

# INVISTA

## Expanding capabilities





**Working with Huthwaite International, global polymer and fibre specialist INVISTA took a flexible approach to improving negotiation skills and value-selling LYCRA® fibre and other speciality apparel lines.**

LYCRA® fibre has enabled the manufacture of comfortable garments around the world for more than 50 years now. But even selling and marketing established brands such as this can have its own challenges.

Currently, all manufacturers are coping with the fluctuating cost of raw materials which, in turn, is affecting profit margins. They are also dealing with a drop in demand as consumers curb their spending because of economic uncertainty.

However, for those connected with the fashion industry, the challenges are further intensified. The trend for fast, low-cost fashion is forcing down prices, brands are being diluted by counterfeit copies and shifting weather patterns are disrupting the traditional selling seasons – to name but a few of the problems.

Selling in this environment is tough and teams need finely-honed skills and knowledge of the latest sales methods. They must ensure they clearly identify, define and meet the true needs of customers along complex value-chain, building valuable, long-term relationships in the process. Multinationals face a further test: how can they ensure consistency when sales teams are widely dispersed and face-to-face support and coaching is either very challenging or simply impractical?

These were some of the challenges facing INVISTA, a large global company which markets LYCRA® fibre and other speciality products both upstream and downstream in the apparel chain. It operates in more than 20 countries across North and South America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

INVISTA's sales processes vary in nature and complexity, depending on the prospective purchaser and influencer. Selling to fabric mills or yarn processors tends to be straightforward, but INVISTA's route to market also involves interacting with and convincing garment makers, brands, retailers (and even consumers).

This means that several decision makers are involved making selling a far more complex process. With all this to consider, INVISTA wanted to take a holistic view and decided to look outside the organisation for help.

As executive VP, new business development and brand strategy, Serge Vigouroux explains: *"INVISTA conducts a wide range of training itself, especially around our own business philosophy called Market-Based Management™ and in particular about compliance matters. However we decided that, when it came to commercial training, it was best to engage the help of specialists. INVISTA provides the industry with a differentiated fibre and textile offering and one of our aims as an organisation is to improve our ability to present the value of these products across markets and locations."*

Huthwaite International is renowned for its SPIN® sales training programme, developed after years of research. It is also highly-experienced in training multinational organisations in the skill of negotiation. It was a natural choice for INVISTA: *"Huthwaite's ideas resonated with our own business culture,"* says Vigouroux.

**“Huthwaite was extremely accommodating in adapting the content of the programme to our industry while remaining true to its own methodologies,”**

**Serge Vigouroux**

### **Company-wide approach**

To start the project a pilot session was carried out and this enabled INVISTA to refine the programme and individual modules before they were rolled out across the wider organisation. *“The Huthwaite team was very receptive to dialogue while also not hesitating to challenge us in developing the most appropriate programme,”* says Vigouroux. *“It was a very constructive exchange.”*

INVISTA's entire global sales, marketing and technical teams were enrolled in SPIN® training, followed by negotiation skills for many of the same audience. Refresher sessions were used to hone and embed the initial classroom training with extended practice opportunities for all involved. In support of the sales force, where delegates were widespread and fewer in numbers, training for coaches took place in Huthwaite's virtual classroom. This meant the coaches had the benefit of working alongside others also tasked with the support and development of their teams.

INVISTA was determined that the training should form part of an on-going journey for the organisation and become part of its commercial culture, rather than be just a one-off event.

*“We did modify some activities, such as case study work, to make them closer to our own*

*business experience and match the commercial realities of the organisation. In this way, Huthwaite was extremely accommodating in adapting the content of the programme to our industry while remaining true to its own methodologies,”* says Vigouroux.

Because of the size and scope of the organisation, a solely face-to-face programme was not viable. However, working together, Huthwaite and INVISTA came up with a flexible compromise. E-learning was used to deliver the theory, so that this could be assimilated at an employee's own pace and when convenient. This left more time for role play and practice during the face-to-face training.

### **Positive reaction**

INVISTA has implemented a set of metrics that include some of Huthwaite's own methodologies and tools, enabling it to track understanding of the concept and compare it at various stages in the programme. Development is partly measured through internal customer connection management tools, such as CRM, adapted to integrate some of the Huthwaite tools and provide a more dynamic view of performance and results.

### **Platform for success**

In all, Vigouroux describes the commercial training as being “extremely energising” for the

organisation and employees of all levels of experience. In particular, the ability to value-sell INVISTA's products at a very high level was identified as being extremely important to meet the needs of a fast-changing industry.

Vigouroux believes that continual learning and improvement will be critical to INVISTA's future industry success. *“We will build on this foundation to further develop our sales and negotiation skills,”* he says. *“We have many ideas of how to sustain this learning and ensure that new recruits have access to training, as well as develop skills and understanding as part of our broader commercial excellence strategy.”*

*“The apparel/textile value chain is truly global and requires people to work together in different trading environments,”* says Vigouroux. *“Through this training we have established a common language throughout the business to ensure a consistent commercial approach. This has enabled our sales, marketing and technical teams around the world to think closely about the questions they pose and react appropriately to the different types of feedback they receive throughout the commercial process.”*





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