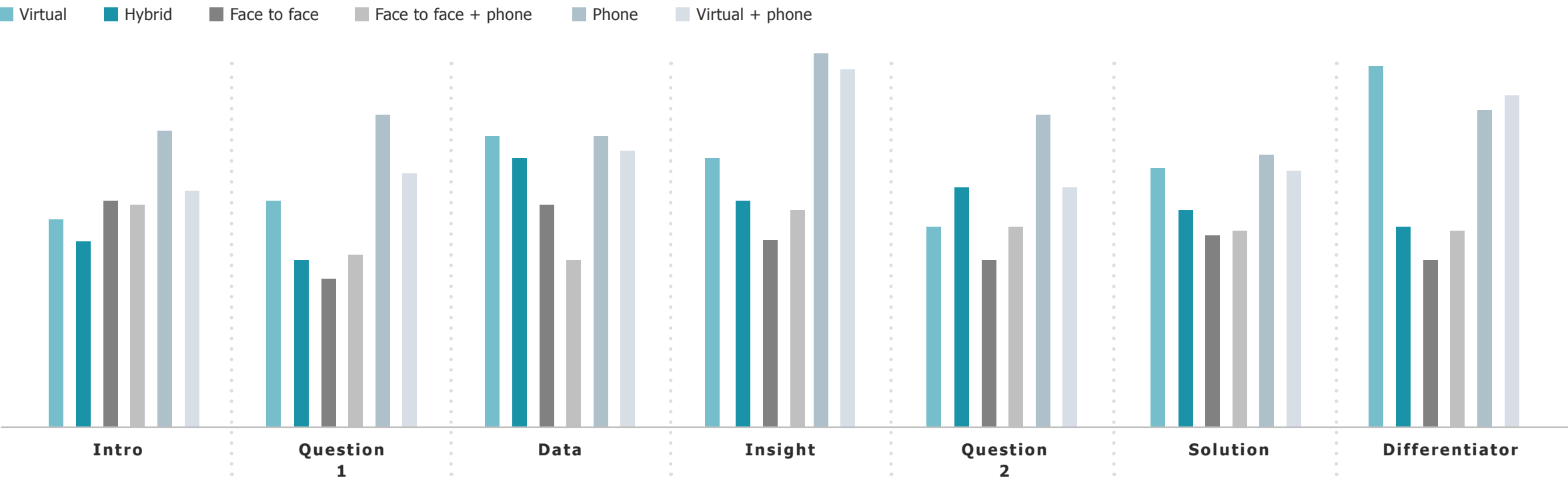
Phone and Virtual groups experienced the best synchronization, while Face to Face groups experienced the worst. And those results are consistent across several important segments of the presentation.

Engagement synchronization across all groups



When researchers compared all participant data, the Virtual and Phone groups shared a more similar experience than participants who watched the presentation face to face.

Engagement synchronization during specific presentation sections





avoid hybrid presentations

transcend
modality
with design

the *presentation* is the *equalizer*

A well-crafted sales presentation transcends the method by which it's delivered.

Researchers found that even though each of the four groups experienced the presentation differently, their cognitive experiences and memories were similar.

Why? It's likely because participants all saw or heard a presentation that followed guidelines from other behavioral and neuroscience research studies, which have been shown to make presentations more persuasive and memorable.

► **These research-backed criteria include:**

- **A clear and repeated "10% message."** The main message and its three supporting points were repeated three times verbally and seven times visually.
- **Slides that respect design rules**, including contrast, balance, harmony, and proximity.
- **Fast-paced presentation with motion and animation.** The presentation had an average of 33 animations per slide, and slides changed every 30 seconds.
- **A combination of logical and emotional language** throughout the script.
- **Effective delivery skills**, including hand gestures, modulation, and eye contact.

When you apply these messaging and design principles, you can ensure your audience stays engaged and remembers your main message, no matter how they see or hear it.

invest in *visuals*

When people view business content, they tend to react to the visuals as much as the content.

So when you're designing your presentation, it's important to apply some universal design principles to make your presentation more enjoyable and easier to understand and remember.

