

# Why should there be any failing in sales training?

**Andrew Scott**, managing director, Purplex, bring his series to a close with a rallying call for all businesses in the fenestration sector to stop treating sales training as a cost but regard it as an invaluable investment.

However we look at it, the Window Industry is facing challenging times. We could argue that volume has dropped and margins are under pressure, or we could argue the problem is over-capacity; either way it puts pressure on the Industry as a whole.

How can companies improve margins in this marketplace? How can the Industry improve margins as a whole? Well, clearly, there must be either a reduction in capacity (fewer companies or reduced output), or companies need to become better at what they do.

The more efficient a company becomes, the tougher it is for competitors, and ultimately this creates the divide we see today – some companies achieving strong growth and profitably, and others struggling to survive. Natural evolution, it seems, may in time resolve the over-capacity problem itself.

So how do companies become better at doing business? New technology? Investment in automation? Innovative marketing? Yes, but its not enough. In this Industry, business is about people, and if we don't improve our people we won't improve our business.

## AN INDUSTRY-WIDE PROBLEM

Consider this; there are over 15,000 window and conservatory companies in the UK and Ireland. The success of the Industry depends on the ability of these companies to win business at good margins; and these companies depend on their sales people in the field.

As an Industry, we are beginning to wake up



Instead of a scorched earth policy towards marketing, businesses should see that there are fruits to be had from treating it as an investment

to the advantages of training. Better trained, multi-skilled fabricators improve productivity, and skilled fitters ensure higher quality installations and happier customers.

Who would consider putting an untrained individual in charge of finance? And yet we continue to put untrained sales people in front of customers. If this industry depends largely on its sales people to generate business and margins, we need to embrace the fact that professionally trained sales people will produce better, more profitable companies.

## TRAIN FOR SKILLS

Customers rarely buy on price alone. Training your sales people to sell solutions and value, rather than product and price, will help improve sales conversation rates and avoid heavy discounting. If your sales team are out of the mould that says "I've been doing this for 20 years and there's nothing you can teach me", your business – and your margins – are at risk.

Skills don't just involve closing the deal. Improving your sales team's presentation skills, use of technology and negotiating skills will all improve results. Providing some general business and marketing training will give your team more confidence and better position them to understand and assist your customers and prospects. Your team will

also value your investment in them, creating loyalty and better motivation.

**TRAIN FOR ATTITUDE**

There are very few truly self-motivated sales people; however, with the right training it is possible to motivate sales people to a new level of performance. It's not just about carrot and stick; if sales people truly believe their product or service will really benefit the customer, they will go the extra mile. Major sales organisations know this and spend almost as much time selling to their own sales team as they do teaching their sales team to sell.

**TRAIN FOR MOMENTUM**

Even with the best skills and motivation, some sales people don't deliver results. These people are often disorganised, have poor time management and lack planning and prioritising. Training can dramatically leverage performance and improve overall results.

Investing in a good CRM system will help them manage this sales activity more effectively. Train them to use it and you will discover their productivity and performance will increase rapidly, generating more sales revenue while improving customer relationships.

Your sales team are most productive when sitting in front of customers, whilst having them drive around the country prospecting for new customers is expensive and unproductive. Invest in good marketing, advertising or telesales to generate the leads, and keep your sales team busy selling – and updating your CRM system.

**COMPANY-WIDE TRAINING**

Training should not, however, be restricted just to the sales team. Your business is about winning and keeping customers, so everyone in your organisation who is customer-facing should be trained. Again, consider the most successful companies in any Industry and you will see highly trained people – whether it's Tesco, McDonalds, or Dell.

Consider this; your customer-facing staff – office personnel, drivers, fitters – could either enhance or damage your relationship with your customer. Most companies leave this to chance, pouring thousands of pounds down the drain and not even knowing it. Top performing companies do know this, and invest in training customer-facing staff. If you don't, you're leaving your business to chance. In a recent survey, one major company discovered they lost more customers through "indifference" than they did through bad service. Can you afford to take this risk?

The approach to training may have changed in recent years, but not fast enough. Machinery is seen as an asset whereas training is seen as cost. We must recognise that in an industry with very little product differential, your people can become your greatest asset. Highly trained, motivated people can transform your business, achieving growth and margins that competitors simply cannot match.

**GET INTO THE PREMIERSHIP**

Consider your people like a Premiership football team; you invest in buying good players, but do you leave them to it or continuously train them, improve their skills, develop their attitude, and create momentum? You train them individually, and as a team, and you monitor their performance when on the field. What happens if one of your team underperforms? Do you sack them, or train them?



For example Chelsea paid £30.8m for Andriy Shevchenko from AC Milan in 2006 and Real Madrid paid £80m for Cristiano Ronaldo in 2009 from Manchester United.

Whether your business is a systems company, fabricator or installer, Premier League or 3rd Division, your biggest advantage in a competitive market is a highly trained, highly motivated team of people. Perhaps it's the best investment your business will ever make.

So how do you position your company and your products to build customer value and increase revenue? First and foremost, develop a strategy for communicating