

Excellence Across the Board

Following privatisation in the late 1990s, the electronics group Thales (then Thomson-CSF) set about strengthening its market position and adapting to change. Implementing Miller Heiman's processes, Strategic Selling® and Large Account® Management as part of a major sales improvement initiative has streamlined its sales approach worldwide and reinforced corporate values.

Today the Thales Group, which was founded in France more than a century ago, is a global systems and electronics company employing 61,500 people in more than 30 countries. It provides technology-based solutions and services to customers worldwide in the aerospace, defence, services and security sectors.

The company was renamed Thales in 2000, following change on an unprecedented scale. As Thomson-CSF - France's first major electronics supplier - it was nationalised during the early 1980s. Then, following privatisation in 1998, to consolidate growth, the Group stepped up its "multi-domestic" strategy in defence markets, acquired numerous interests outside France and forged new alliances and partnerships.

Leveraging its expertise in dual technologies, the Group positioned itself for strong growth in the information technologies and services sectors by developing products for the commercial market and adopting a new set of values based on customer-focus, multi-cultural team spirit, knowledge sharing and transparency. With the acquisition of Racal Electronics in 2000, the organisation realigned around three business areas: Aerospace, Defence and Information Technologies and Services.

A Sales Improvement Programme within the Information Technology & Services (IT & S) division was launched in Autumn

2002 to support growth in Thales' commercial IT business, which has a strong emphasis on national and collective security, including networking and communications, payment and electronic transactions, and navigation and telematics solutions. Key goals were to clearly define sales role profiles for selection and recruitment purposes; to implement effective training; and to devise incentive programmes such as Thales' 'Elite Club' for top performers.

Another programme objective was to standardise the Group's sales methodology. Thales recognised that replacing the plethora of existing systems with a new, uniform approach would streamline sales activities in world markets and its dealings with major, multi-national customers. A common language for actions and messaging would make it easier for sales teams to communicate, strategise and collaborate. Thales also considered that basing business forecasts on a single sales process would enable more accurate and predictable results - something that is vital to Thales as a publicly quoted company. This programme was led by Philippe Dusautoir, an experienced Sales and Marketing Director who has worked across all Thales' domains for 20 years.

"Because of our history we had inherited a variety of sales methodologies, many of which concentrated on negotiating deals rather than positioning for complex sales."

“Starting from scratch we wanted to build a consistent culture right across our multi-national operations, **with the aim of increasing bookings and developing the know-how and professionalism of the sales force, particularly in terms of account handling,**” explains Philippe Dusautoir.

A process was launched to select basic training tools. For pre-sales positioning Thales considered a number of programmes, including Miller Heiman's Strategic Selling® which was already being used in its Avionics business. The programme's Blue Sheet analysis tool provides a step-by-step process, enabling sales teams to assess their potential success in any given situation and quickly develop an action-based strategy. By pinpointing strengths and weaknesses, and identifying decision-makers and their buying criteria it is possible to qualify prospects more accurately and predict results, leading to more consistent performance and better forecasting.

Based on its previous experience of Miller Heiman, Thales decided to adopt Strategic Selling and also the Large Account Management Programmessm (LAMP®).

Top-level backing is always important for driving through change. But in this case it was absolutely mandatory, both to secure the necessary financial support and to ensure that management all along the line were wholeheartedly behind the new programme. To get that initial commitment Philippe Dusautoir worked with Jean-François Cambon, Miller Heiman's representative, to run workshops for board directors and to train middle managers. It was also essential to have a clear endorsement of the new approach as levels of discipline within the organisation vary from country to country. Consequently, to launch the programme every

sales person received a newsletter, in which the Head of IT & S stressed how vital the Strategic Selling® and LAMP® tools were to improving the sales process.

The Strategic Selling workshops have since been rolled out in France, the UK, the US, South Africa, Germany and Spain by Thales internal trainers, supported by Miller Heiman who provided materials in different languages and assisted with additional translation. According to Philippe Dusautoir, people everywhere found the process easy to understand and appreciated its benefits. This positive reaction was reflected in their feedback questionnaires - the workshop scored on average between 3.5-3.8 on a scale of 1-4.

Upholding best practice

The company has trained a total of 700 people in Strategic Selling® (300 in Avionics and 400 in IT & S) and another 100 people in LAMP. Although anyone attending the workshops is able to download the software, it is the Sales Director in each operating company who decides how the programmes are actually used. Therefore to ensure Miller Heiman principles are integrated into the business in a coherent fashion, Thales is concentrating particularly on organisation and quality management.

The Strategic Selling® concept is constantly being reinforced throughout the organisation. At 'Sitcom' meetings, which are held regularly to review major commercial situations, regional sales leaders use the Blue Sheet tool to present major business opportunities. People can go to the web site and click on 'sales training' to register for either of the Miller Heiman programmes, which are now included in the 'Thales University/catalogue. Refresher training is also planned.

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The company has also published an internal guide to best practice for Strategic Selling®, based on feedback and ideas gathered from Sales Leaders. It offers tips on all aspects of implementing the Blue Sheet process, including detailed information on how to use the analysis in a bid, presenting the analysis at a sales meeting, sharing information with project managers and colleagues from other disciplines, and approaches to multi-national customers. “Work is ongoing to embed the LAMP® process, which is already helping Thales to refine job descriptions and to orientate people towards account management. **In the meantime, the sales organisation has a road map for excellence and is progressing towards its goals**”, says Philippe Dusautoir.

Based on the LAMP® programme Thales has developed account plans for its top 20 customers and is working to embed the process, which is also being used to refine job descriptions and to orientate people towards account management. “In effect, the sales organisation now has a road map for excellence and is progressing towards its goals”, says Philippe Dusautoir.

“The ultimate aim of using Miller Heiman's methodology is to increase sales revenues. But as a large, multi-national sales organisation we are already benefiting from having a common culture and a language that everyone can understand no matter where they work. We now have a consistent way of doing business and of doing it more easily.”

“By fostering a customer-orientated attitude, and ensuring people are able to share sales information across international boundaries, the programmes serve to reinforce our partnership approach and are backing up Thales' corporate values 100 per cent.”