

KSS and Verint target more effective proposals

KSS and Verint are two companies from rather different parts of the IT sector – but with one thing in common. Both successful at selling, they clearly understood that improving the way they make written proposals for major opportunities – making them more compelling for busy people to read and making a better job of incorporating real customer needs into the proposed solution – would make them better still.

KSS supplies software systems to help retail organisations, such as petrol retailers, to monitor sales and provide decision-support for price setting and promotion configuration. Selling such systems is often a long-cycle, complex business as they can be big ticket items affecting critical business areas. The market is competitive with a small number of niche players. There can be significant internal competition as well, from potential customers' own IT departments who may want to continue maintaining, or develop and install, their own bespoke systems.

Verint Systems is a leading provider of analytic software solutions for security and surveillance, and for call centre monitoring: ensuring that their customers' call centre staff are as effective in their use of time and technology as they can possibly be.

A group of 15 sales and pre-sales professionals from Verint had an unquestionably high level of selling ability. What they lacked was a consistent (but not stereotyped) approach and message in their proposals. While the team was measurably

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competent at identifying the needs a buyer might have for Verint solutions, they were often less skilled at reflecting those needs back in the all-important proposal. This being so, the benefits of the Verint solution were harder to describe in a truly persuasive fashion. In addition to this challenge, many Verint proposals are written as direct responses to tender requests, where no sales meeting has taken place, and the seller has had no opportunity to guide the conversation towards the uncovering of buyer needs – normally the most powerful intelligence in the sales process.

The one-day proposal workshop, run by Huthwaite's Richard Graham, incorporated sessions in how to make the proposal as persuasive as possible, how to construct an





effective management summary, and how to structure the document to be easy to navigate as well as how to get the proposal read. The event was, says James Pratt, Verint's EMEA Director of Sales, "a very powerful shot in the arm for our salesforce, giving

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them an introduction to the skills and processes that will mark our proposals out from the competition's, and enabling us to produce proposals that will sell for us – even when we are not there."

For KSS, the Huthwaite event was part of a series of training initiatives to develop the sales team's skills, in which particular care has been given to ensuring the sales team take time to explore the customer's needs in depth before putting forward solutions.

Tim Napper and Mike Goodwin, two Senior VPs at KSS, worked with Richard

Graham to develop an internal template and house style to ensure that future proposals would be attractive, easy to read and persuasive. This template was then introduced to the team as part of the Huthwaite workshop to help them construct more persuasive, customer-focused documents which would set out the customer's needs, demonstrate that KSS could meet them and demonstrate the benefits that would accrue from the investment.

Tim Napper commented: "We selected Huthwaite not just because their research background reassured us that they had the skills to help us develop more persuasive proposal documents, but because they encouraged us to embed the training into our company through the production of our own proposal template. This approach makes it easier for our people to adopt the approach we want, so that the lessons from the course are implemented quickly... in fact, with the very next proposal produced. We are sure the work we have done is a big step forward and it will ensure we are producing user-friendly documents which set out a clear business case to help the customer's decision-making process".

To embed the training even further, KSS

is examining its proposal review process to ensure that any gaps in the proposal are identified and remedied at an early stage, and that the final document fully reflects the approach agreed during the training event.

David Freedman, Huthwaite's head of sales for the IT sector who worked closely with KSS to set up the project, remarked "Proposals play a critical part in the sales process with many clients short-listing suppliers based on the proposal they have submitted, yet few organisations pay much attention to these documents and even fewer train their people to write a good document. It's remarkable that all the investment put into training salespeople to

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be more customer-focused and to take more care in exploring customer needs can be wasted if the proposal that follows is just a list of features with a price tag attached. Paying attention to this aspect of the sales process can pay huge – and immediate – dividends."