

Microsoft

The mission

- Reposition Microsoft as an enterprise solution provider in order to ensure that Microsoft does not miss market opportunities.
- Achieve this by ensuring that sales staff target business decision makers, not just IT managers.

The solution

- Use Cambashi's industry training so that sales representatives understand which people to target and what to say to them.

The results

- Sales representatives reported that they had changed the way they approached prospects.
- The training project supported Microsoft's larger strategy to create and sell solutions.

The customer

"We looked at other companies and did not come across anyone that understood us and our needs. Cambashi can call on a range of resources, for example a network of native speakers. Its staff have specialist expertise and the ability to relate effectively at a personal level."

Rod Blackwell. Regional Business Manager
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Changing a perception

Its phenomenal success in business critical commodity applications was a double edged sword for Microsoft. The market perceived that Microsoft sold products, not solutions. In Europe only 30% of gross revenue was from solutions. Yet Microsoft recognised that people buy solutions not products. It realised that it needed to do something in order to gain credibility in the solution selling space. At the same time it became clear why it was facing this situation: sales representatives were not approaching the right people. They were relying on the traditional route via the IT department. They were not targeting senior decision-makers dealing with business issues.

Microsoft decided that the best way to start tackling the issue was to focus on the needs of each industry vertical. It identified these as manufacturing, finance, retail, government and telecommunications. It recognised that sales staff would benefit from line of business solution training so that they could convey the expertise of Microsoft in each of these areas.

Rod Blackwell, Regional Business Manager, had particular responsibility for the manufacturing industry within the EMEA area. "We realised that we were missing opportunities and it became clear that the reason for this was that sales people were not targeting properly. In the past we have been seen as a product company and the sales people were reinforcing this perception. Having Microsoft on a business card means it is fairly easy to get an appointment with IT and procurement. Once in a company, sales people were asking about the number of PCs, focusing on cost per PC and talking about how quickly roll-out could begin. We wanted to promote a new perception of Microsoft."

He realised that the industry marketing department needed to gain the mindshare within the field sales force. However it was not immediately clear how to proceed. "There was the

internal Microsoft view,” he said, “we needed to work with an external company in order to get a wider view.”

He called on several suppliers to provide suggestions. Microsoft had used Cambashi over the past few years for market research and preparation of white papers. Training was a natural extension of these activities. In addition, Cambashi saw the problem from the perspective of a sales person. It identified that there was a responsibility to take a sales point of view. Cambashi maintained that, to encourage sales people to change their behaviour at a deep level, they had to see some benefit for themselves.

Other suppliers, in contrast, took an information approach which involved presenting sales people with knowledge. “We looked at other companies and did not come across anyone that understood us and our needs,” reported Rod Blackwell. “Cambashi can call on a range of resources, for example a network of native speakers. Its staff have specialist expertise and the ability to relate effectively at a personal level.”

Microsoft appointed Cambashi to deliver a series of training workshops for sales people across Europe. The overall aim was to show the sales teams who they should be targeting and what they should be saying. To achieve this the workshops would review the types of business problems that organisations face, then demonstrate how and why there was potential for an infrastructure solution based on Microsoft technology. The first requirement was to identify the various types of situation in which a Microsoft solution would be extremely appropriate. Both Microsoft and Cambashi felt that the key to success lay in making the workshops as closely related to real life as possible. This involved creating several scenarios.

One particular scenario was built around an existing Microsoft customer. Workshop participants visited a factory where the customer willingly shared several business issues. An interactive session focused on potential solutions to address these issues and the scope for Microsoft to supply these solutions became apparent.

The structure of the course evolved through a number of meetings between Cambashi and Microsoft. The basic design was tailored to different needs to reflect the make-up of the sales force. These included account managers, people in support and consultancy roles and marketing staff; in pre-sales, tele-sales and direct sales. Each seminar was delivered by three people, a Microsoft manager, a Cambashi consultant and a local associate of Cambashi. The courses were advertised and promoted internally, interest was strong and the seminars took place in several locations across Europe.

Cambashi prepared all the material, which included a book of slides, a CD and supporting documents. As the courses were rolled out, all of the content was published on the Microsoft Intranet for those who were unable to attend.

“Cambashi was very professional; the workshops were well planned and well documented,” said Rod Blackwell. “We had the flexibility to make changes whenever they were needed and everything we wanted was done. There was a good cultural fit between Microsoft and Cambashi staff. We gathered immediate feedback during the workshops, we also received feedback from participants afterwards. Sales people reported that they had done things differently, some reported that they had won projects as a direct result of going through the training.”

The sales training was one of a number of initiatives that fitted into a larger strategy. Microsoft not only created packages of solutions, it changed the way in which sales were measured and the way in which sales people were compensated. “We now have a different approach to the sales process. We changed the classification of customer accounts and no longer think in terms of number of PCs; we view customers according to how much they spend on IT, it is a totally

different dynamic. We are looking to work more deeply with a small set of customer in several new areas.”

As customers get more sophisticated people want services that go with products and look for suppliers to provide solutions. Microsoft had been providing solutions, but typically through partners who were using our platform. Microsoft did not sell solutions itself. Now we are packaging bits of technology to allow customers to build a solution. As a result our partners are using Microsoft solutions as part of their own solutions.”

These changes took place over a period of three to four years. Reflecting on overall progress Rod Blackwell said “There has been a transformation. We have created virtual teams because customers cut across boundaries; our sales people now share best practice. The training was a critical part of this whole. It addressed the different needs and different objectives of sales people engaged with manufacturing customers.” As a result of this success Cambashi was asked to create similar training courses for the Americas and Asia Pacific regions.

“My local management felt that the training project was value for money,” reports Rod Blackwell. “The sales readiness team in the US and colleagues in industry marketing in the UK saw the project as a success. They looked at the kind of people on the course, the feedback and how we developed a virtual team network. Whilst the programme was led by Europe it was extended to the US and the Far East.”