

CONFIRMATION DURING COVID-19

5 Steps to Confirming Orders
and Hitting Your Sales Goals

— BY ROD OSTHUS —



COVID-19

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Letter from Rod



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most field sellers are struggling to develop an effective sales plan for the sales year. RC Thomas has a plan that, when followed, will help every sales rep overcome obstacles and ensure achievement of their sales goals.

COVID-19 has changed the way you need to plan to operate your seed business. This guide shows you that the plan can be simple since it's about just one action—confirmation.

Confirmation is a strategy that tears down obstacles and clarifies whether or not your sales plan is working. Confirming important parts of the sales process addresses your greatest fears and assumptions by telling you whether or not they are valid. Taking action on each one of them through a confirmation strategy keeps you on track to your goals and makes every sales year a lot more fun.

Our Confirmation During COVID-19 Guide lays out an easy to follow strategy that's guaranteed to get you the results you want when executed properly.

Happy Selling,
Rod Osthus

“Confirmation during COVID-19 is more than just confirming orders. It involves confirming every fear you have as being valid or invalid.”

Rod Osthus

Introduction

It's Always Confirmation Season

Confirmation—the act of taking NOTHING for granted...ever!

In this guide, you will discover an entire new definition of confirmation and how that new definition helps you take sales to an entirely new level.

Over the years, confirmation has simply meant finding out whether or not a customer was going to plant the seed he or she ordered. Most field sellers performed that task some time prior to delivery. But, in today's seed marketplace, confirmation has a much broader, more comprehensive meaning. It's now an ongoing, year-round strategy. It involves confirming the existence of every attitude—good or bad, every obstacle—real or perceived, and every opportunity—captured or uncaptured.

In our new definition, confirmation means validating the effect of every activity a seller uses to get a sale. Without confirmation, there is no way of knowing the role that activity played in the selling process.

Confirmation begins with a plan that includes a list of every step in the sales process that needs confirming. You want to know if the system you're using to get sales is working. That list includes confirming:

- That customers are connecting the yield goal for each field with planting your seed in those fields.
- The level of responsibility each grower is taking to protect your varieties at all cost by following the Top 5 Factors.
- Their commitment to begin their cropping plans prior to harvest and understanding how it benefits them.
- Their willingness to communicate with you before making any changes to the cropping plan.

The above steps often require multiple conversations to get true confirmation that the strategy is fully understood and in place.

Confirmation Starts with a Plan

What does your COVID-19 confirmation plan tell you?

Does your plan...

- Start with your selling calendar, identifying where you are now and where you want to end up at planting time?
- Detail what you're going to be doing every week of the selling season leading up to planting?
- Tell your prospects and customers what they can expect from you, how you will be communicating with them, and when those contacts will take place from now until planting?
- Expose your prospects and customers to new ways of communicating that gives them a new experience, while allowing you to continue making progress with the relationship?
- Have the capability of tearing down every obstacle you will face from now until planting?
- Lead you seamlessly to your sales goals without having to rely totally on face-to-face contact with prospects and customers?



Decide Which Strategies Require Confirmation

Confirm only the strategies you don't want interfering with your ability to achieve your goals.

You need to confirm:

→ **Your sales goal.**

Pulling your sales goal out of the air or basing it on what you sold last year is guessing. It has no basis. Make sure your sales goal is based on the sales potential of your territory. Confirm for yourself that you understand how many new customers you will need and how much they will need to buy in order for you to achieve your sales goal.

→ **Your selling calendar ensuring it's directed at goal achievement.**

Many field sellers don't reserve time in their selling calendars to pursue the increase they need. As a result, they get so busy with activities that they run out of time and never achieve their sales goal. You must confirm that your calendar will give you the roadmap that leads you directly to your goal.

→ **You have an effective sales story.**

If you don't have a detailed, well-practiced sales story, nothing else in your plan will work. You must confirm through role-play that your sales story is effective and that you can deliver it with confidence.

