

Persuading Senior-Level Decision-Makers from Charismatics to Controllers

As a long-time user of Miller Heiman's methodology, Experian has a tried and tested framework both for *Strategic Selling*[®] and dealing with major customers. But the adoption of the *Executive Impact*SM tool has led the information solutions expert to radically re-think its approach to persuading senior-level decision-makers.

Experian is a global leader in providing organisations and consumers with the analytical and information services needed to manage the risk and reward of commercial and financial decisions. The company, which is listed on the London Stock Exchange following its de-merger from GUS plc in 2006, employs over 12,500 people in 32 countries, supporting clients in more than 60 countries.

Experian has expertise in credit services, decision analytics, marketing solutions and internet-based marketing. At the core of its business are comprehensive databases, derived from both public and private sources, providing credit and marketing information on consumers and businesses. It has also developed own-brand products, like Mosaic, offering a comprehensive view of socio-demographics, lifestyle, culture and behaviour of consumers in 25 countries worldwide, and Geodelphi, which provides a unique insight into credit demands and behaviour based on their location. The company sells software and data to support decision-making in industries such as financial services, retail and mail order, telecommunications, utilities, media, insurance and the automotive sector. In the UK, where its main activity is credit services, Experian deals with all the major credit card companies, building societies and banks. Using the company's proprietary systems and software, these clients can instantly search and match credit application and

repayment details, enabling many millions of applications to be processed annually. Operating in such a business-critical area, Experian works closely with its clients to build an in-depth understanding of their current and future needs and market characteristics. Pursuing sales opportunities of this scale and complexity naturally entails a significant investment in people and financial resources, as well as skilful negotiations at a high level.

Part of Daily Working Practices

Experian relies on Miller Heiman's rigorous methodology to manage these key customer relationships. Starting with *Strategic Selling*[®] in 1998 and then moving on to *LAMP*[®] (*Large Account Management Process*SM), the company implemented these programmes for all customer-facing staff in Northern Europe and the Middle East. Everyone involved in the sales process goes through *Strategic Selling*[®] workshops - salespeople including directors, consultancy and technical delivery staff, as well as some marketing and product development personnel. *LAMP*[®] is also widely used to plan, manage and grow key accounts. In the Consumer Credit division, it is mandatory for salespeople to complete a *LAMP*[®] Gold Sheet for monthly internal planning sessions and for the half-yearly reviews that take place with clients.

“By adopting a single systemised sales approach our aim was to have a smarter way of working with clients, particularly large accounts. As well as doing more business and improving profitable relationships, we also wanted to differentiate ourselves from our competitors,” said Experian’s Tim Morris. He is responsible for six sales directors within the Consumer Credit division and, as a Miller Heiman Client Associate, delivers training to other parts of the business outside North America.

“Having a consistent framework and common sales language has supported our revenue growth in a measurable way. Staff can collaborate more effectively on deals and accounts, which feed through into business wins and better forecasting. It’s also much easier to request additional resources because we can clearly demonstrate which situations offer us the best prospects and what we need to succeed.”

Miller Heiman’s methodology has been part of Experian’s daily working practices for several years now. But more recently, the UK roll-out of the *Executive Impacts*SM (EI) tool has brought about a change in the way the company engages with senior management in client organisations.

Getting to and persuading senior-level executives is crucial to winning large deals yet research shows that this key audience considers most sales professionals to be ineffective at getting them to say “yes” to their proposals. The research-based EI tool helps salespeople to identify how these executives make decisions, and to match their sales efforts to five individual styles (Charismatics, Thinkers, Sceptics, Followers, Controllers) to maximise the chances of success.

New Thinking

Experian regularly runs *Executive Impacts*SM workshops as follow-on to *Strategic Selling*[®], and the response has been extremely positive, according to Tim Morris. “*Executive Impact*’s

value is that it shows the sales team what large complex client organisations look like and helps them to

understand why they aren’t making progress. To my mind, it makes a good connection between the business deal, the people involved and the long-term perspective following the deal,” said Tim.

“In a year, the programme has radically changed salespeople’s approach to senior decision-makers and, in some instances, knocked very experienced team members for six.

It’s not unusual to hear comments like, ‘I’ve never thought about it like that before’ or ‘I’ve really learnt something from this programme,’” he added.

Experian monitors the progress of all major business situations and is able to measure the effect that *Executive Impacts*SM has in terms of connecting with decision-makers. Key results include:

More Effective Messaging

Salespeople are considering whether to change the messaging they use when presenting to senior executives, and where they need to look for this information.

Sales Proposals with Impact

A typical proposal includes a company’s credentials rather than reasons why decision-makers should buy from them. Experian now gives more thought to making the content of sales documents more relevant. In putting together proposals, it found that focusing on the Valid Business Reason helped to produce an effective Executive Summary, and the detailed proposal then flows from this rather than the other way round. Sales proposals and documents are shorter and more pertinent as a result.

cont...

Seeing the Client's Perspective

The programme has also highlighted that Experian need to better understand the client's business from the client's point of view. For instance, let us suppose that the client is growing very fast. This may seem to be a thoroughly desirable and comfortable situation for the client but inside their organisation there will be people who will be feeling the pain of rapid growth and Experian has learnt that their A/C executives need to be sensitive to these peoples' perspective.

The *Executive Impacts*SM programme encouraged the team members to challenge the status quo and question why they were not making headway. It also showed them how to align Experian's proposition to work with the different decision-making styles. Results were immediate. A salesperson attending the first workshop completely changed his approach to a senior executive he was dealing with and within a week had secured a six figure contract.