

Making a difference that's easy to spot

We are all familiar with those 'Spot the Difference' competitions that regularly appear in the pages of popular magazines. The images chosen may vary in their subject matter but the challenge remains the same. Can you see the number of ways in which the seemingly identical drawing or photograph on the left is different to the one on the right? Spending time peering closely at all the details, comparing one with the other, the differences eventually become apparent.

Of course, in the real world where the word 'competition' carries a rather more serious meaning, customers have neither the time nor inclination to sit down and play 'spot the difference' between rival companies – especially in a highly commoditised market where the most important considerations are perceived to be price, price and price. The challenge therefore, is not just to make the differences easy to see, but to make the pictures as dissimilar as possible.

When Albion Chemicals, a leading independent manufacturer and distributor of bulk and packaged chemicals, was divested by its parent company, it was seen as an opportunity to address the key issue of differentiation. In a very competitive,

price-focused market with most customer relationships existing on an almost entirely transactional basis with very little in the way of loyalty, Albion felt it needed to identify the other values that are important to their customers. In turn, their salesforce would need to develop new skills in selling this added value.

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Rather than opting for a prescriptive training programme, Albion worked in partnership with Huthwaite consultant, Paul Loxley to develop a bespoke training solution. As Clare Waters of Albion Chemicals says, “We knew we had to make a step change in terms of the skills with which we were equipping our staff. We recognised the need to move from an emphasis on transactional sales to ones based on building and sustaining a relationship with our customers. In terms of making this switch – from transactional to relationship-based sales

– Huthwaite were far and away the best in looking for a vehicle to achieve that. More of a business partner than a training provider.”

After an emersion period, Huthwaite recommended a number of bespoke steps that would enable Albion to create an environment and culture in which real sales improvement could be facilitated.

1. The development of a mini sales academy for sales managers who had completed Albion's foundation and advanced internal training programme. The academy promoted complex selling skills, and demonstrated how to get under the skin of a customer in order to understand their business needs and recognise opportunities.
2. Engaged senior management with a Key Account Management programme in order to move their focus from transactional to relationship selling. This culture shift was designed to filter down through the company.
3. Working with the Sales Director and Sales Manager to start identifying the issues involved in improving the call handling skills of the telesales team – focusing on effective inbound and outbound calls.



4. To look at ways that Albion could make improvements to their CRM system, enhancing the monitoring and measurement of all sales activity.
5. Providing a one-day programme to grow the RSM role and their own abilities to develop salespeople within Albion.

Of all the bespoke elements included in the solution put forward, two specific Huthwaite tools featured prominently:

1. "Blocks to progress" – this identifies problem areas and recommends ways to get round the situation.
2. "Strength & Attractiveness Analysis" – this enables Albion to identify key accounts based on business potential. More importantly, it improves Albion's ability to unlock this business potential – the result being real growth.

Following a period of extensive research and by taking an holistic view of the salesforce environment, Huthwaite were able to help in delivering the necessary tools to change the mindset and behaviour of the salesforce, enabling them to compete more effectively. This was supplemented by the introduction of additional tools which have given Albion

a number of ways in which their CRM systems can be improved with much more accurate measurement of sales outcomes.

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As Clare Waters concludes: "The real value for Albion was the consultative, bespoke approach that Huthwaite provided. The solution worked on a number of levels, particularly in helping us to recognise the values that are important to our customers. Working in what I would very much describe as a partnership, together we identified and concentrated efforts on the areas that would accelerate and deliver a real difference in sales performance." One area, we think you'll agree, where the difference is always easy to spot.