→ **Your prospects and customers know your communication plan.**

When they know your plan to protect the relationship from COVID-19, they are more likely to meet with you. You need to confirm they know your plan and agree with it.

→ **Prospects and customers know the protocols they need to follow when using your seed.**

You need to confirm they plan to plant one variety per field, plant a portfolio of varieties on each farm, and follow the Top 5 Factors when planting your seed. You need to know that they want you to be there at planting, ride their harvester in the fall, and conduct field visits with them.

Confirm the Order

The Final Act of Confirmation

Confirmation of the order is so important that I have broken it into a five step process. Study and follow each of these five steps carefully and it will lead you to your sales goal. Best of all, you will have satisfied loyal customers.

1 Step 1—Confirm Early

Even though you've been confirming cropping plans all season long, official and final confirmation of the order is actually a separate, final act. The best time to have this official visit is early—no later than prior to harvest. Below are the top 10 advantages of confirming orders and cropping plans prior to harvest.

Early confirmation:

1. Means good news. Delayed confirmation most often means bad news—lost sales.
2. Coincides with early crop planning and early order writing—outside the Ag Cycle.
3. Makes any changes easier than making them later—gives the seller more options.
4. Prepares the customer and the company for early delivery—ahead of competitors.
5. Prevents interference from competitors trying to steal sales—stay on track to goals.
6. Identifies our true customers—those who remain committed to buy.
7. Is a new and unique experience for customers—it strengthens the relationship.
8. Creates the opportunity to increase sales—growers often find they need more product.
9. Measures the effectiveness of the sales rep—how good have you led all year long?
10. Indicates final sales far in advance—increases accuracy of next year's forecasts.

2 Step 2—Confirm Face-to-Face

During the COVID-19 pandemic, what we have known as face-to-face contact takes on a slightly different meaning. If you're able to visit your growers in person to confirm their order, that's the best. But face-to-face can also mean an online visit face-to-face on the computer. This is a great opportunity to do something new and different with your customers—something they may never have done before. Consider a live stream as part of your face-to-face strategy when you can't do it in person.



If you choose not to go face-to-face, you can get physical by using voice-to-voice contact with a customer via the telephone. The key is to use the same process you would use face-to-face.

3 Step 3—Confirm Varieties by Field, Not Just Varieties

Selling by field is something most competitors don't do. And even fewer yet, match the varieties they are selling to specific fields. Selling varieties by field changes how farmers think about raising a crop by emphasizing that top yields don't just come from a particular variety, but how well a variety matches up with the field it will be planted in. It also demonstrates the seller's commitment to helping the grower raise the productivity of his farm by taking the time to create these matchups.

Selling by field gives both the grower and the sales rep more control over the success of each field. It also positions the grower to raise the yield on the entire field, rather than relying on a particular variety in that field to do it.

**"Confirmation of the order is your last chance to keep the sales
you've worked so hard to get."**

Rod Osthus

4 Step 4—Confirm Time of Delivery

Will you deliver the seed to customers? If so, do they have a good place to store the seed and how early can they take delivery? This is the time to have this discussion, not later on when you want to ship to your customers, but you haven't had that discussion yet. Having these conversations during the time of confirmation will make future deliveries much easier.

5 Step 5—Confirm the Order Prior to Delivery Field Visit

This confirming field visit takes place two to three months prior to planting during what I call the "hell time" of the selling season. It's when your customers are being pursued by competitors trying to get them to cancel orders they already have in place and take their deal. It's also the time when many farmers begin second-guessing decisions they made earlier in the season and they start thinking about ways to save money.

Sales reps need to get to their customers during this time of year to refocus their minds on the goals they already set and the cropping plan they have in place. They need to get the grower thinking about doing everything he can to achieve his goals and not become distracted by deals. This is the final opportunity to confirm an order prior to planting. Few sellers do it and that's why they get caught off-guard when planting season is over and a customer says he planted more of someone else's seed and left yours in the shed.



