

IS IT TIME TO CERTIFY SALES PROFESSIONALS?

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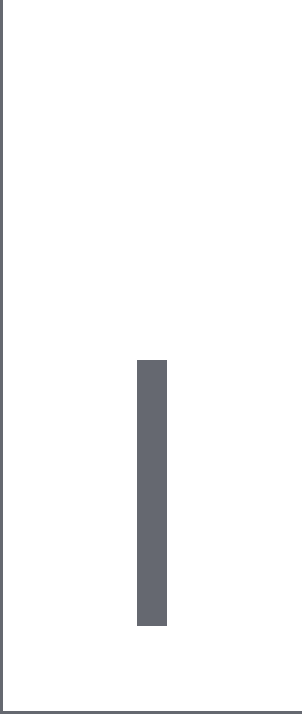
PHONE: 800-597-1873

VALUEBASED.COM

INFOUS@VALUEBASED.COM

Certification implies that a level of performance or competency has been attained. A certified sales professional has been observed and measured while performing acknowledged best sales practices and processes for his/her industry and target market(s).





WELCOME



WELCOME

Certification programs are a part of many professions where certain skills and competencies are required for practitioners to be effective and successful. For example, real estate and financial services as well as healthcare and technology sectors offer—and often require—particular levels of expertise from their practitioners in order to validate their competency. The financial services industry is another sector that views levels of certification as valuable and necessary to consumer and company alike.

Microsoft offers several forms of highly-prized IT certification, ranging from a Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS) to a Microsoft Certified Learning Consultant (MCLC) and everything in between. These designations provides credibility for IT professionals and their company and are considered to be a value-added component to the company's product/service offering.

From a provider's perspective perhaps the most valued aspect of having a team certified is the level of trust and confidence that it creates in the minds of prospective and existing clients. Research says that over 80% of purchases occur because of the trust and confidence that prospects have in their sales representative.

For this and other reasons that follow we believe it's time to consider certifying sales professionals.



This e-book presents the concept of certifying sales professionals as a means of:

1. Improving sales performance
2. Providing an organization assurance that their sales team represents them with a high degree of professionalism and ethics
3. Most importantly, greatly enhancing the prospect and customer experience

First, let's look at what's at stake. Then we'll look at how certifying sales professionals is a step beyond traditional sales training. Third, we'll consider approaches to the sales certification process and its potential impact on the sales professional, the organization they represent and the prospect/customer experience. And lastly, we'll evaluate what's important to look for in a sales certification program and provider.

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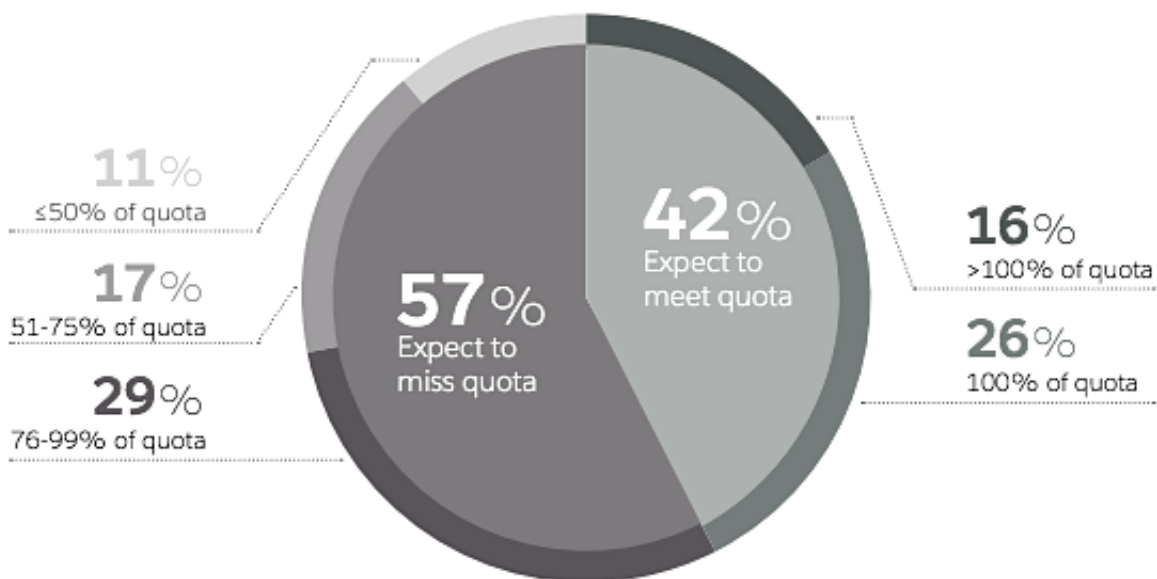
SECTION 1

