

## TRAINING – TRUE VALUE ADDED SUPPORT

### ACCESS AND IMPACT - THE NEEDS OF THE INDUSTRY

Looking at the big picture when it comes to sales forces is never easy; there is always a risk that analysis will be clouded by the plethora of data available.

Huge amounts of time and money are spent analysing competencies in call, key performance factors, detail follow up data, activity rates, key message delivery and a host of other performance indicators. Whilst there is no denying the importance of these combined factors, one single issue can seriously undermine them all – gaining access to the people who we know can really drive the business forwards.

In it's simplest form, there are arguably only two truly defining components which contribute to the success of a direct sales operation in healthcare; one is access to key customers, the other is impact in front of those customers.

Some recent evidence would suggest that neither of these indicators is perhaps as healthy as they could be. The deluge of change and bureaucracy currently swamping general practice is bound to have an impact on GP availability which in turn limits opportunities for the sales representative to build good relationships with their target prescribers and consequently dilutes their overall impact. Talk to anyone at territory level and they will be emphatic about how difficult things are becoming in primary care.

Similarly, the huge rise in teams of specialist healthcare account managers has not necessarily had the impact envisaged according to some recent data. Despite a good deal of rhetoric, the strategic partnerships with PCOs which companies originally envisaged seem to be restricted to a handful of accounts.

In order to overcome these barriers, it is essential to provide a service or outcome that directly addresses the current needs of the customer, and whilst many potential solutions exist, very few seem to have the kind of impact needed to cope with the current climate.

One need which seems to be virtually insatiable but largely unmet in primary and secondary care is for continuing professional

development. Not only can this provide a value added service to customers at all levels, but carefully managed, can also provide access to previously inaccessible customers and a platform on which to build lasting relationships.

### TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT - THE NEEDS OF THE NHS

Needs can best be identified when viewed by customer group and are based on real everyday practical requirements generated by the current changes, which have impacted upon every healthcare professional at virtually every level in the National Health Service.

#### Primary Care

- **Skills development** Key skills such as assertiveness / stress management / communication / leadership / people management
- **Team development** within the practice
- **Service development** – issues arising from the new GMS contract
- **Individual development** – personal development plans and appraisal

#### Secondary Care

- **Skills development** – presentation skills / business planning
- **Leadership and management** for department heads and senior consultants
- **Personal development** – in respect of individual CPD requirements.

#### Primary Care Organisations

- **Personal development** for key targets such as prescribing advisors, clinical governance leads and PEC chairs
- **Organisational development** in respect of managing change and people involved in change
- **Service development** – service and process redesign within localities

### QUALITY PROCESS - THE NEEDS OF THE PROFESSIONAL

Faced with the kind of opportunity which this kind of training can provide, it is easy to get carried away and the temptation is to make it available on too wide a scale to an ill-defined

customer group. Any programme needs to be carefully project managed and the target group clearly defined and identified.

In order to achieve the objective of increased access and impact it is essential that the quality of the training is of the highest standard and the quality of the process by which it is applied is similarly high. To ensure that these standards are maintained, certain key steps may prove invaluable.

- An accurate assessment of the training needs. This requires spending time with the practice or organisation to determine their real needs, setting clear objectives and effectively managing their expectations.
- It is more than a simple opportunity for a quick sell
- Clear commitment from the organisation that they are serious about the training and that the target group will all attend. This ensures that the key customers actually receive the training, not simply the administrative staff. This requires an assertive approach, which emphasises the investment the company is making on behalf of the practice.
- A robust planning system, which ensures that the right training is delivered to the right person in the right place at the right time. To get the most out of the programme it is essential that the representative is part of the event and is instrumental to the logistics on the day. Simply turning up with refreshments is a wasted opportunity.
- Good outcome measures so that follow up can be integrated into the programme and SMART objectives can be measured creating the opportunity for further face to face visits and further training and development if appropriate.

Not only do the above steps reflect good practice, but they will also guarantee at least three or four quality contacts in connection with the meeting if conducted professionally. To get the most from any such project, the representatives managing the process need to be well trained and totally clear about the best way to set up and conduct the events. If the programme is regarded merely as a

substitute for a standard A/V meeting then it's success will be compromised.

The real return on investment lies in converting these contacts into potential sales opportunities, which requires considerable skill and diplomacy on the part of the sales representative.

### QUALITY OUTOMES - NEEDS FOR ALL PARTIES

Retrospective data has provided positive evidence that sponsored training directed at key customers has created

- Access to key customers otherwise unseen
- Positive development of the working relationship
- Positive development of the profile of the sales representative, the product and the sponsoring company

Highly satisfied customers whose development needs are met

There is a clearly expressed need for more training and development within the NHS but their lack of self-sufficiency creates a potential opportunity for a win / win outcome for both parties.

Training and development is also ongoing and has the capacity to lend itself to long- term projects. The industry has been much criticised for it's short termism and opportunistic approach to customers - investing in customer centred value added programmes would go a long way to redressing this imbalance. In addition the increased level of understanding and customer awareness generated by these programmes is bound to provide a competitive edge in an increasingly tight

commercial environment

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