Did You Know...

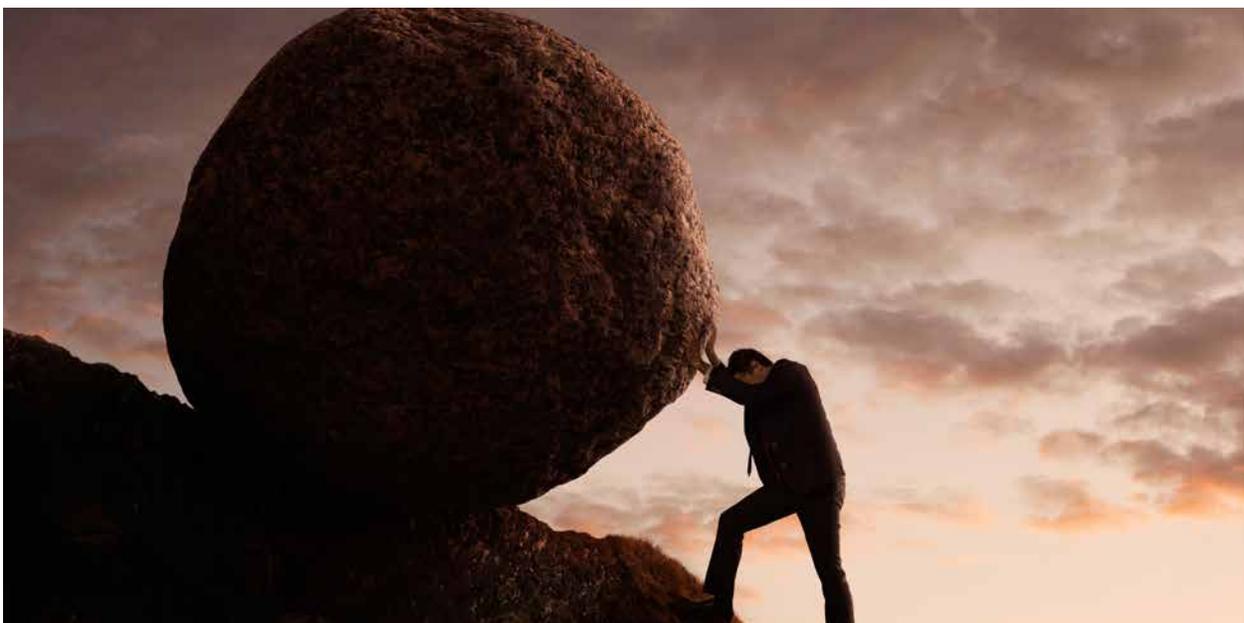
Lack of control is the biggest obstacle to confirmation?

One thing I learned early in my seed selling career was that I was never going to have the seed I wanted in the quantities I wanted it. But, believe it or not, I always had all I needed.

At first, I blamed company management for being stupid and not producing enough of what I wanted and needed. Then, I blamed other salespeople for hoarding all the good varieties by padding orders. After a few years of frustration, none of that blaming changed anything, *I finally figured out that the problem was me.*

I was allowing customers to make their buying decisions so late that there was no way to accurately forecast next year's demand. They were being forced to pull production numbers out of the air. Everyone was operating in the Ag Cycle, forcing management to guess at the most important company decision of all—how much seed to produce so we didn't have unbalanced inventories no one wanted to sell. I had never set up a plan to get the farmer to plan earlier so our forecasts could be more accurate.

Every sales rep in the company is responsible for the company's production plan.



Role-Play Practice

Good morning, Bill. I'm glad I caught you. Is this a good time?

Yes, it's just fine. What's up?

Bill, I'm calling for two reasons. First, I wanted to see how you and your family are doing during the COVID situation.

We're doing really well, thank you. The kids are back in school, so we'll see how that goes, but we think we have them pretty well-prepared the best we can.

Glad to hear that. I'm sure they are eager to get back and see their friends.

