

Mincom Transforms Sales Culture

Establishing a more sales-driven culture across its global operations was a key objective for Australian-based company, Mincom, a leading technology partner for asset-intensive industries. Through effective planning and with support from Miller Heiman the company met its goal within a year, winning over the most sceptical sales professionals.

Mincom Ltd is one of Australia's best-known IT companies. From its global headquarters in Brisbane, it provides enterprise solutions focused on improving business outcomes in the mining, utilities, transportation and defence industries. More than 1000 staff at 18 offices service customers in over 40 countries.

Since it was formed in 1979 Mincom's success has been driven by a strong engineering tradition. However, being able to win business on technical merit also meant that the company did not evolve the robust sales culture needed in difficult market conditions. As global competition increased Mincom recognised that the time had come to adopt a more unified and systematic approach to selling throughout its operations. Consequently when Allen Vaughn joined as VP of Global Sales in 2001, one of his top priorities was to introduce the concepts of funnel management and forecast accuracy, within the overall objective of restructuring and refocusing the sales force.

“There was no common approach or consistent language to describe, for example, ideal customer criteria or our competitive position,” he explains. “Sales people had either been trained in a variety of systems over a period of time or were using their own concepts. We were constantly re-inventing the wheel in term of the sales process and terminology and no one was reading from the same page.”

The company has two main revenue streams: software and consultancy, which covers professional services such as strategy development, systems integration and outsourcing. Each of its four key vertical market sectors is managed locally but quotas are allocated to five geographic trading regions: North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific, Europe and Africa. To match the scale and structure of the operation, the new sales process would need to offer both global reach and an integrated approach.

“We were looking for a sales process that we could grow into-one that provided an entry point for sales people with no basic training and allowed us to work up. The solution also had to be multi-cultural so that it could be exported as easily to Johannesburg as to Santiago. After evaluating several global and domestic suppliers, we found that Miller Heiman gave us these two important differentiators in a well-positioned brand,” explains Allen.

At the time Miller Heiman was one of several disparate systems being used within the organisation. Mincom has now standardised on the methodology for both strategic and conceptual selling, and the programmes have been rolled out to 100 people in the sales, management and executive teams, either through direct training or via follow-up sessions.

Effective implementation

To achieve this implementation plan within a defined timescale Allen worked closely with Miller Heiman independent consultant, Michael Light. To secure the commitment of the senior leadership team, the first step was to run a workshop for the CEO and his direct reports on the subject of instilling a sales culture.

Once the executive team had bought into the concept, the process of training the entire sales force got underway. In most places the workshops were run in English, but they also accommodated those who either didn't speak it or for whom it was a second language. In Latin America staff learnt about the concepts in Spanish and now use the relevant local kit.

The roll out included conducting Large Account Management Process (LAMP[®]) and Conceptual Selling for all Account Managers, plus Strategic Selling[®] and Conceptual Selling[®] for all Business Development Managers, as well as coaching and consulting sessions for industry sector specialists.

To help reinforce the techniques sales people who had been trained in Miller Heiman presented a Blue Sheet analysis of various sales situations to the executive team, who then carried out a critique. This unique tool within Strategic Selling[®] focuses sales people on issues relevant to the final outcome - identifying buying influences and their specific win results, campaign strengths and weaknesses, and the factors that genuinely distinguish Mincom from its competitors.

Any fundamental change in sales culture usually meets some resistance, particularly from seasoned professionals, so the move to Miller Heiman was carefully managed.

As well as requiring sales people to stop using the old processes and putting in place management incentives, Allen was also committed to maximising the value of the programme through ongoing coaching and re-investment. Sticking to the process and having an effective plan ensured that the sceptics are now the biggest converts. He also held regular coaching sessions with colleagues in Manufacturing, Service, Development and Accounts to ensure Miller Heiman thinking is understood and supported outside the sales function.

Accurate sales reporting

Every trading area now uses Miller Heiman's methodology, although additional processes are in place to align industry-specific sales models with outcomes. **The impact is being felt both in revenue generation and forward planning.**

In the best performing regions every sales call plan begins with Conceptual Selling's Green Sheet analysis tool. Sales representatives lay out key information as an A4 spreadsheet in order to review all relevant customer issues. The Sheet is also used to rehearse calls and in goal setting.

Once a year a Gold Sheet review (LAMP's analysis mechanism) is completed for each existing account and the results are shared with the customer. **Having an effective method for managing all accounts gives Mincom the best chance of determining the most successful sales objectives, increasing the value level within its customer relationships and planning its own investment and resources.**

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Every sales leader provides a monthly report based on Miller Heiman, giving an annual forecast, together with a breakdown for two fiscal quarters, that includes details of named accounts the team expects to close. They may be asked to present Blue Sheets on specific customers. A report then goes to the CEO, who updates the board on progress against forecast, including slipped sales, visibility into sales objectives and lost business.

“Now that we understand the size and shape of the sales funnel, forecasting accuracy has improved dramatically (100 per cent accuracy is the goal for next year) so that the company can plan where to invest in order to achieve revenue on an industry and geographic basis,” says Allen.

Although economic conditions may be delaying projects he also believes that Mincom is not losing qualified business and is probably increasing its win ratio.

Mincom has achieved a step change in sales culture based on Miller Heiman's proven principles of a consistent framework and language, and a strong focus on winning business consistently. The programmes are being supported through coaching activity, incentives for senior management and related key performance indicators. To maintain the impetus the company plans to do annual refresher training, whilst the next stage of its growth strategy would be to educate the management team on the sales funnel, including the management of channel partners.