Some universal design rules to follow include:



- 1. Proximity** – Placing elements closer together or farther apart to show how the information is related.
- 2. Harmony** – Creating cohesiveness among separate but related elements using color, size, shape, etc.
- 3. Balance** – Arranging visual elements so their visual weight harmonizes with the other elements in the design.
- 4. Contrast** – Using opposing colors, shapes, textures, sizes, or concepts in a composition.

make it easy for your audience

Delivering a persuasive sales presentation isn't just about making slides look great.

Using plenty of animation and visual language in the script will also direct your audience to focus on the specific information you want them to remember.

Watch the video below, and notice how the script for the presentation supports the movement on each slide. This combination of “visual” language and animation makes it easy for everyone to follow the presentation—even if they can't see the slides.

► **Watch the eye-tracking example:**



reinforce your 10%

Research shows that after two days, your audience will forget most of what you communicate. And if you leave it to chance, the little they do remember will be completely random.

As a general measure, we refer to the small amount of information people remember as a metaphorical “10%.” So when you’re talking to your prospects and customers, you need to identify and emphasize your 10% message and repeat that message throughout your presentation.

An effective 10% message meets the following criteria:

- **Focused** – Do you have one main message with no more than 3-4 supporting points?
- **Rewarding** – Is your main message linked to something your audience finds rewarding?
- **Differentiated** – Can someone else in your field claim your message, or is it unique to you?
- **Repeatable** – Does your message come to mind easily so that someone can tell it to someone else?
- **Actionable** – Is your message phrased as an action you want your prospect or customer to take?



The main message of the presentation was repeated three times verbally and seven times visually during the seven-and-a-half minute pitch.



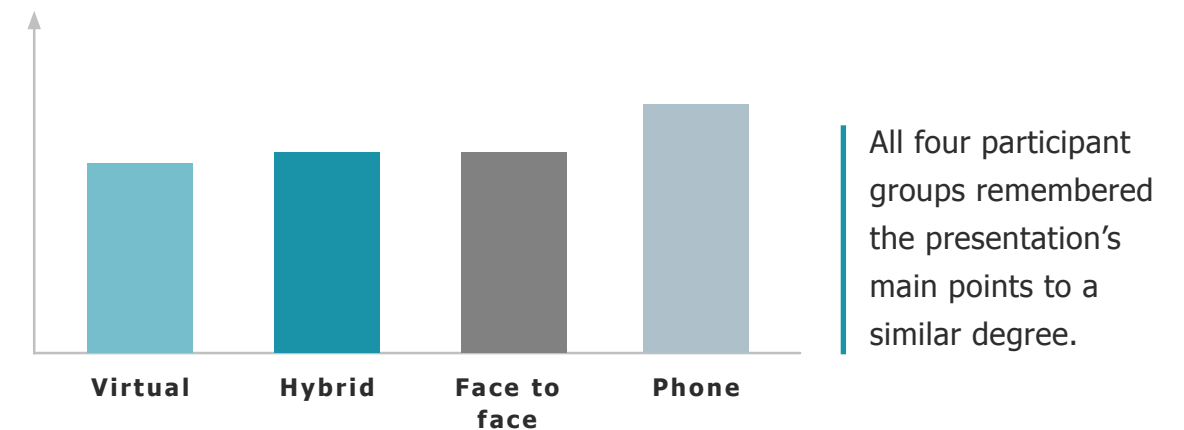
what did they *remember*?

The clear and repeated 10% message stuck with participants from all four groups. In fact, **74 percent of participants remembered the main point from the presentation.**

Researchers also noted that the more accurately people remembered the main message, the more accurately they remembered the three supporting points.

This correlation provides further evidence in favor of creating a strong 10% message and three supporting points that are closely associated with each other. The memory of one (e.g., the main message) can spark the memory of another (e.g., a supporting point).

Memory of main messages from the presentation



74% remembered what mattered

- “Ensure that your sales reps’ goals are aligned with your own so that you can motivate them to sell more.”
- “That this software/service provides companies and their sales personnel a novel way to track compensation and boost sales.”
- “[The vendor] helps find a way to incentivize employees and to reach an overarching common goal and drive sales.”
- “How to align company goals with employees’ goal by compensating employees the right way.”