Yes, they are. I think this is the first time I've seen any of them so excited to go to school every day.

Yeah, I'm sure they missed their friends. Bill, the second reason I'm calling is that I would like to schedule a time to review your cropping plan for next year. Your seed will be ready to be delivered in January, which is only about two weeks away. It's a little earlier than normal, but I know you like to have things in place and organized before anyone else. And, frankly, we are having such a great year we are running out of warehouse space.

That's no problem. I have a nice place to keep it.

Great. We can do the confirmation one of two ways. I can set up a Zoom meeting with you or I can meet with you in your office. Of course, I will be wearing a mask to protect you and your family. Which would you prefer?

Let's do a Zoom meeting. I have only done a few, but that would work out ok.

Great. I have either Tuesday morning from 8-10:00am open or Wednesday at the same time. Would either one of those times work for you?

Wednesday will work.

Ok, great. I'm going to email an updated copy of your variety-by-field plan. If you could have your field maps handy in case we needed them, that would be great.

No problem. I look forward to getting everything finalized.

Perfect. I will send you the Zoom link this afternoon and I will see you online Wednesday at 8:00am.

Ok, thanks. See you then.

The Zoom Meeting

Good morning Bill. You look good on screen; I think you're a natural.

Ha, thanks. Don't they say the camera puts on 10 pounds?

That's what they say, but it's not doing that to you.

Ok, great.

Before we get started, my wife told me to ask you about Megan. I think she's a freshman at State this year. Is she going to play basketball there?

Yes, she is planning on walking on. The program is on hold right now, but she would like to give it a shot.

Well, give her our best. We watched her all the way through her great career in high school. She's a great one.

Thanks, we're pretty proud of her.

First of all, are there any changes in your cropping plans for the coming year?

Well, as a matter of fact, I just picked up another 300 acres yesterday that will be going to half corn and half soybeans.

That's great. Where's the farm?

It's Marv Johnson's place—8 miles straight east.

Oh, that's a nice farm. I know exactly where it is. Actually, the soil type is a lot lighter than you're used to, isn't it?

Yeah, it sure is. I'm not sure what varieties to plant there.

I know that farm pretty well, Bill. Marv was a good customer of mine for many years. I'm sure he's going to enjoy retirement. But I can help you there.

Yeah, I'm glad you came by. I really didn't know what to put on there—I'm not used to that light of ground.

I would recommend hybrids D and E over there. You can get in each of those field very early. They are the best available under drought stress and they also have exceptional stalks if you want to harvest them last.

That's exactly what I want.

I'm going to rewrite your order to include these new varieties so your discounts will also increase on the order.

Ok, great.

Now that we have your new farm taken care of, let's look at your home farm Bill. These are the products you have in your cropping plan for this year. You have 3 corn hybrids and 2 soybean varieties. As you recall, we chose these particular corn hybrids to do 2 things—allow you to plant earlier because they have exceptional early seedling vigor, and to greatly decrease your risks against Mother Nature by spreading your maturity from 105-112 which is what you wanted, is that right?

Yeah, I remember that now that you mention it.

We chose hybrid A for the Smith fields. You said they were some of your best fields and we are looking to bring that bushel per 1,000 reading up to 7 this year on both fields. I have you down for 3 bulk boxes—120 units of that elite hybrid for those two irrigated quarters.

Yeah, that's right.

We also have two bulk boxes—80 units of hybrid B for your home farm. That's a new hybrid that you're going to plant by your house. It dries fast and you wanted a variety that you could take out early even if it didn't get planted too early, is that correct?

Yep. You are right on. Will you have more of that on hand if I need a few extra bags?

Yes, I sure will. Would you like to order more today or give me a call if you need some extra?

I would like to give you a call, if that's okay.

That's just fine. I'll have some on hand in case you need it. If you do, I will deliver it right to your planter within an hour of your call, guaranteed.

Wow, are you serious?

