

Diagnostic Ultrasound puts the buyer at the heart of selling





Paul Knee is managing director of Diagnostic Ultrasound, a company which manufactures specialist non-invasive ultrasound scanning equipment. He knows this is a technical sell into a specialist market, but remains a great supporter of employing graduates, whom he finds to be enthusiastic and ambitious. He believes the real key to helping them to succeed is the right sales training – a principal he applies equally to longer-serving members of his sales team.

Diagnostic Ultrasound is the world leader in hand-held scanners for clinical use; principally in urology, but also in cardiology and paediatrics. The company's patented technology offers a range of easy-to-use scanners for use on the move – by nursing staff on the ward or in residential units, or by patients in their own homes. The devices don't even require a sonographer – solution which offers faster patient care, at lower care cost.

However straightforward their application, the sales process for these devices is complex and involves a number of key influencers and decision-makers. Whilst the products immediately convince ward staff of their value, that's only the beginning of a lengthy procedure requiring the sign-off of other clinicians, administrators, technicians and procurement personnel. Sometimes it's about technical capability handled by the medical engineers or cost benefits to the financial manager. Understanding how

to influence the influencers, how to understand the different motivators at each level, and how to appreciate and sell the benefits of the products are crucial to selling into the modern NHS.

Knee first encountered Huthwaite International at Xerox, where he spent three years and was national accounts sales executive. Xerox put him on the SPIN® Selling programme, and he's been a passionate advocate now for 25 years. *"SPIN® gives you techniques to match the selling process with the buying process,"* he explains. *"It's the only programme I've ever come across that truly puts the buyer at the heart of selling: it's founded on solid research, and it works. I know it works because I've done it myself, I've put many staff through the programme in the past, and I've seen the impact on both the team and the bottom-line."*

Knee began implementing SPIN® at Diagnostic Ultrasound as

soon as he joined the company, but it wasn't until a year later that members of his sales team began attending the programme. Half of his team are graduates recruited with the assistance of a placement company, which prepares them with basic sales training. Additional specialist skills are required once on board, however, to enable the graduates to develop skills to sell where high-level, complex purchasing decisions are made – and Knee saw SPIN® as the natural solution to optimising the performance of the team.

To date, all of the sales team and two managers have participated in the SPIN® programme, which is designed for anyone who sells goods or services which are seen as high-value and important decisions by the buyer. SPIN® analyses both buying and selling behaviours, looks at the salesperson's natural style, and offers a consultative approach to selling.

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The principle is that if you can change behaviour, you can change results. The SPIN® success model lays out different types of questions which establish buyer needs, and help the seller to respond with a personalised solution, avoiding a canned approach. On completing the programme, participants have a framework for planning effective sales calls, based on the ability to recognise and adapt to different buyer behaviours. They are also better-equipped for dealing with objections, or customers with low reaction levels, so that they can close the deal effectively.

“The sales team think it’s brilliant,” says Knee. “They soon grasp why this is like nothing they’ve learnt before, and that this is the key to their future success. They begin to understand that their personal potential is greater than they had thought, and that the level of investment we’re putting into them is actually pretty impressive and measurable. That’s hugely motivating. Attending SPIN® changes the way they feel about their work, and it certainly changes their sales performance.”

Knee believes one of the key strengths of SPIN® is the role-play. He’s so convinced of its value that he has written some bespoke case-studies for use during the programme, which anchor the principles in real working life. *“We created some buying criteria, which the participants have to discover, and they must then create a cost-limited solution oriented to that buyer. The important thing is that this isn’t hard selling, it’s about getting close to each unique customer and creating a solution.”*

Knee has ambitious plans for the company and his team. The next step is to put the service controller and financial controller through SPIN® this year, to create company-wide buy-in of objectives and techniques. *“Having everyone participate gives us a common vocabulary and culture, and ensures we understand where we’re going, and why. It’s important for the sales team to have the support and understanding of the financial controller, and this is the best way to get it.”*

There are plans to build on the foundations laid with SPIN® by investing in Huthwaite’s Major Account Development programme. This will further enable the sales team to develop strategies for selling into each department of a hospital or primary care trust (PCT).

Peter Helgesen, one of the sales team, can testify first-hand to the value of Huthwaite’s behavioural solution. *“I knew that SPIN® had given me the tools I needed, but I still had to take that leap of faith and believe that it could work for me. I was due to make a business case to a financial director, and I was nervous. I reminded myself of everything I’d learnt, took a deep breath, and went for it. And I came away with the business.”*

Knee sees great potential for SPIN® beyond the workplace. *“The company gets the benefit during the working day, but I know that my team will benefit from the SPIN® approach in every area of their lives.”*

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Paul Knee, managing director, Diagnostic Ultrasound





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