26% remembered what wasn’t important

- “That this software is efficient and multi-faceted.”
- “Three levels of compensation to meet market standards.”
- “It is in the best interest of the business to always follow up with a vendor.”
- “The vendor can help companies and employees achieve goals.”

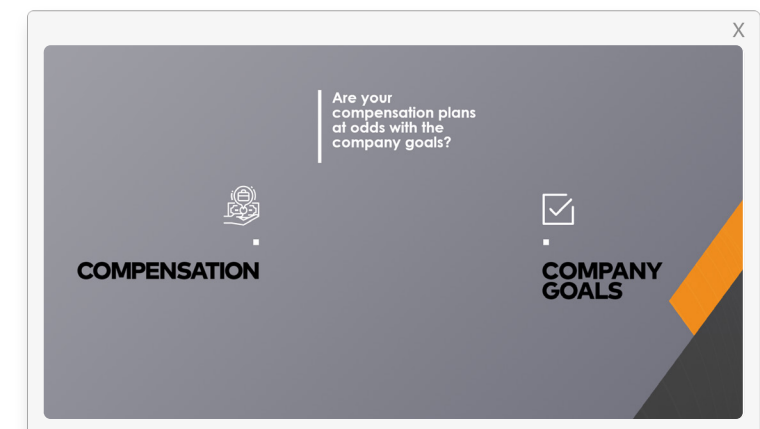
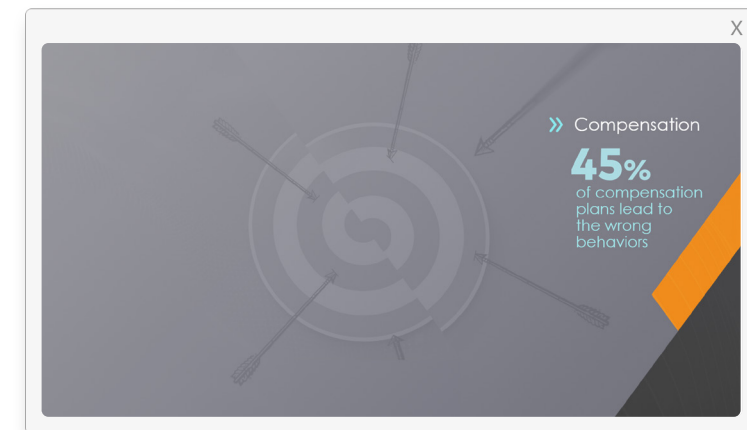
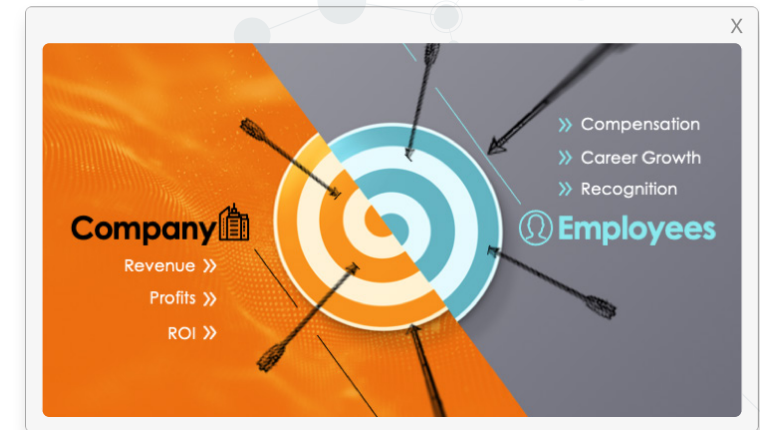
introduce *insights*

A persuasive technique in sales presentations is to present data related to your buyer's industry, extract some insights from that data, and then ask a thought-provoking question.

This technique, called DIQ (Data, Insight, Question), gets your buyer's brain ready to hear a business solution and initiates the process of self-persuasion.

