

ARTICLE SERIES

Study Identifies How Global Giant Compares to Winning Sales Organizations

MILLER
HEIMAN®
The Sales Performance Company

Study Identifies How Global Giant Compares to Winning Sales Organizations

Unilever may well define the much-used term “global.” The consumer goods giant has salespeople on the ground in more than 150 countries doing battle to secure local restaurant shelf space.

Unilever’s Foodsolutions division offers food ingredients to restaurants and shops, and most successful salespeople cook with local proprietors and sell by demonstration. However, in some instances, this interactive sales method leads to a string of one-time sales as representatives finish a demonstration and move down the street to the next target.

Unilever trainers around the world have been working to shift sales culture and encourage methods that produce repeat business, according to Roy Martinez, a Unilever sales training leader with responsibility for building sales capacity in North America.

Miller Heiman spoke with Martinez and Miller Heiman VP of Sales, Tim Call, about Unilever’s methodology: Global sales executive leaders expressed interest in *Miller Heiman’s Sales Best Practices Study*, and Martinez asked Miller Heiman to administer that survey to key people in the division, so they could directly compare their results against Winning Sales Organizations (WSOs).

Miller Heiman surveyed a majority of Unilever’s senior sales leaders, their two COOs, and 135 managing directors and salespeople--about 185 individuals total. The depth and detail with which the division was surveyed required senior executive-level input from both companies. Bob Miller, Miller Heiman’s co-founder, delivered the keynote message at Unilever’s January 2007 sales meeting, during which the results were presented.

Martinez suspected the survey results would help articulate areas where the division’s leadership could drive more sales involvement at the country leadership level and the areas where changes to the sales process

were needed. The study results delivered on his hunch and also helped rally executive fervor around training geared toward developing more strategic planning for sales calls.

Excerpts of the discussion with Martinez and Call follow.

Miller Heiman: How did the Sales Best Practices Study fit with Unilever’s plans for its sales team members?

Roy Martinez: In the last 14 months, we’ve really been looking at selling strategy. We have so many different go-to-market strategies. In many places around the globe, the selling strategy is transactional selling, and the thought among regional leadership is that the more people you have on the street, the more you can sell. That’s good, but it doesn’t bring accounts with larger volume potential to us.

It created heated debate all over--Rotterdam, Turkey, South America, Bangkok. We hoped to record what our salespeople and executives around the world know and don’t know--on a data sheet. How could we make a big difference in spreading a real sales-driven culture, whether we are looking at a very simple sale to a shop owner in Vietnam, or selling to Yum! Corporation in the U.S.?

We needed to tie the knot much tighter between executive leadership in all those different countries to get them really locked into their sales organizations and understanding their customers.

Tim Call: Response to Bob Miller’s presentation of preliminary survey results at the global sales meeting was very good. Over the next few days, meeting attendees kept referring to it.

MH: It sounds as though discovering concretely where Unilever either does or does not match up against your peer group helped solidify strategy you’ll follow to improve results.

RM: If you’re a large company touting yourself to be leading edge or ahead of the pack, you should know what the pack is doing. We wanted to know what WSOs

were really doing, get a sense of our benchmark. It's one thing to read about selling strategies in a book, it's another to hear them in person, to be able to work on the issues the survey has identified.

TC: Typically, using survey results, an organization will make a laundry list of five to seven things they want to change incrementally, then decide what's most important and set strategy for the following year.

RM: We'll target two or three areas that stand out. The study gave us a clearer direction to move in.

MH: What are some of the specific areas that you think the division will target?

TC: I think at the global meeting, they learned they're doing a pretty good job at some things. One area they might pursue, though, is around opportunity identification, knowing when to pursue an opportunity and when not to.

RM: We need to bring some lofty goals down to earth. If a salesperson says he can close \$100,000, we need to hold him accountable for this number. Sales leaders tend to be exuberant, and salespeople are always hopeful, but you can't take hopeful to the bank!

The survey also showed our value proposition is not as strong as a WSO. We need to strengthen our ability to articulate that, instead of just listing 15-20 features and benefits in a call. We need to look to the customer, and provide solutions they would really value. The importance of qualifying the opportunity, understanding your customer and articulating a true value proposition were things the survey results expanded on for us.

This is why we're working to develop strategic sales process worldwide. And if you have senior sales leaders, VPs, trainers in HR like myself and the chairman and executives of a region actively involved, you are going to strengthen your value proposition within that structure.

INTERVIEW SUBJECT:

Name: Roy Martinez

Title: Manager for North American Learning & Development. As an associate *Strategic Selling*® trainer, Roy has facilitated the *Strategic Selling*® process for more than nine years and incorporates cross-functional teams in the learning agenda.

Previously: Roy was with Sizzler and served as the International Director of Training. He also led the development of a Corporate University Program for restaurant managers at the Collins School of Hospitality at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, USA.

Company: Unilever

Business: Creates products that help consumers meet everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene, and personal care with brands that help people feel good, look good and get more out of life including Knorr, Hellmann's, Lipton, Bertolli; Dove, Lux, Pond's, Rexona/Sure; Skip/Persil; Cif and Domestos.

Headquarters: Unilever NV: Rotterdam, Netherlands; Unilever PLC: London, England; Unilever also has corporate offices in the United States and strong local roots in more than 100 countries across the globe; it operates in 150 countries worldwide.

Founded: Lever Bros., which eventually merged with other entities to become Unilever, was started in the 1880s

Revenues: Annual sales of \$40 billion in 2005

Employees: 206,000 worldwide

Website: www.unilever.com