

WELCOME TO THE DIGITAL AGE

SHAZ QUERESHI says the way sales training is delivered has not moved on in decades

As the general election comes closer, politicians from all parties feel the need to convince us that the 'feel good factor' is around the corner. But are companies equipping themselves to take advantage of the upturn? The classic barometer for returning to better times is the number of companies recruiting and up-skilling their salesforces. The latest buzz around the UK sales job boards and sales training companies is that the downturn has bottomed-out. But we know that the green shoots of recovery require much nurturing, and this at a time when resources are already stretched.

This means getting the most out of sales budgets and salespeople. We need to re-evaluate and question our sales methods, finding new ways to exploit technology and demolish barriers to efficiency.

We are already a long way down the track in the adoption of CRM and sales automation systems, with many sales managers enjoying the resulting efficiencies. But there are other areas where we have not moved forward in decades. Our approach to sales training is one of these. For years, we have been sending people to off-site training courses, in the belief that we will prosper from their increased knowledge. But all too often the only lasting benefits of classroom training are a heavy manual that gathers dust on a shelf and a certificate of attendance.

Online sales training with in-built assessment is a step change that exploits today's technology. It re-invigorates sales training in the same way that CRM systems have helped organisations to make efficiency gains.

Making sales training available online to sales teams provides gains in efficiency not traditionally available through classroom training. People no longer need to leave their place of work for training, thereby avoiding travel, accommodation, lecturer, venue and material costs. These costs only facilitate the delivery, not the ongoing value, of training, but they make up most of the cost of classroom courses. Programme organisers need minimum attendee numbers to be cost-effective and we've all smiled at the 'Only two places left - hurry, book now' offers.

Training of the same quality is now available on people's desktops, through better exploitation of today's online technology. Unlike classroom training, where assessment by the lecturer is often biased towards success - for obvious reasons - the impartial nature of online training means that in-built assessments offer a realistic view of the knowledge gained. The proven value proposition is that the same learning can be retained by candidates, but at a much lower price to their employers.



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The ISMM's Director of Education recently reviewed the materials available from my company, ISMM-endorsed training centre salestrainingonline.com, commenting: "It is an ideal resource because it can be fitted into busy schedules. By breaking the training into bite-sized chunks, salespeople can learn at their own pace and are automatically provided with a record of their training. It is equally important that online training is endorsed to ensure quality standards. Assessment throughout the training demonstrates that knowledge has been retained and, on completing the programme, candidates are provided an ISMM Certificate endorsing the materials. I'm particularly interested in products that enable learners to access online training as it's so flexible and fits well with continuous professional development."

Companies that stretch today's tight budgets by harnessing technology to enhance efficiency will not only nurture their own growth, but will also lead the UK's economic recovery. It would be satisfying to see the sales profession seize the initiative with online training, helping the nation sell its way out of recession and restore the feel good factor - for all our sakes.