WHAT'S AT STAKE



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Percentage of Sales Reps Who Expect to Meet the Following Share of Their Quotas This Year



Base: Sales representatives
Percents may not add to 100% due to rounding.

>> 57% of sales reps are expected to miss quota this year.

* STATS FROM "STATE OF SALES" SALESFORCE SALES RESEARCH 2020

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The recent succession of national and global recessions, natural disasters, and an economy-crippling pandemic has left many small and mid-size companies with depleted sales and marketing budgets that allow little room to fund important revenue-producing initiatives. However, history has proven that an investment in sales and marketing during recessionary and/or recovery times can—at worst—sustain a company and—at best—catapult them over weaker competitors to capture some of the available market share.

In addition to industry and market growth opportunities, there are company revenue and margin targets that must be achieved. These are impacted by individual sales representative productivity, which in turn, affects most everything else. The adage that "nothing happens in a company until something is sold" has never been more true than it has in the last several years.

Taking a "macro" perspective one could argue the US unemployment rate of over 11% could be reduced if there was an overall increase in corporate sales and revenues that lead to re-employment to meet the increased demand for goods and services. So there's a lot at stake.

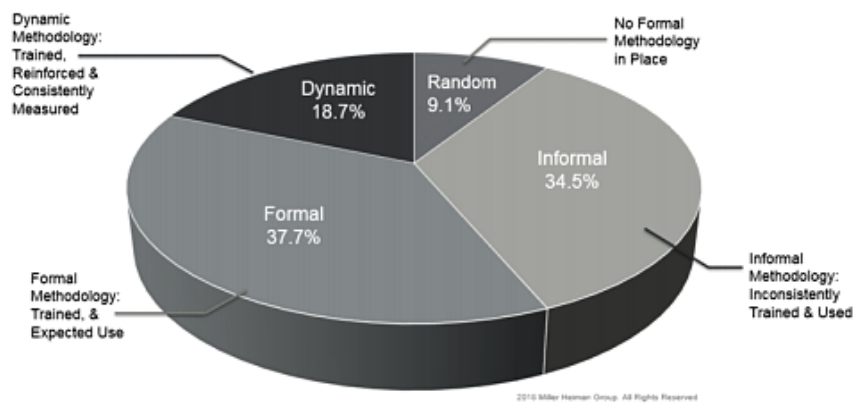
WHAT'S MISSING?

Our experience after working with 100's of SMBs and Fortune 500 companies for almost three decades concludes there are **5 key initiatives** that their sales organizations invest in improving:

