



Short-listed finalists

- GCap Media plc
- May Gurney
- Home Retail Group
- The Sales Academy, O₂ (UK)
- Volkswagen Group Learning Services

WINNER THE SALES ACADEMY, O₂ (UK)

Background

In 2003 the O₂ sales directorate faced a series of challenges. There was increased competition and it was difficult to differentiate through products and services. They had to deliver more complex solutions to more experienced buyers whose desire to buy was dominated by price. Staff attrition was high and there was an increasing need to motivate their sales force.

At a strategic level O₂'s business objectives were to enhance productivity of every individual through increased capability; to differentiate themselves from the competition through consistency of standards and behaviours and to deliver the best customer experience.

Through observation conducted by external training partner Imparta, and interviews with individuals across the sales directorate five fundamental development challenges were identified. The transactional sales approach was doing little to separate them from the competition and there was a lack of consistency regarding best practice. Limited reinforcement and measurement following instructor led training was weakening use, while sales managers were seen as part of the team, rather than as coaches for team development and there was no link from development to other business processes such as appraisals and performance management.

The initiative

Critical to the success of the Sales Academy initiative was visible support from the O₂ leadership and customised launches were delivered to the sales managers before a wider roll out to the full sales directorate.

A four staged accreditation approach was developed by Imparta, allowing each person to progress through the development phases at their own pace. Bronze for knowledge building; Silver for adoption and application; Gold for a trusted advisor status and Platinum representing externally benchmarked skills and the ultimate role model.

The accreditation levels set out to drive development and behaviours through a series of interventions, measures and metrics, allowing O₂ to track individual performance. Imparta's Creating Client Value (CCV) approach was seen as the ideal methodology by which sales people could become true consultants to their customers. All entrants to the Academy completed online pre-work that provided an insight into CCV methodology followed by a five day consultative sales methodology workshop. On completion of their induction participants achieved Bronze accreditation by passing an online knowledge test. The CCV induction was supported



Tony Green, joint managing director of sponsors, Ento presenting Lia Santoriello of O₂ (UK) with the trophy

by skilled sales managers who coached the participants in the methodology.

At Silver all salespeople are benchmarked by their managers against role specific CCV competencies, managers were benchmarked using external coaches for validation. At this level individuals had to demonstrate: competency improvement; regular coaching and adherence to best practice process.

Each person was coached and assessed against the competency framework by their sales manager in real life customer meetings once every six weeks. All the sales managers were observed coaching their team members by Imparta's coaches and assessed against their own CCV coaching competencies.

To achieve the Gold level sales people had to meet more rounded business metrics including competency development and business performance.

Top performers reached Gold and Platinum level and they had to maintain minimum performance levels or risk losing their status. Gold achievers were assessed against a 'Trusted Advisor' competency framework which helped broaden their professional capabilities outside of CCV. Individuals who achieved an external world class benchmark during the development centre were selected to join the elite Platinum level. Here the business sought to identify and recognise O₂'s exemplars, giving them the opportunity to be role models and thought leaders with the opportunity to contribute to the changing face of the organisation.

The results

A strong emphasis was placed on measuring impact at all four levels of the Kirkpatrick framework. The average O₂ salesperson demonstrated the required level of knowledge to achieve Bronze accreditation within 23 days of attending their induction programme. Of the 109 instructor led programmes delivered in 2007, evaluation indicated an average score of 3.6 out of 4 for delegate satisfaction. External analysts have identified the Academy as a strategic initiative of significant importance, adding value to shareholders with over £65m of revenue directly attributed to the adoption and use of the Academy's sales methodology.

What the judges say

This was a well researched and designed programme, very clearly focused on the challenges within the industry. Good pre- and post-initiative measures provided evidence of its impact on the business and the staff. A hierarchy of development phases provided a great framework for tracking progress and motivating learners. ■