The Insight segment in this presentation used the DIQ sequence, plus a more rhetorical question at the beginning of the sequence:

- 1. Question:** How do you align interests so everyone benefits?
- 2. Data:** Take compensation, for instance. We find that 45 percent of compensation plans actually lead to the wrong employee behaviors.
- 3. Insight:** That means your compensation plans are misaligned with your corporate goals nearly half of the time.
- 4. Question:** Thinking of your own company, are your compensation plans at odds with the company's goals?



insightful *results*

So, how did participants in this study react?

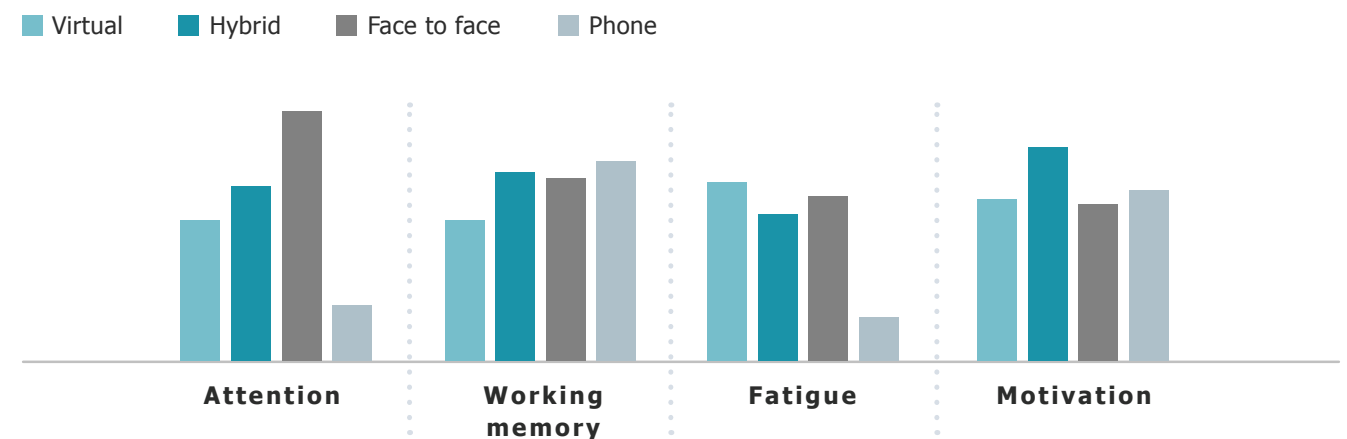
The Face to Face group was in a more positive affective state and significantly more relaxed than all the other groups during the Insight section. Qualitatively, the Face to Face group also seemed to have the most focused attention.

Meanwhile, participants who listened to the presentation on the phone paid less attention than the other groups. The Phone group also displayed significantly less fatigue than the Virtual and Face to Face groups.

Phone meetings work well for a high-level sales presentation. But based on these results, it's not the most effective modality for a thought-provoking dialogue. **Ideally, an entirely face-to-face presentation is best for presenting insights, if you have the option.**

