



Is It Time to Build Your Own Sales Training?

There is a point where many B2B sales leaders find their investment in seller development could be better accomplished without purchasing licenses from a sales training vendor. This brief discusses the conditions under which a “build your own” approach to sales training – and sales method – is warranted.

Is Sales Training the “Flavor of the Year”?

When it comes to sales training, many companies find themselves in a “flavor of the year” situation. They purchase a sales training program, customize it, and roll it out to the field, often at great expense. A year or two later, they repeat the process. Why? Little or none of the first sales training proved valuable enough to embed into everyday practice. Of course there is massive inefficiency in this process, as specialists create learning and tools that sellers will never adopt. And it is easy to underrate the drag on culture, as management is tasked with “coaching” and “reinforcing” training they didn’t buy in the first place.

Sometimes, the selection process is the problem. Learning objectives might not be clearly defined, or the buyer does not know what questions to ask in order to determine the right content, delivery, and methodological fit. Other times, implementation is the issue. Often, “training the field” is spoken of as a process, but it turns into an event only, due to poor project management and execution. Lack of upper management support is also an issue.

The “One Good Idea” Syndrome

And yet, we have seen plenty of situations in which selection and implementation were solid, yet the training did not stick. For example, we were recently referred to an insurance company known for its dedication to training and development. In fact, the company had demonstrated this commitment by purchasing an average of one new sales training program or speaker every 16 months for the last ten years. A brief discussion told us why. Most sales managers could not name more than one thing their teams were consistently applying from any of the programs they had “implemented.”

In fact, the bar is so low for “flavor of the year” sales training that you will often hear managers exhort their people to take “one or two good ideas” from the workshop and put them into practice. That is an exceptionally low expectation for ROI!

Yet “one good idea” is accepted as the standard. And while sometimes one small change leads to big results, it is hard to find that in sales training. Usually, it is an accumulation of smaller changes that leads to the big effectiveness change driving results.

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The Real Problem: Outgrowing Outsourcing

The problem with buying licenses to SPIN Selling or training your trainers to deliver the Challenger Selling seminar is not one of quality. These are fine programs with quality content. Rather, the problem is one of fit. At a certain point in the lifecycle of your sales force, your experience and expertise in the nuance of your sales outpaces sales training vendors' ability to customize. On top of that, the restrictions of renting training by the license, usually indicate it is time to insource your sales training development and implementation.

Seven Signs You Are Ready to Build Your Own Sales Training

The more of these boxes you can check, the more likely it is time to bring sales training development and delivery in-house:

- You already have a "way" of selling - Outsourcing sales training is okay when you're still casting about for a method that will work. Once you've established that method, even informally, it's dangerous to bring in external, competitive methods. It's not for your sellers to sift through different methods to see what they like - that's management's job.

- Off-the-shelf options do not correspond to your account strategy or opportunity strategy -

If you are already using a certain nomenclature and syntax, it is difficult to find a sales training vendor that can build around it. And the translation / matchup process is a beast - nothing is worse than having to explain that when the book says "A," that's equivalent to our "B."

- You wish you could paste two different programs together -

Almost every sales training program on the

market today is great at some things, and just okay (or worse) at others. Unfortunately, trimming and quilting together two or three different programs is absolutely cost-prohibitive. That, and none of the three vendors would like it, and they would not help you much.

- You realize that under the packaging, all sales training is based on the same core ideas -

Here is the dirty little secret sales training companies do not want you to know. They have taken freely available content (e.g., behavioral psychology, scientific method, logic) and engineered it into something they can trademark and charge you money for. Once you see the game, it makes it hard to pay license fees and easier to see the value of in-sourcing. Content is a commodity!

- You already know what your sellers should be doing -

Your best managers are already training or coaching their sellers to do some version of the training for which you just paid. Why not start there?

- You have models of greatness on the team -

Another dirty secret of sales training... vendors charge you to teach them your business, and they do it by extracting knowledge and examples from your top performers. Then they charge you licenses for the training you just customized for them! If you are here, it is time to insource.

- You have a champion (or several champions) -

The hard truth is without internal champions no sales training will survive to the results stage. So this is a requirement in any case, but particularly in a BYO situation - somebody's got to want to pick up a

wrench. But this is a good thing – the act of building your own sales training begins here.

Conclusion: If the Signs Say, “Go,” Then Go!

In reality, any two of these indicators could be enough to warrant a BYO approach, especially in light of how cost-effective it is to do so. At the very least, these indicators should spark a discussion as you evaluate the different strategies you could use to

develop your sales force.

The question we encourage you to ask yourself, though, isn't “What program should we buy?” The question is, “Is it time to build our own sales training?”

Dan Smaida and Matt McDarby are the co-authors of this advisory brief. For discussion and more specific, tailored guidance on whether BYO sales training is right for your organization, please consult with Dan (dsmaida@specializedsalessystems.com) or Matt (mmcdarby@specializedsalessystems.com).