You bet I am. That's one more thing that sets me apart from the competition and my customers really like fast service during planting time...don't you, Bill?

Absolutely.

We've decided to plant the 2 bulk boxes—80 units of hybrid C on the new farm that's farthest from home, is that right?

Yes, that's what we talked about.

I assume it will be the last you harvest, and with its exceptional stalk, this is definitely the right one.

Okay, I'm going by what you recommend Rod. I trust your judgment on this.

That's good, Bill. I can assure you that with these corn hybrids on your farm, you will have the best opportunity to produce your best crop ever.

Great!

Thank you so much for taking time to confirm your cropping plan. I'm going to schedule delivery for January 21st. If, for some reason that will not work, here is another calling card so you can call me. Thanks again for your business and have a great day.

Order Confirmation Quiz

Rank each customer type in order from 1-5, according to who you would consider a top priority and confirm first, and who you would consider a lower priority and confirm last.

(1 being top priority)

___ new first-time buyers

___ farmers buying less than half of their needs from you

___ all buyers who prepaid, new or current

___ farmers buying more than half of their needs from you

___ 100% buyers

Answers on page 15



Summary

Field sellers who rely on order confirmation as part of their sales strategy have the largest sales increases and the fewest returns every year. That's about as profitable as any sales territory can get. A profitable seed business like that comes not only from executing the confirmation strategy, but also from using confirmation as a training tool for customers.

Twenty-first century seed businesses rely on well-executed confirmation of seed orders as a key financial strategy for both themselves and their customers. It trains growers on how important it is to plan early and stick with the plan.

That process alone eases one of the greatest financial burdens seed companies carry today, and that is managing expensive inventories. That's why top companies train their sales reps to be smart managers of their businesses so when planters take the field, these smart seed sellers aren't even trying to manage returns to control haulback because everything was already confirmed.

Instead, they're busy hauling out extra seed, which ensures they will exceed their yearly sales goals because there are few (or no) returns to detract from their sales. Take a look at what the word C-O-N-F-I-R-M stands for on the next page.

One Final Note

Confirmation is the key to selling success at the customer, dealer, territory, and company level. It's the time of year that gives everyone who has ordered seed the opportunity to make a promise to pay for it and plant it, or to back out of the deal.

Unfortunately, many field sellers don't do an adequate job of confirming their sales processes as well as the order itself. Today, the cost of getting a sale is at an all-time high. That means that every step a sales rep uses to get a sale is part of that costly process.

You would think that order confirmation would be the number one priority in every company, but it's not. This costs salespeople and their companies sales every year.

Quiz Answers

1, 2, 5, 3, 4

Confirmation Benefits Sellers and Customers

C	Cash or Credit —find out who will pay and who won't pay. No seed goes in the ground unless it's paid for or financed.
O	Organizes your customers to follow your lead.
N	Neutralizes the possibility of growers not following your cropping plan.
F	Familiarizes the seller with buyers who are likely to lose acres or who you suspect have over ordered.
I	Informs the buyer on how, when, and where to plant your seed and on which fields.
R	Regulates inventories to keep them in proper balance.
M	Magnifies the seller's importance in the customer's decision-making process.
A	Attention to the customer because the confirmation process is done face-to-face.
T	Tracks customers' thinking.
I	Identifies next year's sales increase potential.
O	Opportunity to increase sales.
N	Negates unwanted surprises following planting.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Make the Confirmation Contact

My Confirmation Call Checklist:

➤ How do I look?

- ➔ You must look like a professional leader
- ➔ You must look different than your competition
- ➔ You must feel in control

➤ How does my vehicle look?

- ➔ Your vehicle must match the perceptions you want to portray

➤ Do I have my COVID-19 confirmation plan in place?

- ➔ My customer knows my COVID protection plan
- ➔ Masks, social distancing
- ➔ The cropping plans
- ➔ Proposed calendar of events for the upcoming season
- ➔ A checklist of important dates that involve the plan for the year



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