THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CREATING A SUCCESSFUL SALES ENABLEMENT STRATEGY

A WHITEPAPER BY THE BROOKS GROUP

Taking the right approach to sales force enablement is something that can have a profound impact on the success of your sales organization.

According to research from [Demand Metric], 75% of companies surveyed report that having a sales enablement strategy makes a moderate or significant contribution to their achievement of revenue goals.

What is a Sales Enablement Strategy and Who Does it Involve?

At its core, sales enablement is a business function that's designed to help anyone involved in the selling process profitably sell more to prospects and customers.

Sales enablement is generally set up to give sales reps the proper skills, tools, and processes to improve sales productivity and drive revenue. However, as we know, sales are not made by the sales team alone. Many departments within an organization take part in the processes and interactions that lead up to the final sale being confirmed.

An effective sales enablement strategy should take this reality into consideration, and consider involving departments outside of sales that support the sales effort, including:

- **Inside Sales/Business Development Team**
- **Account Management Team**
- **Customer Service Team**
- **Marketing Team**

You'll soon learn that one of the keys to a successful sales enablement strategy is establishing a strong sales focus across the entire organization. Involving stakeholders from multiple departments is an effective way of accomplishing this.

Why Planning is Critical to Success

There can be many moving parts to a sales enablement strategy (training, content, tools, support, etc.), so it's important to create a plan that aligns with your organization's goals—and then set forth executing it.

Sales enablement often involves changing or improving the processes and established culture that exist in your organization. As with any other change management process, sales enablement should be properly planned out to ensure the desired outcomes are met.

We're all too familiar with the quote from Benjamin Franklin: "*If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail*."

So, give your sales enablement strategy the best chance for success by carefully and intentionally mapping out the execution plan before beginning any work. You can do this on your own, but we suggest working with an experienced provider who's familiar with the most common mistakes, pitfalls, and keys to getting your plan off the ground and running.

Let's cover the steps to creating your winning sales enablement strategy.

Step 1 ⁞ Identify Your Unique Challenges and Pain Points

There is no “one size fits all” strategy for improving sales effectiveness.

Your organization is unique, and you must take time to gauge where you are today—and your goals for the future—so you can connect the dots with your plan.

Evaluate the challenges your sales team currently faces by asking the following questions:

- Are there specific market changes that are forcing them to adapt?
- What types of things are creating friction inside of the sales process?
- How is the buyer’s journey changing? (And how well are your sellers adjusting to those changes?)
- What information do prospects and customers already have by the time they engage with your sellers?
- Are your sellers capable of having strategic business conversations with the right people?

Finding the answers to questions like these will give you a starting point for where to direct your focus in terms of sales enablement.

Tools to Assess Your Team's Current Situation

- **Anonymous polling** – Getting to the bottom of what's holding your salespeople back can be as simple as asking them. Consider deploying an anonymous survey to gather feedback. (TINYpulse or SurveyMonkey are great tools for this)
- **Shadowing Sales Reps on Sales Calls** – There's nothing like living a day in the life of one of your sales reps to truly understand the challenges they're up against. Observing reps in their environment is a key strategy The Brooks Group uses with clients during our Discover phase.
- **Key Stakeholder Interviews** – It's a good idea to get consensus on the success factors that key stakeholders in your organization consider to be important before designing a strategy.
- **Sales Team Insights** – What's the DNA of your current sales team? A comprehensive assessment-based report can reveal the strength and challenge areas of each of your sales team members based on your unique selling environment.

Step 2 Understand the Characteristics of Your Top Performers

You likely have some members of your sales team who are already performing at high levels. Work with these folks to see what is contributing to their success, and what kind of tools or training would make them even more successful.

Remember, instead of trying to clone your A-players, work to understand what the role itself requires for success. Which hard skills and soft skills does someone need to perform at high levels in the role? Does the role require a "farmer" or "hunter" personality style? These questions and more will help you determine what the role requires.

