

Keys to Choosing the Right Sales Training Provider

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There comes a moment in every organization when choosing and implementing a sales improvement initiative is recognized as a key strategic priority. Typically this occurs when leadership within the organization identifies the need or opportunity for a game-changing shift in sales performance. Ultimately, someone becomes responsible for making good decisions regarding the right methodology, strategy and resources to get the job done.

Selecting a sales training provider can be a daunting task. After all, there are virtually thousands of providers and just as many price points from which to choose. Where to start? Selecting the right training company depends largely on the goals and priorities of the client. Once a company begins considering resources for developing their sales organization there are several key points that need to be considered:

Take a Holistic Approach

Successful training-driven sales performance improvement is 50% skill-based behavioral modification and 50% change management. As you look at potential training providers, make sure their approach is holistic and provides the transformation that will be critical to success. This reaches well beyond the methodology. Be sure your training company provides:

- **Experiential learning** components, to gain active participation from your team from the beginning
- Content **customized** to your business reality
- A **coaching or leadership** component
- An internal **Trainer Certification** Program
- **Methodology that is unique** and creates competitive advantage
- Methodologies that can be used in all customer contact points to create **Customer Experience**
- Provisions for **all adult learning styles**
- A **complete learning continuum** (more than one piece of intellectual property)
- **On-line reinforcement**
- Talent assessment
- **Integration into CRM** systems
- **Blended approach** to incorporate human touch with technology

Sales skills development cannot be an event. It must become an ongoing process; a sustained way of conducting business. Consider the difference between a "diet" and a healthy eating lifestyle. The first tends to be an intense, dramatic and short lived event designed to facilitate the very specific goal of weight loss. The latter involves a fundamental and permanent change in behavior to support a broader goal – good health. There is a multitude of research to document which approach actually achieves sustained weight management, and it is not the diet!

Skill Development vs. Information Transfer

Too often, an organization's sales improvement effort is over before it begins because the improvement goal is too narrow and/or too shallow. Exemplary sales performance requires a unique blend of interpersonal skills and technical skills, often referred to as the art and science of selling. Only authentic skill development will facilitate the change in behavior necessary to drive performance improvement. Information transfer cannot accomplish this goal.

Anatomy of a Successful Sales Training Initiative



Product training is not the same as sales training; rather it falls into the category of information transfer. Skill development is a key component of change. Information transfer has not historically created change within a sales team or organization. Cultures require development of new skills, practice opportunities, reinforcement of change, and practical recognition for those who embrace the new skills.

The broad availability of on-line curriculum combined with tighter budgets are causing more companies to look at the economies of on-line learning for skill development. Organizations should carefully consider both the potential and limitations of the on-line classroom. Again, it comes down to the difference between skill development and information transfer. On-line learning is an excellent tool for information transfer, making it effective as a reinforcement tool. It doesn't provide the human interaction and level of active participation needed for authentic skill development. Adult learning tenants indicate that adults learn best when allowed to learn, see demonstration, and practice with specific feedback.

For this reason there are many professions for which on-line learning is a critical component to reinforcement, but not necessarily the main learning element. Would you trust your life with a pilot whose entire training was on a flight simulator? How about a surgeon? Intuitive Surgical is the world leader in surgical innovation. A key component to their training is hands on, real life simulation. While not the life or death possibility of flying or surgery, sales skills are critical to the life of any organization.

Customized Approach

Not all sales training is created equally. Much intellectual property is similar in that it is industry-based and developed by industry experts. The most effective training content is research-based on business-to-business or business-to-consumer buying tendencies, with credibility from a business perspective. With a credible foundation, it can then be customized to a specific industry or application. A training program that is not customized for your team loses credibility instantly. Customization is critical to creating examples within the training to which your team can relate.

Customization in conjunction with internal trainer certification creates sustainable success and competitive advantage as you cultivate expertise and advocates within your organization and make the training effort your own. In today's business environment it is recommended that your internal training team include sales directors or managers who will use the skills much more viscerally and can become reinforcement advocates. The combination

of customization and internal training entities will go far to ensure that the institutionalization of the training concepts is a natural outcome.

Self-Awareness

Many organizations lack the self-awareness necessary to allow a successful sales training effort in terms of what they want/need and their specific challenges.

- Do you understand the unique challenges that your team is facing in the field?
- Do you have the right people in the right places?
- Does your sales team fit the new operating world of your company?
- Do you understand your own needs or "GAPS"?
- Does the proposed training methodology align with your go-to-market strategy and how you want your team to represent your company?
- Have you created a complete development plan or continuum for your team?
- What are your ROI objectives, and are they measurable?



Your training provider should facilitate answers to these and a myriad of other questions to clearly set objectives for the sales training initiative. As an example, research shows that more customers are looking for sales professionals to become more collaborative business partners as opposed to having just product expertise. Many training providers are focused on product or service orientation, with the sales methodology centered around scripted responses or planned, manipulative dialog. This could lead to a customer or culture inconsistency within your team. Compatibility with your customer engagement strategy is a critical component of your selection process.

Strategic Considerations

Why do you want to do sales training? The answer is not as obvious as you might think. Every sales organization wants better quota attainment, higher revenue, fewer concessions

and more profitability. Whodoesn't? In reality these objectives will provide great measuring milestones for ROI, but they don't lay the foundation for strategic advantage in the short-term or long-term.

Sales strategy and training are not about the measurements (that are important for ROI), but about the strategic advantage that behavioral change within your sales team could bring to your market dynamics. In other words, expand your vision of what "success" would look like relative to your role and impact in your marketplace. Three questions often come to mind:

What is the NEW customer experience that your sales team will be implementing?

How is your team going to more thoroughly serve your customer base?

What will create strategic advantage for your organization?

Even in markets and among customers who seem to be pushing everything towards commoditization, the opportunity to attain true competitive advantage still exists. The challenge is developing a team that understands the skill set required in this new competitive environment to create long term advantage.

ROI

At the outset of a sales development initiative, few businesses realize that the actual cost will be two to three times the investment made with the sales training provider, as these costs also include travel, lodging, meals, and time out of the field – just to name a few. Having a methodology to measure success and ROI are important components that

your provider should partner with you to develop and implement. Providers should provide strong success stories and references that reinforce their positive impact across several industries. It is a significant investment for any organization to implement a selling and training strategy. Having criteria to select a provider, methodology and strategy are critical to your success.



Carew International is a leader in sales training and leadership development; specializing in comprehensive, proven training programs for sales, sales management and customer service excellence. For over 35 years, Carew has earned its reputation of delivering increased productivity and profitability to our valued clients worldwide.



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Your Sales Training Checklist

- Does the training strategy align with your sales culture?
- Do you know your skill "GAPS" within your sales team?
- Do you have a holistic training plan for complete development versus event-based training?
- Does the training methodology align with your Customer Experience strategy?
- Is the program customizable to your business reality?
- Is there a coaching and reinforcement component?
- Is your senior management prepared to be part of the reinforcement strategy?
- Is this Skill Development versus information transfer?
- Is there anticipated and measurable ROI?