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How HR at Shell have galvanised the sales effort

One of the keys to increased profitability is to develop the competencies of the pivotal roles within an organisation, as Shell Global Lubricants discovered when it undertook a major review of its operations recently in a drive to increase business.

The company's automotive group wanted to strengthen and develop its global account management capabilities while developing its market position within the aftermarket lubricants sector.

Many of the issues and challenges confronting the team, such as networking and knowledge sharing, are common to any organisation operating in a global arena. The automotive sector is particularly competitive, however, with manufacturers exerting pressure on their suppliers to deliver value.

One of the challenges it faced before starting on its development journey was to examine the management team's capabilities and conduct a gap analysis to assess the distance between its current performance and future aspirations.

This meant communicating across several departments – a task facilitated by an active and business orientated HR team.

Cue Ian Irving, a former HR director and now MD of international sales and customer relationship development consultancy BREESE.

Ian's company has recently developed an innovative internet based electronic audit tool which Shell Global Lubricants vice president

Andrew Hepher believed would enable him to access the information he needed from an account management team spread across five continents quickly and effectively.

"The issues we were grappling with are by no means unique to Shell and the immense value of having someone come into the business is that they can plug into the issues almost immediately, cut to the quick of what is required and provide me with some highly practical insights into where the leverage points are to grow my business," he explained.

The on-line tool consists of a comprehensive series of questions with multi choice answers which enabled Shell to gauge where it stood in relation to best sales practice. Because it was internet based, information could be gathered, analysed and collated from every corner of the world very quickly and at minimal cost.

The tool was customised to focus on the sales and account management areas most relevant to the Automotive group's needs, which included account strategy, relationship planning and management.

"There were two issues we wanted Ian to address in a global context. Firstly, how fit we were and secondly how fit we were capable of being. In

other words, it was a health check exercise,” said Andrew. “We weren’t looking for big theories here, but someone who could get to the essence of the challenges we face as a team.”

“After I’d communicated our intentions to the team, BREESE emailed the questionnaire to each global account manager, who then spent no more than half an hour doing a self-assessment,” said Andrew. “Their task was to rank themselves within the spectrum of multi-choice answers, which ranged from basic competence to the most sophisticated best practice.”

It was this benchmarking aspect of the process that led to a real ‘Aha’ moment for the Shell management team. The opportunity to see and understand exactly where the gaps between current account management practice and best practice lay acted as an antidote to the change fatigue that undermines so many change management programmes.

“For example, we might rank ourselves at a level 2, 3 or 4 in a specific area, but when we saw what we could be doing to achieve a level 5 it shakes you out of complacency,” explains Andrew. “You begin to realise that the 1000 metre race you thought you were running is actually a marathon! It was an exercise that really highlighted the “art of the possible”.”

The resulting information was used to create a Revenue Generation Map™ – an individually tailored, simple to understand and implement one page flow chart highlighting an organisation’s strengths and showing where improvements need to be made to increase profitability and improve customer relationships. It shows how the inter-relationships between seemingly separate functions within the organisation are vital for maximum effectiveness.

Shell Global Lubricants’ Map helped strip away some of the preconceived ideas about sales, and enabled Andrew Hepher and his team to step back and take a totally fresh look at what they do. It helped them focus on identifying what their customers want, explore expanding into currently untapped markets, identify areas of potential growth, look at ways to improve relationships with

existing customers, question why they’re selling what they’re selling and look at selling the benefits of the product rather than the product itself.

The value of this kind of feedback is threefold, according to Andrew.

“Firstly, it very quickly gives you an overview of where you are now. The diagnostic period lasted around a month, but you could quite easily put a sales organisation through the audit and collate the results within a week. Secondly, it gives you powerful insights into what is possible and thirdly it opens up the issue of how high you want to place the bar,” he explains. “It also allows us to assess the temperature within the group as a whole by comparing individual views across a globally disparate team.”

Shell Global Lubricants’ previous account management activity was traditional in approach, with much of the sales focus on the company’s product and service solutions. The audit helped to identify gaps within the more strategic business functions, and highlighted the fact that operations needed to be streamlined.

Because of the size and complexity of the organisation, simplifying the internal sales and account management processes and practices would improve productivity.

Ian Irving stressed that the role of the HR team in carrying out the initial audit and implementing the required changes highlighted in the Revenue Generation Map was crucial.

“As a former HR director myself I know the vital role played by this department in motivating staff across all functions to work together. The sales improvement process really is a people skill. The modern HR executive is an internal business consultant who is aiming to achieve his or her business goals by aligning the people talent within the organisation”.

“The HR function has a pivotal role to play in building an organisation that is an effective selling machine. Building a strong sales capability requires the melding of all the business functions and their activities. HR has a role to play since its

It makes revenue growth a boardroom and whole organisation issue and transforms the extremely complex business growth challenges that many organisations face into something that’s relatively simple to understand and non-bureaucratic to implement.



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non-partisan position enables an absolute focus upon implementing best practice business, organisation and people solutions”.

Ian highlighted the importance of clearly defining role profiles and customised personal development programmes for Shell’s global account managers.

Global Competence Development Manager at Shell Global Lubricants, Giles Watkins, explained,

“It helped us identify the skills, knowledge and behaviour we are looking for in the sales process. It enabled us to distinguish between the competencies required for strategic account management and those required in normal account management. A strategic account manager needs to be a political entrepreneur, adept at getting all the different parts of the orchestra, such as finance, the CEO and Research and Development, to work together.

Ian added: “Before we carried out this programme Shell Global Lubricants had a team of local account managers by country, who were not responsible to

the global account representatives. So if something was agreed in, say, Detroit it was on a wing and a prayer if it happened in Germany. Now there is a much greater chance of getting something to happen in a cohesive, coordinated manner.

“Because these global account roles are becoming increasingly important there was a need to develop a competency set and individual personal development plans to ensure the right people were in place and that they could grow in the most effective way for the demands of the new job.”

Shell’s holistic approach to improving its sales and customer relationship management is already bearing fruit. Using the HR team to marshal all departments to work together has been a unifying and beneficial experience – with customers reaping the benefits of Shell’s new approach. But they are aware they still have some way to go.

Andrew Hepher concluded: “The electronic audit was a very rapid and cost-effective means of identifying the headline issues. I was also impressed

by the depth of thought that had gone into the hierarchy of options for each question, but this is just the beginning of a two to three year journey.”

This means the HR team still has plenty of work ahead, galvanising departments into action to ensure the best results for Shell and for its customers.

Giles Watkins is already throwing himself into one of the key BREESE recommendations – to clearly define the global account manager role competencies and objectives and construct a personalised development programme for the short and medium term for each of the global account managers.

Ian Irving concluded: “Business can be straight jacketed by the political tensions between

functions and divisions, often leading to a fragmented customer focus. HR is above all of this – true HR professionals work as independent adjudicators to ensure the implementation of best solution business decisions and guard against change fatigue.”

For more information on BREESE call 0141 339 3833, contact enquiries@breese.biz or visit www.breese.biz

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BREESE's Revenue Generation Map™ won the 2004 innovation award in the National Sales Awards – beating off competition from Barclays Bank, Scottish Widows and Everest.

** Photo – Former HR director Ian Irving and his company BREESE helped Shell Global Lubricants sail in the right direction and develop its global account management capabilities

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