

A CATALYST FOR SALES COMBUSTION AT CIBA

Interview with Michael Bannwarth,
Head of Marketing & Sales Education, Ciba

Competition in specialty chemicals is growing and the pressure to maintain profitability levels is higher than ever. As a global leader, Ciba recognised the power of world-class sales skills to realise its mission of being a leader in all its chosen markets.

Controlling free radicals
Ciba produces specialty chemicals that improve the performance, protection, colour and strength of plastics, paper, vehicles, buildings, home and personal care products and much more. Products and services are sold in over 120 countries and, to achieve this, the company employs approximately 13,000 people worldwide.


To achieve its business objectives, Ciba's sales strategy is directed towards:

- **Developing a common sales language and methodology in the sales force**
- **Balancing exceptional technical knowledge with exceptional sales ability to ensure the sales force is equipped with best-practice skills**
- **Creating value for the customers using specialist chemicals to differentiate them from off-the-shelf products**

Ciba decided to embark upon a global behaviour change initiative

to establish sales excellence at the very heart of the organisation. A Marketing and Sales Board (MSB) was established to drive the evolution to a marketing and customer focused organisation and to emphasise the importance of this transition internally.

"Selling skills are becoming increasingly important in our marketplace," explains Michael Bannwarth, Head of Marketing & Sales Education at Ciba. "Our products are technically demanding chemical products. So practical experience is critical but this must be married with outstanding sales skills; the requirements in the specialty chemicals arena are very particular."



Ciba is committed to developing long-term relationships with suppliers and therefore wanted a partner to work closely with over a number of years. The company also wanted a flexible partner that could tailor a solution to specifically meet their requirements, and with roughly a third of Ciba's sales people in each of three continents, a partner with an international capability that could match its global footprint.

The MSB ran pilot schemes with a range of different potential providers to compare propositions and approaches before finally selecting Huthwaite International on the basis that they could best deliver against the selection criteria and objectives. To prove Huthwaite's delivery capability was truly consistent around the world a six-month pilot roll-out was undertaken, delivered in English, French, German, Spanish, American and Mandarin.

Michael Bannwarth is responsible for coordinating the operational roll-out of the programme. "Sometimes units were trained together as they were from similar units and sometimes it was useful to bring people from separate units together, giving them the chance to meet colleagues and better understand the company," he explains. "The Huthwaite trainers were flexible to train each type of group."

Commitment from the highest level is vital to success and this project had top-level support from the start until completion of the programme and beyond.

Chemical reaction

The project has seen 1,080 people trained across 24 countries and in seven languages ... all within 18 months. The whole sales force, including sales managers, has completed the behavioural change programme.

Pre-work was delivered electronically and carefully managed to ensure completion to a satisfactory standard. Sales management and coaching skills seminars were then delivered in local languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Brazilian, Portuguese, Mandarin and

Japanese) and followed by 'on the job' coaching. Post course support is provided to reinforce skills and the success of the project.

Ciba wanted a partner that was prepared to tailor the content and delivery to match its requirements. Huthwaite responded to this by using the initiative to implement a new sales process, by integrating elements of Ciba's CRM system into the training and by adapting role-plays, all of which made it easier for Ciba delegates to understand and apply their learning.

"Our aim is that any new starters will have their sales skills assessed, and if they need specific training, then we'll schedule actions so that everyone is kept at the same level going forward," explains Michael. "Sales managers now have common processes and can use the coaching principles that they have learned to ensure that consistency is maintained across the organisation."

Litmus test

The completion of the project was achieved two months ahead of schedule. An impact survey was conducted anonymously and questions were designed in conjunction with Huthwaite who hosted the survey on its server to ensure its independence and encourage honest feedback from respondents.

The key finding was that sales managers were now regularly coaching their account managers in both sales strategy and skills and were convinced that the coaching was making a real difference to the performance of their teams.

"The sales managers played a key role in ensuring that the best practice sales skills covered in the seminars were embedded within the sales force," says Huthwaite Account Manager John Read. "Their commitment to coaching and their ability to do it effectively was central to the success of this initiative."

Ionic bond

Pilots for implementation of a negotiation skills training programme have been completed



MICHAEL BANNWARTH HEAD OF MARKETING & SALES EDUCATION, CIBA

and rolled out to complement the sales training for selected members of the sales force. To meet this ongoing demand, Ciba will continue to partner with Huthwaite, benefiting from their in-depth knowledge of behavioural change and understanding of the intricacies of Ciba's organisation.

"One of Huthwaite's biggest strengths is its global capability, but what is also impressive is that the company really lived its own principles when selling us the solution," says Michael. "They supported us when addressing challenges and always worked towards a win/win situation – they really do walk the talk!"

He concluded: "I enjoyed a very open relationship with Huthwaite, which I greatly appreciated. We discussed things openly in both directions. In a project of this scale, things are bound to go awry at some point, so to have such a strong and candid relationship was critical to success. Huthwaite's people are true professionals and a pleasure to work with."



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