How to Develop a Top-Performer Profile

- **Determine what the ROLE requires for success** – Every unique role will require a certain set of competencies, behavior traits, and a certain personality style to perform at high levels. (A "farmer" sales role has very different requirements than a "hunter" sales role, for example) Determine what the role needs, and THEN look for the perfect candidate. A benchmarking tool is extremely helpful here.
- **Interview top performers** – Identify which salespeople are performing the best and interview them to see what they consider their success factors to be.
- **Interview sales managers** – Who else is close to the role? The sales manager. Conduct interviews with them to see which qualities they believe an ideal candidate should possess.
- **Interview key stakeholders** – Finally, interview other stakeholders in the organization who have insight on future goals and direction for the company. What does an ideal salesperson look like in their eyes?

Develop a top-performer profile, and then work to hire individuals who fit that mold using behavioral style interviewing techniques and a quality assessment tool.

> **Tip:** Use a validated hiring assessment to ensure all new hires match the criteria necessary for top performance in the roles you're looking to fill. The tool should meet all federal and ethical guidelines for employment testing if you plan to use it for hiring purposes.

Step 3 | Provide Training and Support That's Immediately Applicable

You must provide your sales team with tools they can put to use right away in order for your sales enablement strategy to be effective both short and long-term.

That requires starting with the fundamentals, and not overcomplicating the process. Give your team a launching pad by training them with a standardized sales process, and layer on advanced selling skills gradually.

Keep in mind that your sellers will be more likely to buy into your sales enablement initiative if they can see the personal payoff. Show them the immediate value the training will bring (i.e. how it will help them increase their sales) and they'll be much more engaged and motivated.

Important Questions You Need to Ask an Outsourced Sales Training Provider

1. *"How can my team observe the training methodology before we commit?"*

A sales training initiative typically requires a substantial investment of resources – including time, energy, and of course, budget dollars. So before committing to a training methodology, it's important to make sure it's a good fit for your team.

Ask any solution providers you're in conversations with how you can observe the training they deliver before you make a decision. Whether it's in person or by way of video, you should see a system in action to truly gauge if it's a match for your team and organizational goals.

2. *"How will the training be customized to my business?"*

One size does not fit all when it comes to sales training—or any training for that matter. The most effective training programs are customized to include the specific challenges, selling scenarios, and industry language that participants are familiar with.

Customized training that includes relevant examples and the opportunity for reps to work through real challenges they're facing is much easier for participants to understand and buy into. Real-world learning scenarios increase the likelihood that new skills will be used once reps are back on the job.

That engagement and transfer of knowledge is huge when it comes to maximizing ROI.

3. *“What sets you apart from the competition?”*

You likely have a list of outsourced training providers you’re considering. Ask this question to find out what sets each of them apart from one another.

You may discover that one provider specializes in your industry or the challenges your organization is up against. Some of the differentiators may be things that weren’t originally on your radar, but that could enhance your sales effectiveness strategy beyond what you’d initially envisioned.

> **Tip:** Use this question (and any others you ask) to observe the effectiveness of the sales representative you’re speaking with. If they’re trained in the selling methodology you’re researching, it’s a good opportunity to see how it feels when you’re in the buyer’s position.

4. *“What other clients have you helped, and what did success look like for them?”*

How often do you visit a new restaurant without checking the online reviews first? Probably not very often.

It makes good sense to research the experience your peers have had—especially with a decision as important as selecting a training provider.

Inquire about notable clients and whether the provider has testimonials available to share with you. It can also be helpful to speak directly to the client if the provider has referrals available.

5. *“What kind of reinforcement plan will follow the training?”*

A sales training initiative can be one of the most impactful things you can do to improve your organization’s success. The question is, will the training program result in permanent behavior change and lasting sales performance improvement, or will it be a “flavor of the month” that your sales team abandons a few weeks after the experience?

The difference between success and failure of a sales training initiative can often be made by the quality of the reinforcement program.

Be sure that the training provider you choose has a robust reinforcement program to build on the momentum of the training and solidify new behaviors. Reinforcement should be engaging, interactive, and easily integrated into your sales team's daily routine

If the solution provider doesn't offer any reinforcement options, it may be wise to remove them from your short list.

