

Huthwaite supports global sales effectiveness drive at RSA



Change Behaviour. Change Results.

Laying claim to a heritage stretching back almost 300 years, RSA (formerly Royal & Sun Alliance) is one of the world's leading insurance groups. With operations in 28 countries and providing insurance products and services to more than 130 countries, the company has a strong legacy of underwriting and claims expertise, providing customers with innovative and high quality financial services solutions.

Yet in a fiercely competitive market nothing stands still and in 2006, following a major restructuring

of the Group, as part of its new growth strategy RSA developed a company-wide Sales Effectiveness Programme (SEP), fully supported by the main board.

This fundamental change initiative was designed to create a stronger sales culture and focus, with nine 'work streams' addressing a broad range of issues - from account planning and performance management to incentive-based remuneration and utilising management information effectively.

One of the key work streams has been improving selling skills. As part of this, a global training programme was developed in conjunction with leading behaviour

change consultancy, Huthwaite International. To-date, sales and coaching programmes have been completed in the UK, Italy, Denmark, Ireland, Canada and Latin America and additional negotiation skills training in Sweden, delivering uniformly impressive results.

"With our international network of experienced training specialists, the RSA programme has proved once again that Huthwaite is unmatched in its ability to provide consistent high-quality training programmes, delivered by specialist local trainers and tailored to meet the particular needs of each local market," confirms business director, financial services, Peter Belsey.



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Mario Diemoz - RSA



A consultative approach

In undertaking a training project designed to meet the overall needs of the business across multiple geographies, RSA and Huthwaite recognised the importance of developing consultative face-to-face selling skills as the basis for common performance improvement group-wide. The resulting programmes were therefore based on Huthwaite’s internationally renowned SPIN® Selling methodology, which is underpinned by a step-by-step consultative approach to determining and agreeing customer needs.

“However,” says Belsey, “as with all our clients we ‘practise what we preach’- working closely with RSA’s local management at the outset in order to establish the precise requirements of each region, understand their different cultures, and areas of expertise, to determine the most appropriate training content and method of delivery .”

The programmes implemented in Canada and Latin America respectively demonstrate the flexibility of the Huthwaite approach, in identifying and delivering an effective tailored solution to improve competitive performance in each marketplace.

Securing buy-in

For the long-term success of any Huthwaite training programme it is important to secure buy-in from

senior management and the sales staff undergoing training. It follows that effective planning is crucial in determining the precise nature of the problems faced and aligning training content to address those key issues identified.

This has a number of elements. In Canada, for example, as part of the diagnostic process pre-training, Huthwaite undertook a qualitative study working with Business Development Managers (BDMs) and Regional Vice Presidents (RVPs) in the Greater Toronto area, supported by a generic sales questionnaire which covered a broader geographic area than could be achieved face-to-face.

This extensive preparatory research sought to determine: the relative importance of generic sales activities within the BDM’s role; their relative skills levels in each; and to compare the BDMs’ perceptions of each with those of their RVPs.

“The results inevitably highlighted differences in perception between the sellers and their managers,” confirms Belsey. “However, we identified a healthy lack of complacency in both groups about their skills levels, indicating a likely significant appetite for training and subsequent on-going coaching.”

“At the same time, both BDMs and their managers agreed that the most important skills in the BDM role were those deployed face-to-face with their broker contacts. And it is precisely these skills

– uncovering needs, developing those needs and building value for RSA’s key differentiators – that the ensuing SPIN® project was ideally geared to focus on and develop.”

“Huthwaite carried out needs analysis on a country-by-country basis. Capturing the key behavioural changes required to improve sales performance was particularly valuable in Latin America”, recalls Huthwaite’s, Ivan D. Cortes. “This information was fed back during top team events and workshops with senior management, to help gain management support for the sales training initiative – which proved critical to its success.”

Successes achieved early on in the Brazilian programmes also provided strong additional evidentiary support in securing buy-in for the subsequent training activities in Colombia and Chile.

A tough challenge

In common with many other financial services businesses in which technical expertise had long been seen as the bedrock of sales success, moving to a more consultative selling style – identifying rather than assuming customer needs - represented a major cultural shift.

Mario Diemoz, then leader of the SEP programme in Chile, agrees and adds: “For the first time we had to learn to listen rather than simply talk to our customers. Easy to say, much harder to achieve, especially with highly experienced and long-standing sales people who had previously been successful with a more traditional, technically-based approach.

“However, improving the consultative sales skills of our people in this way, as part of a more systematic process, offered us a unique opportunity to create clear competitive advantage for RSA in a tough insurance marketplace.”

Customised training delivery

Here too, it was important to reflect the realities of each local marketplace. As a result, in Canada, for example, local HR managers and BDMs combined with Huthwaite to create credible exercises, role-plays and materials that accurately reflected their sales environment.

Similarly, in Latin America, Cortes worked closely with each

senior management team in customising existing Huthwaite training material. *“To create a training environment which made participants more comfortable we developed role plays which realistically reflect local conditions as most broker customers were typically SME businesses, resulting in a very different relationship dynamic from the much larger brokerages typical in the UK and Canada,”* he says.

“And for Chile in particular, it was essential that existing non-affinity role-plays were further customised to reflect the affinity-based nature of RSA’s local business relationships.”

Training delivery also differed to suit local requirements. In Canada, the SPIN® selling and coaching programmes were delivered to around 40 of the company’s BDMs, RVPs and selected head office sales staff as a single integrated programme, as part of a major sales and training conference.

By contrast, in Brazil the Huthwaite training was phased over three months, with 48 key account managers taking part in three-day SPIN® selling workshops and sales managers receiving a further two days’ coaching skills training. Subsequent sales training programmes then took place in Colombia and Chile.

Impressive results

The results of this highly flexible and individualised approach have been immediate and substantial.

For example, since training took place in Colombia seven months ago, the RSA sales team has regularly exceeded target by between 15-32 per cent. In Brazil and Chile too, the more consistent, systematic sales techniques adopted as a result of the SPIN® training have also seen substantial sales gains.

“This was especially evident at a recent sales convention in Brazil,” confirms Cortes, *“where ‘before’ and ‘after’ role-plays showed the dramatic impact the adoption of SPIN® selling techniques had had, almost from day one - and how RSA’s culture was already undergoing fundamental change.”*

The impact has been similarly evident in Chile: “Visits to sales meetings show clear evidence of our BDMs having a much greater understanding of their clients’ requirements: as a result, all 19 of our branches spread across the country are regularly achieving above-target sales,” says Diemoz.

Anecdotal customer reaction has also been uniformly favourable, with comments such as “they now understand my business and my needs” being typical.



