

Changing the way you sell

The business case for a Sales Development Programme (SDP)

The benefits and pay-back from an organised and long-term sales development programme are many. However, this article addresses some more practical short-term measures and performance improvements that might be expected

Whilst any reasonable accreditation programme will benefits, the following improvements should be expected:

- change the sales culture,
- raise sales standards,
- improve sales staff retention and
- offer gains in overall business results and efficiency,.

From our experience in this, here are some suggested performances areas for a SAP. These are not competencies, but rather specific gains and improvements that can be targeted.

These are grouped under three headings:

1. Activity and productivity
2. Opportunity value (account penetration and order value size)
3. Conversion ratio

Typically the programme would be run over a six month period and involve instructor-led training events, individual coaching and support materials and activities. I would involve all sales and business development staff and their managers.

Measuring and targeting sales effectiveness

Activity and productivity

Increase in activity levels by 25%:

- Average number of new and repeat appointments per calendar month over a quarter
- Percentage of time spent with customers
- Number of active¹ accounts managed by each sales person (new or existing)
- Number of proposals and quotations submitted

Opportunity value (account penetration and order value size)

Increase, target average increase of around 10% for the following

- Average order value
- Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers
- Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts
- Value of sales proposals compared with average value last year
- Size of account/pipeline potential
- Number of accounts with three or more products or services

Conversion ratio

Targeted gains

- 10% increase in qualified prospects to proposals
- 10% increase in proposals to orders
- 10% reduction in customer churn
- 10% reduction in length of time to close sales
- 25% increase in accuracy of sales pipeline – value and timescales

¹ Account with an ongoing requirement or visit in previous 90 days

Table 1.0

NB: The transition for moving from one level to another would be on achieving performance targets and completing necessary training and possible other milestones. The actual target or performance criteria may vary from sales person to sales person or region to region. **All numbers are examples only, however can be benchmarked against industry standards.**

Activity and productivity

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	25	30	32
Percentage of time spent with customers	28%	32%	42%
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person (new or existing)	40	60	80
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	10	15	18

Opportunity value

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	£X	£X+15%	£X+30%
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	£Y	£Y+15%	£Y+30%
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	5%	10%	15%
Value of sales proposals compared with average value last year	5%	10%	15%
Size of account/pipeline potential	£Z	£Z+15%	£Z+30%
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	50% of all accounts	75%	100%

Conversion ratio

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	55%	65%	70%
Percentage of proposals to orders	25%	30%	40%
Percentage of customer churn	28%	24%	20%
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	16 weeks	12 weeks	8 weeks
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline – value and time-scales	50% accurate	60%	70%

Managing the Accreditation Programme

The sales development should offer salespeople and their managers equal challenge, more recognition, fairer and consistent rewards (financial and psychology) and ability to succeed on their own merits.

It is recommended that three levels of sales performance are created, **acceptable**, **above average** and **outstanding** (top 20%).

Achievement of each level would be made up of a combination of criteria:

1. reaching a number of the target KPI's as suggested in the model table 1.0,
2. achieving sales target
3. observation and appraisal by their manager or other

It would be unlikely that a salespeople would achieve the benchmark level for all elements immediately, so an entry level for each level could be set.

For example, once a Level One salesperson has achieved two or more of the elements in each of the three areas they could be progress to Level Two. They would then need to achieve three of each element at level two before being able to progress to Level Three. In effect, this gives six or more levels. Sales people could drop a level as well.

In addition, outstanding performance in any element, no matter what level, could be recognised and rewarded.

It is anticipated that progress from one level to another would be every 6-18 months. Most importantly is that this progression would for the large part be directed by the efforts and ambition of the salesperson and their manager, and achievable on their own efforts.

Training format

It is recommend that such improvements could achieved by five methods, one reinforcing the other:

1. Instructor-led live training course
2. Notes and slides from course, including action plan and workbook
3. Application (digital) 'tool-kit' and guides available on PC and PDA platforms
4. Management coaching and direction
5. Mentoring (by colleague from a higher level)

The training courses, information sharing and PDA applications would all support this. In this way a highly focused, on-purpose, sales culture could be developed based on sound business processes and procedures, as well as nurturing natural talents.

COURSE SUMMARIES

This section contains a brief summary of each training area or event and which elements it will most address. Further detailed outlines are available.

All training would be personalised for your organisation.

Course / KPI mapping

Here is a summary how each of the proposed courses would contribute to achievement of increasing target KPI's.

