

BUILT BY SALES – FOR SALES

DAVID BATUP homes in on the idea of sales enablement
– getting more of the salesforce prepared like the best performers

There is a wave of change quietly washing through many marketing and sales departments that is making a significant difference to the effectiveness, efficiency and performance of all customer facing teams, and in particular sales. Analysts such as Gartner, IDC and Forrester have labelled the wave as ‘sales enablement’ and it encompasses a range of activities, disciplines and thinking focused on removing the barriers that often get in the way of successfully closing deals.

Central to sales enablement is the idea of harnessing the knowledge and best practices of your best salespeople (the so-called ‘rainmakers’), to the benefit of the whole sales operation. And it is also about approaching the sales cycle not from the perspective of your company’s products and services, but from your customers’ perspective.

Sales and marketing teams may say, “So what, this is what we do already, isn’t it?” But there is evidence that there is still a big shortfall in the way salespeople are prepared for and conduct themselves in front of the customer, relative to the customers’ expectations. To underline this point I have identified these statistics from various sources:

- 57% of customers felt the salesperson was not prepared for the meeting
- 33% of customers say deals could have been won if the salesperson had been better prepared
- 65% of sales time is spent not selling
- 7 hours a week is what the average salesperson spends looking for relevant information to prepare for sales calls
- 70%–90% of marketing material goes unused by sales
- 50% of information is pushed through email
- It takes an average of 7 months to ramp up a new salesperson.

The list makes uncomfortable reading and brings the potential value of sales enablement into sharp focus, as we all can relate to some, if not all, of these points.

For me, the first three points suggest salespeople probably spend more time and energy focusing inwards on their own firm than on their customers. There is one major company I know where this is certainly the case and I suspect if the top three points are only half accurate then there are a lot of sales teams in the same situation.

Sales enablement is all about maximising the outcome of the opportunity development time a salesperson has, and minimising the time spent on activities that can only be described, unkindly by some, as sales procrastination. To do this, sales enablement is about preparation for, the holding of, and follow-up from customer meetings to ensure the salesperson has the greatest chance of success, where success is moving the sale forward or closing.

So, where to start? For sales enablement to be successfully implemented the accepted view is that it starts with your sales strategy. Assuming this is the case then I would add that it should also form a key part of the marketing strategy, given that the marketing team has a very significant role to play in the execution of sales enablement.

I suggest the major steps for sales enablement are:

- Understand how to articulate your products to customers’ business needs, buying cycle and information needs. Engage with your top performing salespeople
- Overlay the ‘moments of truth’ (MOT) onto the customer’s buying cycle to create an MOT map and include

the levels of responsiveness required to meet their needs

- Define the sales enablement problem from the perspective of the customer and salespeople’s needs. Identify the collateral, tools and solutions that will support the salesperson before and after the appointment

- Invest in developing or aligning your assets to meet the customer’s business and process needs. Deploy the assets in a way that makes them easily accessible to sales, ensure they are in the context of the sales cycle and where appropriate provide customer self-service

- Focus on the execution in terms of change management, awareness, benefits and internal PR

- Start simple with a phase 1 that delivers quick, measurable success, and plan for phase 2

- Find ways to ensure the momentum does not slow down, at least for the first year, and work hard to demonstrate the ROI for the programme.

The challenge for any sales enablement programme is to deliver a platform that allows your sales team to facilitate the customer’s buying team through their process in a way that favours your company. If you never lose sight of ➤



*57% of customers
felt the salesperson
was not prepared
for the meeting*



◀ this, then the chances of your programme being a success will be greatly enhanced. Overcomplicate, overengineer and overlook the needs of the customer and field sales, and your chances of adoption will be poor. The following three points are best practice, based on my experience. They will help you focus on what is important during the build and implementation phases.

■ During the build phase there will be a temptation to cram in as much content as possible. This is a mistake. Identify the 20% of the content that will make an 80% difference. This can be done by combining the customers' information needs with modelling of the rainmakers. Then deliver this combined content in the context of the buying, and ultimately, the sales cycle.

■ Don't make assumptions during the design or build phases. Letting the build team define and construct content without cross-checking with field sales will result in limited useful content and poor adoption. Set up a forum made up of rank and file salespeople and a rainmaker as its lead. Task it to act as a field sales body where ideas, testing and feedback can be tabled.

■ Do not underestimate the challenge of adoption. Sales teams can be hard to help and need a lot of convincing that what you have is worth their time and effort to look at. Consider spending at least a third of the project budget on awareness, training and resources designed to encourage adoption. Use the members of the field sales forum as advocates and keen users.

When planning or implementing sales enablement programmes, it is useful to look at the most recent productivity wave available to the sales team, namely CRM. Learning the lessons from CRM implementations is incredibly useful — especially when working with a salesforce that has seen it, done it, got the T-shirt and is a bit cynical when it comes to management ideas of how to increase sales productivity.

Just to drive the point home, CSO Insights, in its 2010 Sales Performance Optimization report, found that 75% of the firms surveyed have implemented a core CRM system but less than 16% achieved increased revenues as a result of their core CRM investments (see also p26).

For me the key lessons from the past ten years of CRM implementations are so relevant to sales enablement initiatives that they should form the core of the project risk assessment before the sales enablement programme starts. I believe the following are the most important.

■ Engage with the rainmakers and key influencers to develop a core team of advocates who are openly behind the sales enablement programme. It is this team that will have the biggest impact in terms of adoption in the field.

■ Relate the strategic needs for sales enablement to the individual; explain the why, the ultimate goal, the impact and what is expected. Then listen really hard with an open mind.

■ Work really hard so this is not seen as some new management trick that involves more information recording and snooping from above. This is probably the number one CRM complaint from sales teams, typically where it has not been positioned properly.

■ KISS — keep it simple at the start, monitor what is useful and add more as the sales team get to grips with the new ways of working. As one American boss told me: "Don't try to drink from a fire hydrant."

■ Look for the early wins and ensure they get the visibility and kudos they deserve. But never slow down once the momentum has built, otherwise it just becomes another fad from management that has failed and can be ignored.

There are two other important factors that can get overlooked. These are 'sales empowerment' and 'behavioural change'. All three factors work together (enablement + empowerment + behavioural change) to meet the customer's business needs and buying cycle.

For example, when a salesperson is empowered by being clear on what the operating parameters are when selling and quoting, it has a huge impact on their ability to respond in a timely and effective way to customer needs.

And behavioural change is fundamental to the success of the sales enablement initiative. It is all too easy to get carried away by the glamour of providing systems and shiny new collateral rather than thinking hard about what is really required and in what format.

Just recently, my experience working with SMEs has shown that it can be the simplest things that make the biggest difference.

For example, have a clear and effective set of market messages, containing value propositions, unique selling points and differentiators that have been validated by your top performers. These help a salesperson with customer conversations much more than endless collateral on an intranet.

In summing up, there is a very strong case for sales enablement. We all know that anything that can be done to improve sales effectiveness and efficiency is something to be seriously considered. But I would counsel you to revisit the lessons learnt from CRM implementations and remember to keep phase 1 simple and uncomplicated.



Focus on the execution in terms of change management, awareness, benefits and internal PR

Contributor *David Batup* is founder of Perperitus, a specialist company that develops enabling solutions for marketing, sales and professional services. db@perperitus.com 0118 965 4066 www.perperitus.com LinkedIn davidbatup