



Assessing Product Knowledge at GE Information Services

Regular readers of this publication will know that GE has a long relationship with Huthwaite International. Huthwaite has delivered a number of training programmes such as SPIN® Selling Skills, Sales Presentations and Strategic Account Planning for different parts of the company.

GE Information Services (GEIS) has introduced a new key programme for its sales people designed to provide product knowledge in a consistent manner. The Product Certification Programme focuses on product knowledge and how that knowledge is then applied in the sales situation.

Level 1 is a computer-based online test which assesses knowledge of the product, with a self assessment list of 25 questions. This provides an initial view of the salesperson's product understanding. In order to demonstrate how they use this knowledge face-to-face, the programme also includes a second

level to test knowledge in a dynamic environment.

GEIS has put together an assessment centre involving role playing. Participants simulate two sales calls and a sales presentation so that they have the opportunity to display both product knowledge and sales skills. Immediate feedback is provided to the participants by the Huthwaite consultants who observe the role plays. Using the SPIN® behaviour model and the SIEVE model for making persuasive presentations as the benchmarks, Huthwaite consultants identify successful and unsuccessful sales performances. In addition, GEIS managers provide feedback on product knowledge.

The results of the certification programme are being used to inform coaching plans for individual sales people so that they can improve their skills. The coaching is monitored and where appropriate Levels 1 and 2 may be re-taken.

Huthwaite International's Jenny Simnett explains: *"Good product knowledge is often about familiarity with the technical features of a product. A good sales person needs to be able to translate this knowledge into persuasive business benefits based on what the client says they want. The skills element of this project has been to focus on the 'tight' integration of these benefits and personalise them to the individual decision-maker."*

The certification programme has been positively received as Jerome Doherty-Bigara of GEIS comments: *"The Certification Programme has had a number of benefits. It has provided a focus for marketing, pre-sales, sales and professional services teams to work together to pool information and understanding. In addition, the results of the programme are being used to plan further skills development involving coaching and monitoring by sales managers."*



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