All sales people

Element	Notes
Making things happen	Positive attitude, goal setting, personal resilience, etc.
Managing priorities and meeting deadlines	Personal productivity, time management, self-organisation, delegation, etc..
Gaining the competitive edge	The organisation's selling proposition and positioning with in-depth competitor analysis – also includes objection handling and closing skills.
Customer satisfaction and account retention	How to pro-actively measure and manage customer satisfaction and loyalty, inc

New business sales people

Solution Selling Skills for New Business	Principles, skills and techniques to move from tactical sales to application and solution based proposition. Also incorporates a much more customer-centric sales, and therefore more effective, approach
Sourcing new business	Includes prospecting, opportunity development, qualification, prospect tracking and other 'funnel' filling activities

Account managers

Constructing the sale - solution selling skills for high value sales	Principles, skills and techniques to identify, develop, nurture and propose complex, high-value and solution based sales.
Account development and planning	Includes strategic and relationship selling skills and models.
Influence and persuasion masterclass	The psychology and science of personal persuasion, influence, decision making and motivation.

Senior account managers/specialist sales people

Understanding business finance	Empowering sales people and account managers to engage in appropriate dialogue with senior businesses managers and align their solutions to business plans, drivers and bottom-line benefits
Professional presentation skills	Really polished, professional and executive presentation skills. To go beyond the average and really impress.
Writing winning sales proposals	As presentation skills, how to write and deliver written proposals that impress and get the business at a senior board level.
Account strategy workshops	Planning meetings

All sales staff: Making things happen /SAP Introduction

Positive attitude, goal setting, personal resilience, etc. This is extremely important within the The organisation sales psyche and its absence leads to major under performance. The contrast in attitude between the different levels of sales achievers was quite stark. It would be difficult to underestimate how important a positive mental attitude is at all levels. It should also present a model of makes for success with sales.

This course would introduce the SAP plan and the underlying principles behind. All salepeople would have to attend this course and complete the pre-course work, assessing the starting point for their KPI's

The output from the course would be a detailed 90 day action to target one element in each for improvement.

KPI's that this course would contribute to: All

Table 1.1 – “Making things happen/SAP Introduction”

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	✓	✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

All sales staff: Sales Productivity

Personal productivity, time management, self-organisation, delegation, etc. Absolutely essential skills common to all top people and lacking in all lesser ones. There seems to be no common methods, principles or models in use, and establishing some basic bench marks of best practise in this area is important. Key objectives and learning points from this course.

- How to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their current approach
- Techniques and attitudes to cope more effectively with high-workloads and pressure
- Tools to better direct and organise their sales time, personal and home life
- Proven methods and principles that will allow you to really sort, filter and target top sales and customer priorities – for the short medium and long term
- To plan sales goals and objectives effectively in a reactive and short-term focused business environment
- How to use key assertive techniques to control interruptions, and conduct effective meetings – in other words, how to say no, nicely! (For internal and external task sharing)
- Maximise personal productivity through improved prioritising, scheduling and delegating
- Methods to identify, anticipate, prevent and reduce major time wasters
- Techniques on how best to delegate work effectively and quickly

Table 1.2 Sales Productivity

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value			
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers			
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts			
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year			
Size of account/pipeline potential			
Number of accounts with three or more products or services			
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals			
Percentage of proposals to orders			
Percentage of customer churn			
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)			
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline			

All sales staff: Gaining the competitive edge

The organisation's selling proposition and positioning with in-depth competitor analysis – also includes objection handling and closing skills. This element needs to be a constantly updated by a simple process. Sales people at all levels should be able to clearly differentiate The organisation, depending on the customer requirements, situation and key competitors. This goes way beyond simple features, benefits and company history and instead looks at shaping perceptions and careful positioning of The organisation messages to the all levels of customer contact. This element should also include some basics of good presentation techniques.

Key objectives

- Be able to clearly state and articulate the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of The organisation in the market today
- Be able to qualify customers more accurately and precisely
- Know, and be able to state persuasively (and create if needed) the unique selling perceptions using a proven model
- Construct and present a short capability statement based on a specific combination of customer requirement, product solution and key competitor
- Be able to answer detailed questions on The organisation and particular product/service solutions
- Overcome commonly asked questions and stated objections

Table 1.3: Competitive edge

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month			
Percentage of time spent with customers			
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person			
Number of proposals and quotations submitted			
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value			
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers			
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts			
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year			
Size of account/pipeline potential			
Number of accounts with three or more products or services			
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

New business sales people: Solution Selling Skills for New Business

Principles, skills and techniques to move from tactical sales to application and solution based proposition. Also incorporates a much more customer-centric sales, and therefore more effective, approach.

Key points that should be included are:

- Create new business opportunities more proactively and accurately
- Reduce the amount of luck and uncertainty in the sales process
- Master advanced skills of rapport, questioning, influence and persuasion
- Use a customer-focused and consultative sales process
- Advanced questioning techniques to develop customer requirements and buying
- How to become a trusted advisor at all levels within the customer's organisation
- Create sales messages based on value and agreed business improvements and solutions

Table 1.4 New Business Solution Selling

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month			
Percentage of time spent with customers			
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person			
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts			
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year			
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services			
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn			
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

New business sales people: Sourcing new business

Includes prospecting, opportunity development, qualification, prospect tracking and other ‘funnel’ filling activities. Key points that should be included are:

- gain referrals and new leads from existing customers and third-party influencers
- networking and contact management skills
- identify potential prospects with greater accuracy and decision makers and influencers within target accounts
- how to make outbound sales calls with improved confidence, control and results
- how to handle outbound sales calls more effectively in a structured and consistent manner
- develop a prospecting tracking and call-back system

Table 1.5 Sourcing New business

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value			
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers			
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts			
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals			
Percentage of proposals to orders			
Percentage of customer churn			
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)			
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline			

Account managers: Constructing the sale – high value solution selling skills

Principles, skills and techniques to identify, develop, nurture and propose complex, high-value and solution based sales.

