

Aligning sales and marketing at Baxter Healthcare

It's a common enough scenario. The sales representative's briefcase is full of glossy brochures extolling in detail the features of each product, yet providing little help in the sales process.

At Baxter Healthcare's Renal Division, a number of issues have, however, thrown this apparent disconnect into sharper focus:

- The sale is especially complex;
- The Division is now not only selling to healthcare specialists such as nephrologists (kidney doctors) and nursing staff but is also, increasingly, selling to professional buyers in hospitals, healthcare trusts and private clinics; and,
- SPIN[®] Sales training has been introduced for the European sales team.

"With its emphasis on defining and agreeing specific needs SPIN[®], in particular, has emphasised what was already becoming clear – that

our promotional support material was not appropriate," says Director of Training, Jon Parker. "Designed to deliver marketing messages, it typically provided an excellent description of the product in question."

"Yet at the initial stage of exploring customer need, it failed to support the sales person faced with managing often highly technical discussions. The temptation in the past, therefore, had been to leave the brochure with the customer early on, with little or no certainty that the most relevant solution had been identified," he believes.

As a result, in 2002 the company turned to the SPIN[®] for Marketing programme to help the European

Marketing Group - responsible for the development of promotional support materials - understand the newly adopted SPIN[®]-based philosophy and approach.

Working with Huthwaite, Baxter blended on-line training with a two-day course, which explored what was needed if marketing materials were to provide effective support to sales people when meeting with clients. "What we required were easy-to-use tools which would deliver the relevant marketing messages and, crucially, help the sales team identify, agree – and so confidently advise on – each client's specific needs," Jon confirms.

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The company then selected a product to test the effectiveness of this approach. "What emerged initially was a paper-based sales aid," he continues. "It had the external appearance of a sales brochure, yet followed the SPIN® process of trying to understand the challenge facing the client and drilling down to establish the implications of the issues involved, before proposing an appropriate solution."

"For example, it would guide the discussion through the process of examining a particular medical challenge and the clinical theory behind it, then detailing the attributes of the relevant Baxter product together with supporting clinical evidence."

The new sales tools, translated into multiple languages, were then introduced into seven countries

across Europe with up to 100 SPIN® trained sales representatives.

The initial response has been very positive. "Faced with a highly complex sale, in the absence of an in-depth technical understanding of the issues involved, the temptation in the past has been simply to leave a few clinical papers for the specialist to read," Jon says. "Our sales teams now recognise they have something which can help them directly time and again, boosting their confidence in managing such conversations and effectively delivering key product and company messages."

Early evidence is that this holds true, whether discussing medical benefits with clinicians or improved outcomes with buying managers.

As a result, year-on-year prescription rates for the product are currently up by around 5%, and

work is now underway on a similar electronic-based tool to support combined product and therapy.

"We have also looked at ways to align more closely the sales and marketing functions when launching new products," says Huthwaite Consultant, Ali Morris. "This gives a new perspective on how to create greater impact when launching to both internal and external customers."

Jon has been particularly pleased with Huthwaite's flexibility in developing customised programmes to meet Baxter's specific needs.

"Like other businesses, we face the continuing internal challenge of aligning sales and marketing more effectively," he adds.

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