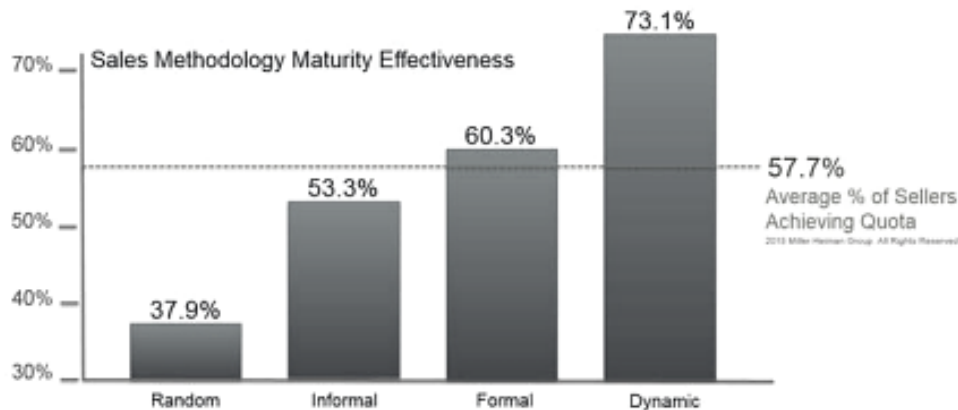
1. Implement a proven and predictable sales process.
2. Create a value messaging knowledge base for their product/service offering.
3. Eliminate margin-eroding discounts and concessions as prospects attempt to commoditize them.
4. Measure and improve individual sales team member's lead-to-close and sales cycle proficiency rates.
5. Create and establish a sales coaching methodology that embeds and motivates a continuous learning culture.

WHAT'S MISSING?

Looking at recent research from CSO Insights (2017) 56.4% of over 1,500 companies surveyed had a formal or dynamic sales process compared to 43.6% that had a random or informal process.



In the same study almost half of the organizations surveyed missed their sales quota. Organizations with a dynamic sales methodology in place had an almost 20% better quota achievement rate than those with an informal process.



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SECTION 2

IF ITS BROKEN—FIX IT!



IF IT'S BROKEN—FIX IT!

One of the greatest challenges for many companies is to consistently meet or beat their revenue and sales goals year after year. While there can be several reasons for this, two can be easily identified and addressed:

- Lack of a proven and predictable sales process
- Less than effective sales practice performance levels among their sales team

These two deficiencies are due, in part, to inconsistent or non-existent sales improvement initiatives within the organization. The typical approach to addressing these problems is for a company to conduct a 2 or 3 day "shot-in-arm" sales training event every year or so. Many companies figure if they throw some money at a problem, things will somehow improve. The practice of conducting a training event produces, at best, a temporary spike in sales, but rarely produces sustained and universal sales increases.

**So how much should a company commit
to training their sales team?**

IF IT'S BROKEN—FIX IT!

All too often, the need to “do something to improve sales” results in a one-time sales training event. In spite of the economy, in the past, some companies spend significant dollars to fly their sales team into corporate headquarters or to a nice destination resort. They spend big bucks to bring in a high-priced sales trainer/facilitator. The sales team also takes valuable field sales time to travel to the training location. On average, the cost for this kind of sales training event can easily exceed \$5,000 to \$9,000 per person, after all the costs are calculated. And as stated earlier, after all this time and money has been spent the results are less than impressive.

Without all the travel and location costs, companies can spend between \$1,500 and \$5,000 per sales professional for a formal sales methodology engagement.

**What's missing from these expensive initiatives
is retention and utilization
of the new training content/processes.**

Sales team members typically reach their brain's saturation point after 6 to 8 hours of continuous training. This, combined with a less-than-effective lecture-style training, reduces retention to less than 25% of what is presented. And when retention lowers, so does utilization.

IF IT'S BROKEN—FIX IT!

Lastly, there's generally little to no follow-up to these training sessions—neither tracking nor reinforcement.

Experience shows that any form of reinforcement, such as refreshers or one-on-one coaching sessions, will more than double the retention and adoption of newly learned sales practices/processes.

So how well are companies doing reinforcing the process to help sales representatives bring in more business? When salespeople are asked if they need help, 54% of them say they need more coaching on identifying and closing important deals. **Bottom line: more than half of sales reps say they would like more coaching.** Unfortunately, many sales managers don't have the time or skills to coach their sales team with 60% saying their coaching process was informal and not one of their strengths.

(CSO Insights, 2019 World-Class Sales Practices Study)

IF IT'S BROKEN—FIX IT!

Today, many companies are saying “Enough!” to the failed approach and are looking for a solution.

