

As part of a major change initiative, one of Australia's largest insurers has teamed up with Miller Heiman to standardise its approach to selling.

Allianz has been part of the Australian insurance market since the early 1910s when it began its workers compensation underwriting business. Today the company still provides this type of cover for one in five Australian employees. In addition, Allianz Australia also offers a range of personal and commercial insurance products that are sold primarily through insurance brokers, financial institutions and car dealerships.

Part of Allianz Australia's growth can be attributed to acquisitions. Consequently the company operated a variety of market approaches and systems until it embarked on a major change initiative in 2003.

Learning and Development Manager, Nicola Morley, explains:-

“Prior to 2003, our four distribution divisions had each adopted their own approach to selling. We recognised that to grow the business we needed to break down our divisional silos and develop a consistent approach to sales and fulfilment that sat across the whole organisation.”

The process of standardisation initially focused on four key areas: rewriting job descriptions for key sales roles; reviewing reward and recognition systems; streamlining the Account Management process and introducing interpersonal skills training for all sales people.

“Miller Heiman's Strategic Selling[®] was a key component of our Account Management process. **Strategic Selling[®] was chosen for its simplicity, ease of use and ability to operate within different sizes of accounts.**”

In late 2003 a total of 300 sales people, including senior general management, attended a series of two-day Strategic Selling[®] workshops which were facilitated by Skills Farm, the Miller Heiman distributor for Australia.

In preparation for the implementation Allianz also used the ‘Predictive Sales Performance’ tool to assess the skills and competence of its sales force. Miller Heiman sees benchmarking individual potential as an intrinsic part of its holistic approach to building exceptional sales organisations, especially where companies are re-positioning and need to move forward confidently. Predictive Sales Performance benchmarks candidate responses against specific profiles for success. The success criteria is based on over 30 years of data analysis. Companies using it can expect to increase selection accuracy by 25-30 per cent and also benefit from profile data to help in fine-tuning job/person fit, succession planning and effective targeting of development resources.

The key to Allianz Australia's success is the ability to write profitable business. Allianz sales professionals now use the ‘Blue Sheet’ as a tool to help them select and win the right kind of business, in order for the organisation to maintain its competitive position.

In general, Allianz sales people have responded positively to Strategic Selling[®] and now have access to an online Account Management system that houses all account and Blue Sheet data. Regular updating of the database is one of the key indicators against which individual sales performance is measured.

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The length and complexity of insurance sales cycles means that it will be some time before the true impact of Strategic Selling[®] can be assessed. However, Nicola is able to cite several instances where the process has been instrumental in intermediaries committing to place additional business with Allianz. Examples of recent successes include Heritage Building Society, Big Sky Credit Union and St George Building Society.

Like any organisation managing change Allianz has met resistance in some quarters but is heartened by the progress it is making and is working hard to embed the methodology. Strategic Selling[®] is now part of the Corporate Induction Programme for all new sales recruits and Blue Sheet terminology is now commonplace within the organisation. To help further reinforce the process plans are in place for sales managers to go through a Strategic Selling[®] coaching programme.

Strategic Selling[®] has undoubtedly introduced greater rigour and consistency in the way Allianz identifies and develops business across its divisions. But it is only one piece of the jigsaw, according to Nicola.

“When developing a new sales culture you need to look at the whole picture. Of course, it's important to have a sales process that you can rely on, but to ensure it is utilised effectively it needs to be linked into an effective accountability and reward system. In addition, you need to have systems and procedures in place to ensure all your sales data is managed accordingly.”

Nicola also acknowledges the role of a reputable Miller Heiman distributor, commenting on the high standard of service provided by Skills Farm, in terms of their experience, responsiveness and professional integrity;

“As the Miller Heiman distributor for Australia, we found Skills Farm to be an extremely professional organisation. We were particularly impressed with the fact that Skills Farm themselves use Miller Heiman products and that Skills Farm trainers all have extensive sales and sales management experience. Essentially Skills Farm practise what they preach!”