Step 4 Align the Entire Organization with a Sales Focus

Your sales team doesn't operate in a silo. They need the support from every other department in your organization in order to be as successful as possible.

According to Aberdeen, companies that have sales, marketing, and service departments in sync have customers who are more loyal and spend more. The study reveals:

- Aligned firms enjoy 7.6 times greater annual increase in customer retention rates
- Aligned firms achieve 2.8 times greater annual increase in company revenue
- Sales teams across these firms enjoy 41% greater annual growth in their attainment of quotas

Imagine how much more productive your organization would be if your marketing department understood the sales process and could provide marketing materials for every step of the buyer's journey, for example. And imagine the synergy you'd create if your customer service reps felt comfortable identifying cross-selling and upselling opportunities in addition to solving issues quickly for the client.

When you're building out your sales enablement strategy, keep in mind that it will benefit you to have departments outside of sales trained in your sales process, and empowered with a sales focus mindset.

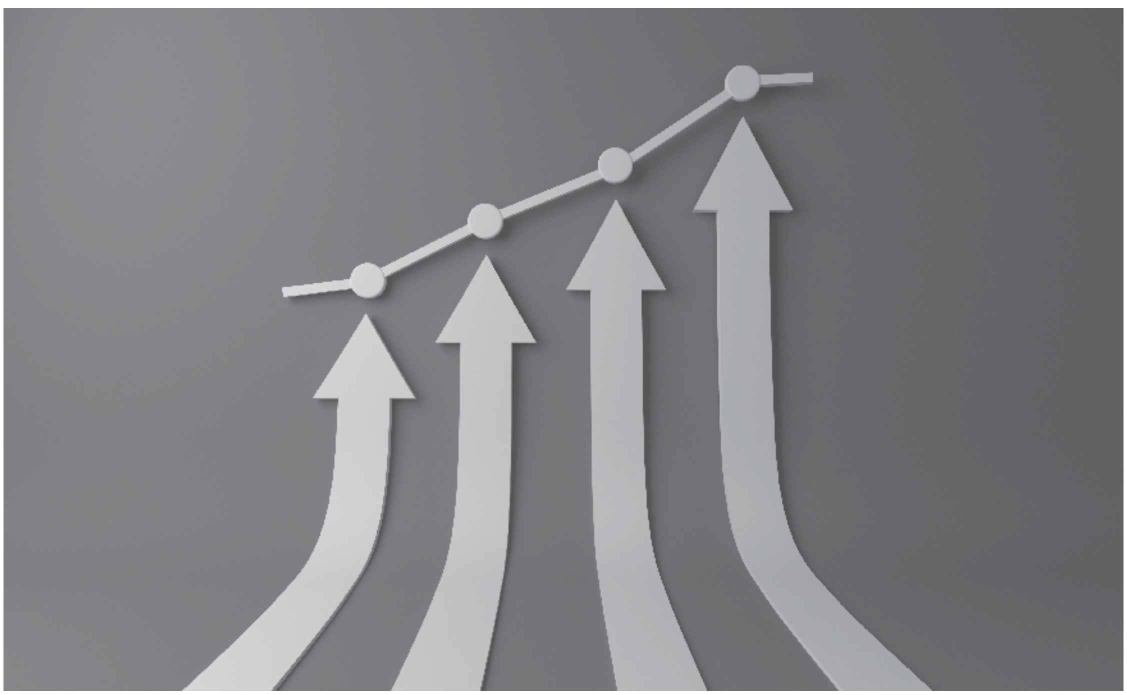
Doing so will ensure that everyone is working together towards the common goal of increased sales.

Methods for Improving Cross-Departmental Alignment

- Create an SLA (Service Level Agreement) between the sales and marketing team
- Train customer facing teams in a common process (outside sales, inside sales, account managers, customer service, etc.)
- Extend CRM software to teams such as marketing, customer service, finance, etc. to improve efficiency and collaboration and drive a sales focus
- Align your company-wide hiring process with your sales culture – this is all about getting clear on what your culture rewards, creating ideal candidate profiles, and incorporating hiring and coaching best practices into your current processes. A good provider can help you navigate this key piece to the sales enablement puzzle.