We believe that as companies recover from the recent economic blows, they need something different that gives them more return on training investment. We believe they are aware previous sales training cost/benefit ratio has not measured up.

Drastic changes need to be made. So, if the traditional approach to improving sales is broken, what is the solution?

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

For a training or certification initiative to work, major stakeholders (CEOs & VP of Sales) who commit to and fund the activity need to see immediate, measurable and sustained increases in sales. Measuring and comparing pre- and post-training initiative performance levels for each sales person in the context of a certification program is an effective means to do so. The following comparisons reveal the value of certifying sales professionals.

- Comparisons should be made of pre- and post-initiative lead-to-close ratios for each sales person.
- Comparison should be made of pre- and post-initiative sales cycle proficiency ratings. This data can be used to hold sales team members accountable for qualitative and quantitative improvements validated by prospect sales cycle advances and close/conversion rates.
- Comparison should be made of pre- and post-initiative average order size and margin analysis.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

There are other metrics to measure and track but these are three important ones that demonstrate effectiveness and ROI for a training/certification initiative's success or failure.

Sustainability, for our clients, means the CEO and VP of Sales can track continuous improvement in all the metrics listed above for more than a quarter or two. Ideally, sales and margin improvements should continue quarter after quarter and year after year, not just occurring immediately after the initiative and then fizzling.

Sales improvement sustainability requires reinforcement.

When reinforcements such as individualized coaching and role-playing sessions are interspersed with training, deployed over time (several months), content adoption rates rise. For our clients, this kind of reinforced program produces sustained and measurable results.

SOLUTION: CERTIFICATION

Certification implies that a level of performance or competency has been attained. A certified sales professional has been observed and measured while performing acknowledged best sales practices and processes for his/her industry and target market(s).

Further, both the science (quantitative) and the art (qualitative) of each practice/process should be executed and assessed in customized, real-life sales scenarios and/or exercises. A sales professional desiring certification needs to excel at both.

Those certifying the salesperson's performance must be sales experts familiar with the industry and target markets served, products/services sold, and the selling practices/processes certified.

Some management teams may question if it's realistic to expect independent, (possibly) ego-driven sales professionals to commit to and be held accountable to completing a sales certification program. And it's a valid question and we believe the outcome is determine by leadership.

SOLUTION: CERTIFICATION

Wise sales managers will want to enlist and motivate their veterans/influencers to be mentors and examples for other team members. The involvement of a seasoned pro who is willing to share their years of industry, product, and sales knowledge will not only enrich a certification program—it can validate it.

The biggest gain in a sales team certification program can come when new hires are immediately enrolled in the program. Our experience demonstrates new sales representatives trained in a proven and predictable sales process will *reach quota-level production levels in half the normal time.*

Savvy sales managers will challenge their new hires to commit to a sales certification training program to not only guarantee their success with the company, but as a way of enhancing their resume.

SUMMARY

In today's economy it's important for executive management to consider all alternatives to improve their company's top line. Traditional sales training initiatives have not produced sustained results, yet companies, perhaps out of not knowing what else to do, continue to throw good money after bad.

With over a billion dollars spent on sales training initiatives globally, there's room for improvement. At Value Based, we believe a well-designed sales certification program customized to a company's industry, target market(s) and products/services can produce the sustained sales and margin increases that companies need and are looking for.

Our certification program is administered by highly skilled former sales executives with "been there, done that" track records. We are able to engage sales professionals of all experience levels in a challenging, fun and stimulating adult-learning experience. Best of all, both the company and the sales representatives that invest in our sales certification program have the potential to see measurable and sustained results beyond their previous experience.

So, is it time to certify sales professionals? We say yes.

ONE LAST THOUGHT...

It was interesting to discover from the most recent CSO Insights research referenced in this e-book that the Value Based Certification Curriculum developed over 10 years ago contains 9 of the 12 World Class Sales Practices presented in their 2019 World Class Sales Practices Study.

If you'd like to learn more about these practices and the Value Based Sales Certification please contact us at:



infous@valuebased.com

800.597.1873 (PHN)