

June, 2011

## Sales Training 2011: Uncovering How the Best-in-Class Sustain, Reinforce and Leverage Best Selling Practices

Despite the recent recession and lingering questions about business stability, sales training has emerged as a consistent, growing imperative among companies seeking to beat out the competition. Aberdeen research conducted in 2009 and 2010 has revealed a continuous rise in sales training spend among survey respondents, most recently revealed in [\*Sales Training: Deploying Knowledge, Process and Technology to Consistently Hit Quota\*](#) (September 2010). In this study, the Best-in-Class firms (those with the most reps achieving quota, and growth in revenue and average deal sizes) reported an average current training spend of 5% higher than the previous year, compared with 1.3% among Industry Average companies and 0.4% for Laggards. The planned future spend, into 2011, was also similar, at 4.0% more among the Best-in-Class, versus 2.2% and 1.6% among the Average and Laggard respondents. If 2011 research yields similar growth rates, how will the new funding be spent? In this upcoming study, slated for publication in September 2011, the answer to this, and other questions will be explored.

### Context

Contemporary corporate sales organizations must adapt to today's on-demand selling environment and the resulting altered buying cycles, as well as new methodologies of transferring knowledge to and from customers and prospects. Maintaining credibility, customer satisfaction and their own profitability requires ongoing attention to the skill sets of the company's front line in order to assure the highest degree of sales effectiveness in managing prospects through the sales cycle. To this end, a wide variety of sales training solutions and methodologies are deployed by companies seeking to lower or control the cost of selling, while maximizing the top line of gross revenue, by influencing the behavior of their sales reps as well as of their sales managers.

### Trends Examined

In the third year of Aberdeen research in to sales training best practices, the research will seek to examine how Best-in-Class companies achieve have updated their sales training deployments regarding:

- Extending elements of sales training to non-sales employees
- Distinguishing content provided to new vs. first-year vs. seasoned sales team members

### Research Preview

A Research Preview provides an advanced look at an upcoming study and the research hypothesis which will be explored based on prior research

- More content on prospecting; negotiations (including “knowing when to fold ‘em”); business skills; opportunity management through the entire sales cycle, including customer management and team-based selling
- Is instructor-led training still the most effective modality?
- Technology enablers used to reinforce long-term retention of training content
- Sales manager training, including coaching skills
- Sales training provided in the context of actual real-time sales opportunities
- Utilizing assessments to match training content to sellers’ skills
- Impact of new trends in mobility and social media

**Table 1: The Best-in-Class PACE Framework**

Pressures	Actions	Capabilities	Enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase or sustain revenue within an uncertain economic recovery</li> <li>▪ Decreasing customer budgets</li> <li>▪ Longer customer buying cycles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create more meaningful sales conversations that address buyer’s overall business needs</li> <li>▪ Enhance sales prospecting, nurturing and closing skills</li> <li>▪ Standardize messaging and sales process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of a formal sales methodology - either homegrown or from an external provider</li> <li>▪ We identify internal subject matter experts (SME’s) whose expertise is available to members of the sales team</li> <li>▪ We provide post-training reinforcement of content presented in initial educational sessions</li> <li>▪ Top-level executives within our company are active sponsors of our sales training initiatives</li> <li>▪ Defined sales performance metrics are widely publicized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Instructor-led training</li> <li>▪ Behavioral analysis/assessment</li> <li>▪ Dynamic library of marketing and sales assets</li> <li>▪ Customized sales playbooks</li> <li>▪ CRM/SFA integration of call planning and selling milestones</li> <li>▪ Learning management system (LMS)</li> </ul>

Source: Aberdeen Group, June 2011

The performance metrics which will be used to determine Best-in-Class companies include:

- Team attainment of quota
- Rep attainment of quota
- Sales cycle
- Corporate revenue
- Win/loss rate

**Case in Point - Underwriters Laboratories**

Consider the case of Underwriters Laboratories, the independent product safety certification organization. Prior rolling out a formal sales training

methodology in 2004, explains Keith Gilbert, Business Development Manager, Chemical, “We had very little consistency in the way we approached prospects, managed accounts, planned meetings or even reported on our sales pipeline.” As a result, he explains, UL sales managers were limited in their ability to coach team members consistently; accurately forecast the amount of closed business; and essentially saw, “everyone playing off a different sheet of music.” To make matters worse, no consistent CRM deployment was in place across a variety of business units and geographies.

