

# Out-learn the competition

## Training your sales teams to win more sales

By Luke Kempfski

**D**o you hire talented salespeople and teach them about your product, industry and value

proposition or do you hire people who know your business and teach them how to sell? This question inspires spirited debate among business executives. All people come with a combination of natural talents, skills and experiences that land them somewhere between “expert with sales talent” and “sales

pro with industry knowledge.” From there, you must prepare them to represent you to your valued customers.

By taking a learning solutions approach to your sales training challenge, you can help your sales teams be smarter than the competition and win more sales.

### Teaching the expert to sell

Let’s start by looking at experts with less sales experience. For them, you must provide learning experiences that result in deep comprehension of a standard sales process and the sales skills required for each step. A typical sales process includes steps such as engage, qualify, assess, propose and close. Each step requires different skills. Questioning and listening are the most

important skills in the early steps, while presenting and negotiating become increasingly important when it comes time to propose and close.

Many approaches can help your salesperson gain the knowledge and skills needed for success. These range from reading a manual to being trained one-on-one by an experienced salesperson. There are also technology-based learning approaches, such as online instructor-led courses, self-paced e-Learning and video-based programs.

### The most effective way for a salesperson to learn is through a blended approach.

The most effective way for a salesperson to learn is through a **blended approach** that includes a combination of traditional training and technology based training. A blended approach may begin with reading about the ideal sales process. Next may be an interactive, self-paced e-Learning course. This multimedia

learning experience should not only present the steps in the process but also demonstrate how they apply to real world scenarios. An assessment can be embedded in an e-Learning course to ensure that the learner has mastered the steps in the sales process. To learn the sales fundamentals of questioning, listening, presenting and negotiating, the new

salesperson will need to practice these skills before interacting with customers. This requires more in-person learning experiences and coaching.

The final blended learning approach for your expert to become a sales professional may look like this:

- Read description and take self-paced e-Learning course on company sales process
- Take generic e-Learning courses on questioning, listening, presenting, negotiating and closing
- Practice sales process and apply skills through workshop role playing
- Observe the performance of role models on video and in person
- Perform and receive feedback from a role model
- Participate in ongoing knowledge and skill development

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## Teaching the sales pro

Now, let's look at the new member of your team who has strong sales skills but little product or industry expertise. Again, a blended learning approach is the most efficient way to get your new team member connecting with customers and generating sales.

The blended approach for the sales pro may look like this:

- Read description and take self-paced e-Learning course on company sales process
- Take self-paced e-Learning courses on the company's products and typical applications
- Participate in online, instructor-led courses on how to position products in the marketplace
- Practice sales process and apply skills through role playing in a workshop
- Observe the performance of a role model on video and in person
- Perform and receive feedback from a role model
- Connect with peers on the sales team by sharing knowledge and experience through a social learning platform (a private social media network for sharing expertise and learning peer to peer within an organization)
- Participate in ongoing learning about industry and products

As you can see, the learning approach and emphasis can be customized to individuals' unique learning gaps.

## Moving beyond training with mobile sales support

Instead of relying totally on training, companies are now developing mobile sales support applications for devices like the iPad to help salespeople guide customers through the buying decision. Imagine you are a customer in a retail environment looking to purchase a computer. Holding an iPad, the salesperson asks you a series of questions on how you will use the computer. The salesperson enters your responses into the iPad and the sales support application narrows the number of models based on your criteria. The salesperson then uses the iPad to present the primary differences between models and help you make the final decision. The salesperson can also use the sales support application to present add-on products such as a printer. The support application helps the salesperson focus on engaging the customer instead of simply remembering all the products.

## Mobile support tools can help salespeople guide customers through the buying decision

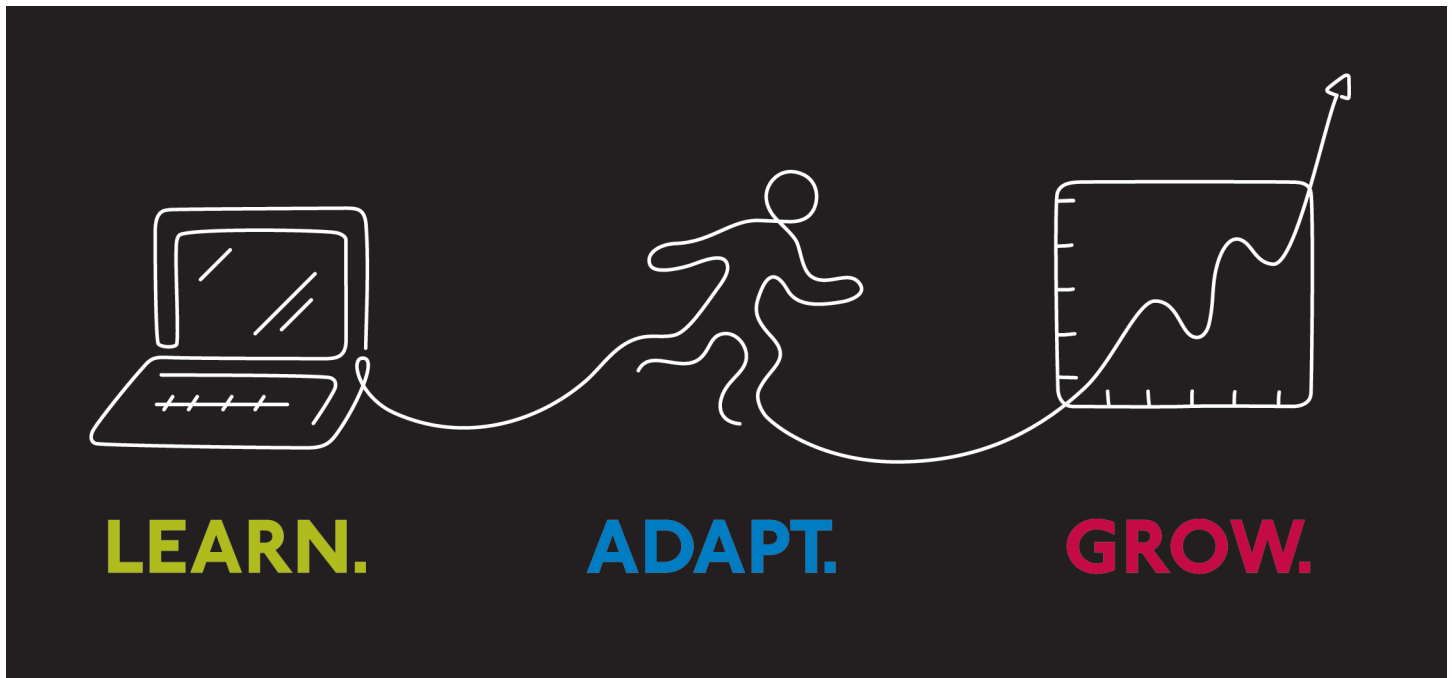
As you can see, there are many ways to prepare new salespeople to interact with

customers and win sales. To create the right blend for your organization, consider the following:

- **Learning objectives (sales process, sales skills, knowledge of products and value proposition)**
- **Complexity of products and sales process**
- **Available learning content and good salespeople to serve as trainers and role models**
- **Costs and timeframe**
- **Available technology**
- **Demographics and preferences of your sales team**

By designing the right blend of instructor-led courses, self-paced e-Learning, practice and mobile sales support, you can prepare your sales team for success. Customers today expect representatives who can educate them and guide them to make a good purchase decision. The best trained representative often wins the sale. Are you ready to out-learn your competition? ♦

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