

Huthwaite and SAP: improving commercial outcomes now and in the future



Over just three decades, SAP has grown from a small regional enterprise to become the world's largest business software company, employing nearly 50,000 staff in more than 50 countries around the globe.

As a business, SAP has long recognised the importance of skills development as the key to maintaining competitive edge and, as part of this, continues its commitment to finding cost-effective and innovative methods of training delivery to its worldwide sales force.

As a result, over the past two years, SAP has worked closely with behaviour change specialist Huthwaite International on a number of bespoke initiatives, including specially-designed SPIN® Selling and Negotiation Skills programmes. And, most recently, this has extended to the development by Huthwaite of 'virtual training rooms' as part of SAP's broader objective to deliver training via non face-to-face means.

"The result of Huthwaite's exceptional flexibility and commitment," says Doug Draper, Senior Director, Global Inside Sales Enablement, SAP, "is that we are successfully building a range of skills development programmes designed to deliver uniformly high-quality training to a geographically diverse sales team – and one that is already delivering significant sales improvement."

Train the Trainer

In 2007, SAP's Global TeleManagement (now Inside Sales) team approached Huthwaite with a request to develop an integrated Train the Trainer programme to develop a cadre of internal SPIN® trainers.

"Several members of the senior management team had previous positive experience of the SPIN® methodology," recalls Draper, "and we recognised that the most cost-effective and flexible way to deliver this valuable training - often to small groups of geographically remote telesales staff - was via properly-skilled in-house trainers."

In helping to create such a capability, in November 2007 Huthwaite ran an intensive and wide-ranging two-week programme for 11 SAP trainers at the company's European Inside Sales headquarters in Barcelona. First, the trainers attended the SPIN® training as delegates, followed by a Train the Trainer programme.

During the latter part of the course, they also learned how to coach SPIN®-trained sellers on-the-job, and how to coach others to coach SPIN®.

Nearly two years later, SPIN® Selling has received strong backing at a senior level, the number of licences and volume of support materials (including Online SPIN® Knowledge modules to help delegates

prepare for the training and reinforce their skill levels afterwards) has increased significantly across the company, and the programme continues to deliver positive results.

Individual sales staff have also benefited from the quality of training in improving their customer interactions. As one Japanese sales representative says: *"My questioning skills have improved...it is now much easier for me to identify and clarify customer needs."* Similarly, for another sales person in India: *"SPIN® training has provided a structured way to suggest value to customers before suggesting a solution."*

And the outcome has been characterised by one French sales person as direct, immediate and valuable: *"By increasing the impact of each sales conversation, SPIN® is definitely contributing to a shorter – and more successful – sales cycle!"*

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Sealing the deal

In early 2009, as part of the company's broader focus on building its SME business – a key target for the 500+ Inside Sales team – SAP recognised the need to improve its level of success in closing deals more quickly and effectively.

“This centred in particular on representatives' ability to plan how to bridge any differences when the customer was close to making a positive buying decision, and gain commitment to secure the sale,” says Graham Short, SAP account manager at Huthwaite. *“As a result, we developed a shortened one-day programme incorporating key elements of our Negotiation Skills programme, to be delivered by local Huthwaite trainers in the local language.”*

“This involved on-line pre-course work and, as with the earlier SPIN® Selling programmes, the supporting case studies were written especially for SAP to reflect real, everyday sales situations faced by those taking part.”

To-date, negotiation training has been delivered in Barcelona, Singapore, China, the USA, South America and, most recently, in Japan and India – and the global programme is due to be completed by the end of the year.

Once again, early internal feedback has been uniformly

positive, pointing to substantially improved sales successes as a result of enhanced negotiation skills.

Virtual training – a different world

As part of its policy of developing more cost-effective and environmentally-friendly skills improvement initiatives, most recently SAP has started to explore non-face-to-face methods of training delivery. As a result, the company asked Huthwaite to examine how it might deliver SPIN® in a virtual training environment.

“We examined what SAP was already doing in the virtual training arena,” recalls David Freedman, business director for IT, Huthwaite *“and recognised that there were a number of fundamental challenges in moving from the classroom to a virtual environment.”*

He is confident that the same learning that takes two/three days in a physical classroom can be covered equally effectively in a handful of sessions over a week or so in a virtual training room. *“By giving the participants almost the whole of the rest of the day to do their ‘day job’, you are much more likely to keep their attention without interruption for each short learning period,”* he believes.

He makes some other observations about moving into the virtual training room. *“Unless the delivery team is highly-skilled*

and the programme design spot-on, the typical ‘push’ style of imparting information common to the less sophisticated world of webinars, webcasts and simple e-learning will miss the mark”.

“Somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps, another outcome of the need to ensure that the individual's attention remains constantly engaged is that class sizes should be no bigger, and arguably smaller, in the virtual world than in the face-to-face, with an ideal class-size of 8. Similarly, there should always be two people running the event in real time - a lead trainer and a producer - to ensure smooth, well-paced and attractive delivery and to maintain the full participation of all delegates throughout the session, including discussions and role-plays.” In putting a programme together for SAP therefore, it became clear that virtual training demands completely new skills of the delivery team, both to master the technology and deliver compelling and effective training. *“As a result, we have completely rewritten the trainer manual for the delivery of SPIN® in SAP's virtual environment,”* he confirms.

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Positive reaction

A full scale virtual programme for SAP sales staff new to SPIN® was a notable success. The feedback suggested that it was not only enjoyable, highly interactive and efficient, but the learning outcomes were at least as good in any face-to-face SPIN® programme.

As with face-to-face training, follow-up coaching and reinforcement remain crucial to longer-term retention and application of new skills learned and here too, this can be applied both face-to-face and virtually. *“Indeed, the intrinsic nature of the telesales environment lends itself to virtual follow-up coaching,”* Freedman believes.

SAP’s Draper feels that there continues to be a role to play for both physical classroom and virtual learning: *“It truly is ‘horses for courses’,”* he says, *“and depends on whether, for a given piece of training and at a given time, the value of having a physical community of learning justifies the cost and effort of creating it.”*

Freedman agrees and adds: *“What we will always do is to make sure that the content and people involved are totally appropriate to whichever medium – marker pen or mouse – our clients select.”*

Close partnership

Huthwaite has established a strong and close relationship with SAP and reflects its broader ability to work successfully with large international businesses with highly specialised requirements but who are looking for a consistent level of high quality training across multiple geographies, languages and cultures.

“We have been impressed with Huthwaite’s ability and willingness to create unique programmes to meet our specific needs,” confirms Draper. *“At the same time, the company’s supporting project management capability has ensured that everything has been in the right place at the right time to make it happen.”*

“In what is a highly complex environment, this often-ignored element of service support has proved equally impressive and has played a similarly central role in the success of each of our joint training projects to-date.”



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