Upon rolling out a consistent sales training methodology, as well as settling on an enterprise-wide CRM, Gilbert says that improvements were quickly seen, though the process was not always smooth. Some of the longer-tenured sales team members were reticent to adopt new techniques and use online access to training content, but “the more career-oriented – and ultimately most successful – reps were eager to absorb the new system. After an initial roll-out, over 70 team members have now been formally trained, with plans for the global sales team of 250 to eventually participate.”

As Gilbert says, “We saw significant turnaround in business opportunities after implementing the training. We expanded into higher-level contacts, saw bigger deals, and are earning more annual contracts as opposed to the bulk of business lying in more transactional deals as in the past.” One large plastics manufacturer account grew from \$250k to \$12M per year in UL spend, he continues, “purely through building peer-to-peer relationships at higher levels, identifying more pain points, and getting away from the transactional type of selling from the past.”

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~ Keith Gilbert, Business Development Manager, Chemical, Underwriters Laboratories

## Outcome

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Our research will show that to achieve maximum sales effectiveness, companies must blend a combination of strategic actions, technologies and services to:

- Incorporate a process for collaborative collection and sharing of 'tribal knowledge'
- Ensure CRM/SFA integration of call planning and selling milestones
- Provide post-training reinforcement of content presented in initial educational sessions
- Establish a dynamic library of marketing and sales assets

## Solution Snapshot

Sales training solution providers include those highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Solution Providers for Sales Training**

Sales Training Solution Providers		
2WIN! Global	Dale Carnegie	Pareto Law
AchieveGlobal	Element K / Cognitive Arts	Patrick Henry International
Action Selling/The Sales Board	Executive Conversation	PI Worldwide
Adventace	Forum	Porter Henry
Advantage Performance Group	FranklinCovey	Richardson
The Afterburner Group	Frontline Selling	Sales Effectiveness Inc.
Altus Learning Systems	GP Worldwide/General Physics	Sales Performance International
Aslan Training	Holden International	Sandler Training
Baker Consulting	Huthwaite	SAVO
BayGroup International	Intrepid Learning Solutions	The TAS Group
The Brooks Group	Janek Performance Group	Think! Inc.
BTS	Kantar	TopLine Leadership
Carew International	Korn/Ferry International (Lore International Institute)	ValueSelling Associates
Chally/HR Chally	LSA Global	Vorsight
Communispond	Miller Heiman	Wilson Learning
The Complex Sale	Mindflash	Ziglar
Corporate Visions	Next Level Sales Consulting	
CustomerCentricSelling	Next Step	

Source: Aberdeen Group, June 2011

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com).

### Related Research

[\*The Extended Sales Enterprise: Channeling Better Results\*](#) March 2011  
[\*Streamlining the Top of the Funnel: How Inside Sales Teams Source, Qualify and Close Business\*](#); February 2011  
[\*Sales Mobility: Quotas Untethered\*](#); November 2010  
[\*Sales Training: Deploying Knowledge, Process and Technology to Consistently Hit Quota\*](#); September 2010

[\*Sales Performance Management: Getting Everyone on the Same Page\*](#); August, 2010  
[\*Sales Forecasting: Analytics to the Rescue!\*](#); June 2010  
[\*Optimizing Lead-To-Win: Shrinking the Sales Cycle and Focusing Closers on Sealing More Deals\*](#); May 2010  
[\*Sales Intelligence: Preparing for Smarter Selling\*](#); February, 2010

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