

In the swim with SPIN[®] - EDS takes Huthwaite to the channel

For most Huthwaite clients, SPIN[®] training focuses on improving the skills of internal sales people. Line management and the HR team can ensure that the programme addresses directly the company's broader objectives: similarly, they can monitor progress through reinforcement and coaching, and adapt courses in light of changing market circumstances. In short, they are in control.

But what if the route to market is indirect, via channel partners? Or sales leads are generated by an external call centre? How can such a company maintain its competitive edge, by ensuring the sales techniques of third parties are of a high level and suited to the customer base?

These were the issues faced by the Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) division of leading global services company, EDS, founded in 1962 and now with an annual turnover of \$21.5 billion and more than 137,000 employees in 60 countries.

Five years ago, EDS had acquired a 3D CAD and product data management product called Solid

Edge - a high-end, high-value and technically complex solution which until that time had been sold almost exclusively to CAD engineers, through independent value-added resellers (VARs).

To compete in a tough market, EDS developed a suite of sales training courses and workshops, called AdvantEdge, which was made available on a subscription basis to major VARs across Europe in their own language. This initially proved highly successful, with 100% take-up.

With technically skilled VARs selling to a similarly oriented customer base, it seemed that EDS had a marriage made in heaven!

The honeymoon was soon over, however, as a result of two changes in the market. *"As the market became more established,"* confirms Huthwaite consultant, Dominic France-Lynch, *"a new breed of professional buyer appeared - no longer interested in technologies and product features, but looking for pragmatic answers to business issues."*

At around the same time, the company's two main competitors began a price war which EDS did not wish to enter, and indeed has continued resolutely to resist. *"This reinforced the need to sell on value, by proposing solutions based on identified need,"* he adds.

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Recognised as the 'gold standard' in developing such a customer-oriented approach, Huthwaite's SPIN® Selling model was adopted and recommended to VARs as the new, preferred sales methodology within an extended AdvantEdge programme.

Over the past 18 months therefore, the first round of training has been completed, with over 100 VAR staff Europe-wide attending SPIN® workshops. The response has been uniformly positive, giving technically experienced sales people the confidence to discuss broader business issues and problems with customers.

And the measure of success? For EDS, the 'acid test' is that of productivity and with SPIN® as a key part of its channel training programme, the company confirms

that sales of licenses per channel salesperson have more than doubled.

More recently, EDS has outsourced the task of lead generation to a telesales call centre and here too, SPIN® has formed an integral part of the customer contact from day one. With a database of over 400,000 potential buyers across Europe, the company has set three key objectives:

- to establish contact with the relevant managers in the database;
- using SPIN® to understand their business issues; and
- to start the process – or 'sow the seeds' – of how Solid Edge might address those issues.

The overriding goal is that EDS should be the first to know when such buyers enter their buying cycle, and that Solid Edge is top of

the shortlist as providing a suitable solution for their needs.

Though the telesales team has yet to undergo customised 3-day SPIN® training programmes, EDS and Huthwaite have worked with the call-centre management team to develop scripts using SPIN® techniques. From the start, these have proved successful in getting CAD users to 'open up' and discuss their problems with the telesales representatives.

"An interesting situation has now emerged," says Dominic. "The call centre team will, in future, pass over to the channel prospects identified as in the early stages of the buying cycle, with needs identified and already exposed to EDS' product messages. The worst thing that could happen, therefore, is that these 'warm' prospects are then faced with sales people taking the old features and functions approach."

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As a result, a programme is now under development to reinforce the earlier VAR workshops with coaching and ensure that the channel is again 'up to speed'. EDS' own business unit managers also play a separate coaching role in ensuring channel partners form a fully autonomous sales channel and they too are fully immersed in the philosophy and practical application of the SPIN[®] Selling approach.

"It is more likely that coaching will be undertaken by the VAR owners," he confirms, "as it is essential to secure the 'hearts and minds' of the channel participants and this is best achieved by those with the authority to make it happen."

With newer, more sophisticated product versions broadening the appeal of Solid Edge and with larger volume sales being achieved in national and international companies, the next step for EDS is likely to be the introduction of a SPIN[®] based major accounts programme for selected partners, probably during 2004.

In the meantime, EDS has been delighted with Huthwaite's level of professionalism and the way in which the company has 'got under the skin' of its business, understood its needs and proposed high-quality solutions which have been well received by

both EDS and its partners – a real tribute to the SPIN[®] approach!

Dominic believes that this common sales methodology throughout what is an interesting and complex sales model - from initial call-centre contact to channel sale, 'over parts of which EDS has influence but no control' - will be firmly in place and operating effectively within a matter of months.

Both Huthwaite and EDS are in no doubt that, in achieving a common culture across a large number of organisations and so providing a single, unified face to the customer, the company will secure significant competitive advantage.



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