Key points that should be included are:

- Create new business opportunities from within existing accounts more proactively and accurately through customer-focused selling techniques
- Reduce the amount of luck and uncertainty in the sales process by better questioning, qualification and understanding decision making criteria
- Master advanced skills of rapport, influence and persuasion
- Use an account-focused and consultative sales process
- Advanced questioning techniques to develop customer requirements and buying
- How to become a trusted advisor at all levels within your account
- Create sales messages based on value and agreed business improvements and solutions

Table 1.6 – Constructing the sale – high value solution selling skills

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month			
Percentage of time spent with customers			
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person		✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted		✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value		✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers			
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts		✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year		✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential		✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services		✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals		✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders		✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn		✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)		✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline		✓	✓

Account managers: Account development and planning

Includes strategic and relationship selling skills and models. Key points that should be included:

- Use practical tools to help manage and measure account performance, problems and success
- How to prioritise and manage accounts and customers pro-actively and successfully
- Build and manage key relationships within an account
- Know how to set, monitor and track key objectives for accounts over the short, medium and long term
- Develop a cross-selling strategy to integrate your solutions into the customer's business as closely as possible

Table 1.7 – Account development and planning

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month			
Percentage of time spent with customers		✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person		✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted		✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value			
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers			
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts		✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year		✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential		✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services		✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals		✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders		✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn		✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)			
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline			

Account managers: Customer satisfaction and account retention

How to pro-actively measure and manage customer satisfaction and loyalty. Key points to include:

- Build a customer satisfaction matrix for individual accounts
- Understand the concept of long term customer value and the importance of adapting a customer-focused attitude
- Spot and react to early warning signals that may cause an account's loyalty to fade, reduce revenue or cause a customer to change usage
- How to turn customer problems into opportunities for increased loyalty and revenue
- The correct way to manage customer expectations and create listening loops within an account
- Make every customer feel like your most important customer – no matter what their size
- Establish the standards, systems and skills that can make every customer feel special

Table 1.8 – Customer satisfaction and account retention

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	✓	✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

Understanding business finance

Empowering sales people and account managers to engage in appropriate dialogue with senior businesses managers and align their solutions to business plans, drivers and bottom-line benefits. Key points that should be included:

- Reading and understanding financial reports and statements
- How the markets work
- Proposing bottom-line benefits
- Financial ratios

Table 1.9 – “Making things happen/SAP Introduction”

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	✓	✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

Professional presentation skills

Really polished, professional and executive presentation skills. To go beyond the average and really impress. Key points that should be included:

- undertake the selection and analysis of material prior to delivery of an executive or important presentation
- select appropriate visual aids and prepare material them
- understand the special considerations needed for technical or complex presentations
- deliver a presentation using visual aids effectively
- maintain audience interest by the application of proven presentation and demonstration techniques

Table 1.10 – “Making things happen/SAP Introduction”

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	✓	✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓

Writing winning sales proposals

As presentation skills: how to write and deliver sales proposals that impress, and get the business at a senior board level. Key points that should be included:

- Identify the purpose of writing customers reports and sales proposals
- Recognise and meet the needs of their readers – at all levels
- Plan documents systematically – to make them easy to read and more persuasive
- Express the content clearly, concisely and correctly
- Choosing the right words that sell effectively
- Adapt the tone and style of writing to the circumstances
- Be able to proof-read and edit work effectively, using formal marks and techniques
- Improving visual layout, format and appearance

Table 1.11 – “Making things happen/SAP Introduction”

Activity and productivity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Number of appointments per calendar month	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of time spent with customers	✓	✓	✓
Number of active accounts managed by each sales person	✓	✓	✓
Number of proposals and quotations submitted	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity value	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Average order value	✓	✓	✓
Value of accounts in first six months of becoming customers	✓	✓	✓
Sales gain year-on-year for existing accounts	✓	✓	✓
Value of sales proposals vs. average value last year	✓	✓	✓
Size of account/pipeline potential	✓	✓	✓
Number of accounts with three or more products or services	✓	✓	✓
Conversion ratio	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Percentage qualified prospects to proposals	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of proposals to orders	✓	✓	✓
Percentage of customer churn	✓	✓	✓
Average length of time to close sales (from first contact)	✓	✓	✓
Percentage in accuracy of sales pipeline	✓	✓	✓