



PERFORMAX

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IS SALES AN ART... ...OR A SCIENCE?

With BC Hydro changing to meet the new realities of competition in a deregulated market, perhaps nobody is feeling the impact more than its force. Consisting primarily of long-term employees focused on engineering rather than finding and winning customers, it needed a fresh approach. So it did two things : it hired a sales professional from the outside and it looked at ways to automate the process.

That hired gun turned out to be BC Hydro's director of sales and marketing Mike Gormick.

Right away, Gormick knew that he didn't want, a sales force automation package that was designed only "to track the salesperson's every move," and to be used "by supervisors to check on salespeople." So Gormick went shopping for a system that would keep everybody happy. He thinks he's found it (in the PERFORMAX System).

The system tracks every activity in the sales cycle. For management, it can track the rate of success at various points in the sales cycle and from there predict the chances of a salesperson making that quota.

And for the salesperson, it shows the point in the sales cycle where he or she is having trouble. "It gives them confidence that they are tracking the right leads and also tells them if they need to have more activity underway to meet their goals," says Gormick.

Another benefit has been increased teamwork.

"It also makes it easier for salespeople to cover for each other, because it shows exactly where a particular sales cycle is."

Peter Michie, managing partner of Performax Sales and Marketing Group Inc. of Toronto, makes it clear that sales force automation is worthless if a sales organization lacks clear goals supported by discipline, focus

and accountability. And those don't come shrink-wrapped. They come from leadership in the form of talented sales leaders and people.

Michie's sales and marketing consultancy began creating simple processes with customized tools & software.

"Our system is simple because many salespeople are process & high-tech averse," says Michie.

Michie says sales automation is still failing because sales teams like to sell "the same old things the same old way." It may be a case of a mature sales force accustomed to a certain group of customers and being very comfortable with those customers in those decision-making positions are suddenly gone, things change and usually very quickly.

It is the consulting process that remains of primary importance to Michie. "Selling is not a science," he says, "But science helps decide how many people I have to talk to and where they are and whether I have enough of them on the go. "Most of his clients come to him after trying sales force automation - usually at thousands of dollars per head.

Martyn Lewis, a principal with the consulting firm Market Partners, couldn't agree more. You can "never discount the art and the creativity of selling," but it must become more of a science.

Lewis had been in sales for 17 year and now knows why sales automation is so popular. "The slack has gone out of the system. The days of salespeople relying on luck are over. Look at the price of the average sales call. You just can't go out and chase every raw lead."

He worries that some SFA efforts are taking people out of the equation. "You still need professional salespeople first," he says. Then, it just becomes a matter of providing them with the right information.