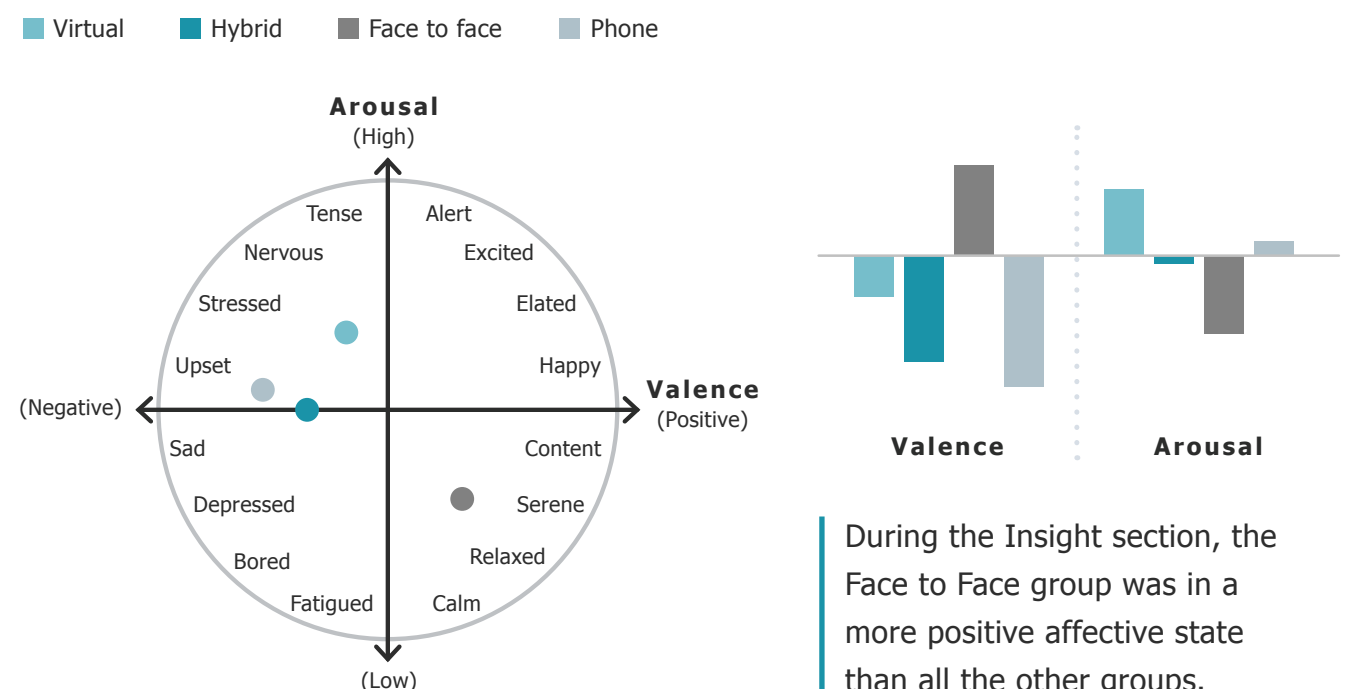
Considering that participants in the Virtual group experienced better brain synchronization during this section, it's still a viable alternative. **Unless you can get all stakeholders in the same room together, virtual is the next best thing.**

Cognitive state during the Insight section



Participants in the Phone group paid less attention during the Insight section, while participants in the Face to Face group had the most focused attention.

Affective state during the Insight section



During the Insight section, the Face to Face group was in a more positive affective state than all the other groups.

avoid *hybrid presentations*

If you have a choice, **choose to go entirely virtual and avoid hybrid meetings for high-level sales presentations.** Contrary to popular belief, platforms like Zoom put people in a positive state of mind, and their brains synchronize well during a fully virtual session.

Overall, **researchers found that a hybrid presentation method:**

- Is **less enjoyable overall** compared to virtual presentations.
- **Leads to less synchronization** of information than an entirely virtual presentation.
- Puts your audience in **a negative state of mind** when talking about your solution.

What about face-to-face meetings? Just because hybrid isn't optimal, there's no need to claim "the death of the in-person sales meeting."

There was, after all, a time when people were reluctant to film sports games because they feared people would not want to go to the stadium. And, just like stadiums survived televised broadcasts, concerts survived music streaming services. In the past, an artist might have gone on tour to sell their albums. Now, they stream music to sell tickets for the tour.

Virtual selling has certainly shaken up the way people buy and sell. But that might just mean your sellers need to rock the virtual meeting for now, and potentially earn that face-to-face meeting later on.

► **GO VIRTUAL FOR HIGH-LEVEL PRESENTATIONS**

► **DON'T DISREGARD THE PHONE**

► **TRANSCEND MODALITY WITH DESIGN**



about B2B DecisionLabs

B2B DecisionLabs is the only B2B research firm dedicated to studying how decision-makers frame value and make choices. Unlike traditional market research and advisory firms, B2B DecisionLabs conducts rigorous research studies based in several Decision Science disciplines:

- **Behavioral studies** – understand why buyers behave the way they do.
- **Neuroscience research** – observe what's going on inside their brains.
- **Field trials** – validate your approach in the real world.

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