

Creating Value for Your Most Challenging Customers

How to Engage a Sales Force to Build a Brand Without a Differentiated Product

By Jaime Danielson

The Issue

After physicians consistently ranked its sales professionals in the lower half of the value creation pack, Pharmaceutical Company Q (PCQ) made the identification of a new business model for its sales force a priority. PCQ's senior leadership established a pilot sales team to develop this business model. The team's marching orders: Figure out how to create value without talking product and report what you learn about your customers back to the organization so value-added solutions can be developed and competitive advantage can be fostered.

Three factors increased the difficulty of the challenge:

- The team calls on the most difficult customer segments—no-see/no-change doctors.
- The team is comprised of top-performing sales professionals with varying levels of experience who have all achieved their success using different sales methods.
- The team's director set an aggressive timeframe for development and implementation of a new sales training program—less than a month.

The Approach

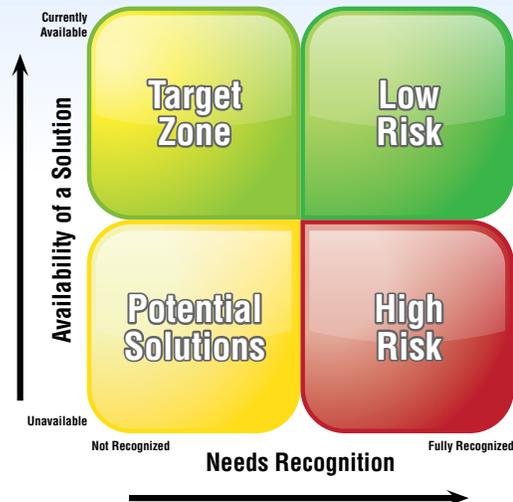
Alliance Performance Systems (APS) partnered with the team's director to fast-track development of a customized sales performance system that would launch with a two-day working session. APS consultants and instructional designers conducted extensive research and analysis to identify the pivotal components of the solution. These pivotal components included:

- Changing the mindset of the sales force
- Identifying customer needs and connecting the dots
- Developing a detailed call plan
- Asking strategic discovery questions
- Prioritizing and communicating information and insights

Changing the Mindset of the Sales Force

With no value-added product to sell and customers inclined to turn them away, members of the sales team felt disadvantaged. They did not see an opportunity to have engaging interactions. APS laid the foundation for a shift in mindset by helping them discover how the gap that exists between physicians and sales representatives developed over time. Then APS used its proprietary Value Creation Opportunity Matrix™ (VCOM) to reveal opportunities to engage customers and add value do

Value Creation Opportunity Matrix (VCOM™)



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exist because many of the needs of a physician's practice go unrecognized. By surfacing these needs, sales professionals can close the gap. They can create value and develop a brand for themselves.

Identifying Customer Needs and Connecting the Dots

With mindshare building among the members of PCQ's sales team, APS introduced the team to its proprietary Spectrum of Needs™. Team members used the tool, learning maps, and case studies to broaden and deepen their understanding of the needs influencing decisions made in the physician's practice. They went beyond the clinical to investigate financial, operational, personal, and patient needs. They also discovered value (and access) can be created if they identify the needs of each call point in the practice and analyze how those needs align.

Developing a Detailed Call Plan

The team's experienced sales professionals already knew how to develop effective strategic call plans. APS facilitators worked with them to integrate a comprehensive customer needs analysis into those plans. In addition, team members began planning the questions they would ask specific priority customers to discover more about their needs.

Asking Strategic Discovery Questions

Top-performing, value-creating sales representatives have three types of questions in their toolbox: discovery, validation, and persuasion questions. Since this sales force was without a value-added product, it had to focus on asking discovery questions. APS created a custom questioning model the sales team could use to ensure the questions they developed and targeted to call points were strategically focused on uncovering customer needs. The team then participated in multiple simulations to test the effectiveness of questions they developed for their own priority customers.

Prioritizing and Communicating Information and Insights

APS provided the sales force with a planning tool they could use to analyze the information they discover and insights they develop about their customers as they implement their new skills. By prioritizing information and insights, the team can more effectively communicate actionable data back to their own organization. Effective communication will facilitate the organization's ability to develop value-added solutions that meet the needs of customers and, in turn, allow the sales force the opportunity to use more questioning skills to link customer needs to those solutions and advance a sale.

The Outcome

The working session thoroughly engaged all members of PCQ's sales team. Participants were impressed not only by the content but also by APS's ability to effectively transfer knowledge without the use of a single PowerPoint slide. They embraced the opportunity to practice needs analysis and questioning through interactive learning activities and in vigorous simulations. As they worked, the participants began to see an opportunity to create customer value where

they once thought none existed. One sales professional reported spending the entire weekend thinking of strategic discovery questions to ask his clients.

PCQ's managers and leaders were impressed by APS's ability to develop and implement such a robust, customized program in less than a month. The team's director received positive feedback from sales leadership, who indicated the working session and performance system developed by Alliance Performance Systems aligned with their business goals. And, most important to the continued success of the program, the team's managers committed themselves to creating development plans for their employees and to coaching the skills in the field.

"I am convinced my people left [the session] having looked at our business in a meaningful way and through a new lens. Undoubtedly, this perspective will serve our team, our customers, and their patients exceptionally well!"

- Sales Team Leader

To learn more about this case study, please contact Peter Pisarri, Senior Vice President of Client Development for Alliance Performance Systems, at: ppisarri@allianceperformance.net or call (941) 766-0058.

And to learn more about Alliance Performance Systems visit: www.allianceperformance.com