Step 5 Reinforce Best Practices and Remember to ABO (Always Be Optimizing)

A sales enablement strategy is often about making big shifts in your culture and daily operations and these kinds of shifts don't happen overnight. Don't think of building a sales enablement strategy as something you can check a box and be done with.



Create a plan that allows you to gain some early wins, and then work consistently to build and improve upon your progress.

In over 40 years in the industry, we've learned that the ROI for a sales training initiative is greatest when live instructor-led training is followed up by a strategic sales training reinforcement program.

Plan to reinforce any training that you deliver with refreshers and coaching, and continually check in on your team's progress to see where you can be optimizing.

Tips for Improving the ROI of a Sales Enablement Initiative

- **Begin with fundamentals and layer on advanced skills gradually** – You team must master the fundamentals before moving on to fine-tuning. A standardized sales process used by everyone on the team will establish a common language—and keep learners motivated as they experience quick lifts in performance. From there, you can deliver more advanced training such as negotiation skills, territory planning, etc.
- **Follow-up training with a well-planned and executed reinforcement program** – The quality of the reinforcement training can often make a difference between sales training that sticks, and training that's viewed as "the flavor of the month." Choose a reinforcement program that is led by expert coaches and that follows a structure that keeps participants engaged.
- **Deploy surveys and other assessment tools to gauge the team's progress** – Keep managers and key stakeholders aware of the progress being made by identifying and tracking various success markers, including:
    - Additional sales that participants attribute to the training
    - Increase in sales volume
    - Change in average sale amount
    - Performance to quota
    - Length of sales cycle
    - And more

- **Train managers to coach to the newly learned skills** – To ensure the new skills and processes are being used in the field, your sales managers need to be equipped to coach on an ongoing basis. Sales managers are force multipliers: train them with a practical coaching system so they can enable the sellers they lead.
- **Refine ideal candidate profiles and optimize the hiring process** – As your team grows and improves their performance, you may need to update what "ideal" looks like in terms of your hiring benchmark. Assessing candidates should become a standard part of your hiring process in order to intentionally build a team of elite performers.
- **Offer training to new hires and refresher courses to keep skills sharp** – As your business grows and you add new positions, be sure to onboard new hires with the standardized sales process the rest of your team is operating from. An online sales training program can be a great option here.

Conclusion

If you're reading this whitepaper, you understand the importance of devoting time and resources to your sales enablement strategy. With the right planning and execution, you can make sales excellence the new normal for your team—today, tomorrow, and into the future.

Luckily, it's not something you have to do on your own. The Brooks Group can work with you to develop a sales enablement plan designed to grow with your business.

Maximum IMPACT Sales Enablement (MISE) will give you an action plan for achieving both your short and long-term goals. In the words of one of our clients, MISE will take your team "from walking, to running, to high speed execution."

Learn more about MISE here, and how it can meet your team where it is today, while giving you a roadmap to get you where you need to be in the future.

Maximum IMPACT Sales Enablement

DISCOVER THE POWER OF MISE

About The Brooks Group

Founded in 1977, The Brooks Group is an award-winning B2B sales training company focused on bringing practical, straightforward solutions to your sales force selection and training challenges.

The Brooks Group provides a suite of proven sales and sales management development programs, industry-leading reinforcement tools, and best-in-class assessments.

For more information
The Brooks Group can be reached by phone at (800) 633-7762,
by email at Contact@TheBrooksGroup.com or online at TheBrooksGroup.com.

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The Sales Leader blog covers everything you need to build and lead an elite sales team. From hiring sales superstars, to delivering highly effective sales coaching, to creating a healthy sales culture—and everything in between.

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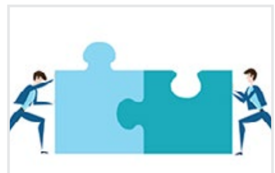

What is the Difference Between Account Management and Sales?

7 Tips to Help Your Salespeople Sell More to Existing Customers

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