

# A radical company restructure required big changes in behaviour at Esko-Graphics.

**B**ack in 2002, Belgian company Barco-Graphics merged with Danish Purup-Eskofot to form Esko-Graphics. The amalgamation prompted a major review of the company's operations and resulted in the decision to focus on the packaging industry and divest all parts of the business that didn't fit their new strategy.

Four years later, Esko-Graphics is the world leader in packaging pre-production solutions. From their Belgian headquarters in Ghent, they produce and market a complete range of hardware and software to address the needs of the entire packing supply chain, from graphics to package structure to project management.

Such a radical business rethink meant Esko-Graphics had to completely reassess the behaviour of their sales team and, once the new marketing strategy was in place, there was a clear need to ensure that their salespeople really bought into the new vision for the company. Esko-Graphics' success was dependent upon their salesforce having excellent product and market knowledge and a thorough understanding of the competition. It was clear they would need to adapt their behaviour to match this new situation.

Hubert Scheir, Esko's marketing director for Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, decided to get Huthwaite involved.

## Esko invited Huthwaite International to tailor the solution

"I used Huthwaite in a previous organisation when we needed to bring about a real change in our sales performance," said Hubert. "On that occasion, the company was going through a fall in sales. We were discounting far too much, which impacted on profitability; our cost of sale was too high; and, to add to our problems, we had a high rate of product returns from unhappy customers! As part of our turn-around strategy, we put the whole salesforce through Huthwaite's SPIN® Selling and Account Strategy for Major Sales.

"The impact was dramatic and we became very successful again. Of course, it's hard to say for sure how much of that was down to training alone because it was part of a larger change project, but I am personally convinced Huthwaite made a big difference.

"From experience, I knew Huthwaite were the right people to help us drive through the changes we needed to make at Esko-Graphics. I also knew their methodology would be very acceptable to our people, making it easier to get their buy-in. The courses are based on scientific research, but it also makes sense to people at a gut level, it just feels right. And, of course, the Huthwaite approach gets results!"

## Matching sales behaviour to the new sales strategy

A thorough analysis of Esko-Graphics' sales process raised several crucial issues:

- Their marketplace regularly involved high-value, long-cycle sales.
- There was a need to influence a range of people within one client account.
- Their offering involved intangible selling points, such as the impact of error-free operation and the increase in productivity their technology would in all likelihood enable.

Selling the value of such intangible benefits required a higher level of skill to make maximum use of customer-facing time. The Huthwaite training project which followed lasted almost a year and a half, with delegates attending three training programmes covering SPIN® Selling; Account Strategy for Major Sales; and Negotiation Skills. These programmes were tailored to develop Esko-Graphics' consultative selling skills, to help their salespeople understand the customer's buying process and how to influence each stage of it, and to negotiate more effective agreements to reduce levels of discounting.

### Sales results reflected the success of great training

"Esko are very pleased with the results." Hubert continued: "We set very stretching targets for the past two years to increase our turnover by 15% year-on-year; and to increase our EBIT by 5%. We achieved both, and I am sure that, without investing in the training support, it would have been much harder for our people to close deals in such a competitive market and contain the level of discounting."

Graham Short, the Huthwaite account manager for Hubert's project, feels that the successful implementation of the sales academy was enhanced by the total commitment of Esko-Graphics' management team and the very positive attitude of their salesforce, who all saw the need to develop their skills in an increasingly competitive market.



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