

## Sales Training Provides the Edge in a Mature Market

### Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions Wins with Improved Selling Skills

Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions, one of five operating divisions within Hitachi Capital UK Plc, found itself in a challenging situation. Despite the Company's commitment to providing unparalleled levels of customer service supported by industry-leading technology, the reality is that Hitachi Capital operates in a mature, competitive and saturated market.

“Our ability to offer something different from our competitors lies mainly with our individual salespersons,” says Tony Greenidge, Head of Sales. “And particularly within a saturated market, our sales team needs to maximise the opportunity within every possible appointment.”

There were other challenges as well. Legislative changes have made it even more important for sales people to be viewed as trusted business advisors who can advise customers how to prepare themselves in advance for these changes, many of which could have a significant financial or operational impact on their business. Furthermore and, in addition to traditional sales skills, all Hitachi Capital sales and account managers need to have the highest possible level of product and industry knowledge if they are going to establish and maintain credibility with key decision makers.

### Attacking the issue

The positive elements of the ownership-driven cultural changes included Hitachi's corporate commitment to staff development. This internal culture of learning is dedicated to helping individuals identify areas they would like to improve.

In the case of Hitachi Capital, the specific needs were to develop the skill and competency levels of the sales team, as well as help sales managers looking beyond the numbers to manage performance and understand whether sales people were performing in a manner that would yield sustained sales growth.

Hitachi Capital had previously worked with AchieveGlobal when its sales team members were trained in Professional Selling Skills, and now wanted to reinforce those skills and concepts. The goal was to ensure that everyone within the sales organisation understood the elements of PSS and used them as a basis for all customer-facing meetings and sales coaching conversations.

Specifically, Hitachi Capital was looking to generate an increase in the number of appointments scheduled, the number of revisits, the number of revisits that turned into negotiations and ultimately the number of negotiations that turned into profitable and long term business partnerships. “PSS has the ability to influence all of these stages of the sales cycle,” says Greenidge.

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Head of Sales**

## Setting the plan in place

As well as meeting with Greenidge to understand his objectives, Mark Hope, AchieveGlobal Training Consultant, spent a day in the business, talking to the sales managers to understand more about their sales challenges and observing examples of sales calls. This provided invaluable information that helped him build credibility with the attendees and enhanced the relevance and delivery of the training linking it directly to the specific objections they faced in face to face meetings with customers and prospects.

“We were really impressed with his ability to tune into marketplace conditions,” says Greenidge. “Mark identified very well the opportunities and circumstances our sales people would encounter and this added significant value to the relevance of the training.”

With the foundation laid, the sales management team, including Greenidge, attended PSS. This enabled them to positively endorse the impact PSS would have on business performance and in addition it ensured that they understood the skills and felt confident to model and coach them in the field. As important was the fact that the sales managers were able to proactively position the programme with their sales teams before they attended.

The next phase was for sales people to attend Professional Selling Skills. Once they had been through the PSS programme, sales managers attended the two-day Sales Coaching course. This honed their skills in leading coaching conversations within a sales context as well as introducing them to the Sales Performance Tool Kit. A key part of this programme was to create a Coaching Issue Diagram that identifies the critical skills, knowledge and behaviours that are implicit to performing a successful sales role within Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions.

In order to provide clarity to the sales team Greenidge has created a learning programme that will culminate in members of the team acquiring “Professional Fleet Advisor” status. Requiring a minimum standard of performance and covering 32 core competences (observable behaviours) a “Professional Fleet Advisor” will be fluent in their use of PSS skills and knowledge of their products and the market place. In addition to the core competencies Greenidge has also developed a bespoke Hitachi Capital sales diploma, covering topics such as fleet funding, Hitachi Capital service delivery capability, legislation and general fleet knowledge which requires sales people, via a formal assessment process, to reach a minimum benchmark score. The sales team have responded positively to these initiatives and are excited at the opportunity to achieve Professional Fleet Advisor status recognising the benefits this will bring them as well as their customers.

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One of the priorities for Greenidge was to emphasise the value of coaching and on-the-job reinforcement. “Driving behavioural change is important for more than just PSS-driven sales skills,” he says. “Sales coaching also supports the development of all the skills, knowledge and behaviours identified as being necessary to drive improved sales performance.”

Hitachi Capital also wanted to ensure that PSS would be supported through additional reinforcement and skill development activities agreed on by the sales manager and the sales person. Toward that end, Greenidge created a PSS coaching form that is used on every joint sales visit. The coaching form encourages immediate and two way feed back on the success, based on the core principles of PSS, of the prospect/customer meeting. The form also provides the earliest opportunity for both parties to agree action plans that focus on any identified areas of development, clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of both the salesperson and sales manager. Sales Managers also do a recap exercise from the sales performance tool kit during every sales meeting.

### **Assessing the results**

Hitachi Capital sales people will shortly be attending the sales diploma assessment day that will include completing the PSS Skill Mastery Test, a set of multiple choice questions to check their understanding and recognition of the PSS skills. Hitachi Capital will then be able to use this to benchmark performance and identify personal development plans to close gaps.

This test will be reviewed in one to one dialogues with sales managers and will highlight areas of the PSS skills where the sales person has the greatest development need. One of the benefits of this tool is that it will help take the subjectivity out of managing people and their performance. Using it, the sales manager can work with the sales person to develop a specific plan to close any gaps, using a variety of coaching and reinforcement tools.

In addition, all sales people have personal development diaries and write an annual business plan, progress against which is reviewed on a monthly basis, for their territory. They agree on objectives with their managers and work toward them using the PSS coaching forms and the core competencies that have been created.

“Although the programme is still in its early stages, we have already experienced an increase in the quality of appointments being generated as well as the number of revisits and negotiations,” concludes Greenidge. “Sales team members now have a common language and are using the PSS skills as a basis for leading all customer-facing meetings and sales coaching conversations. We believe we are certainly on the right track and PSS is at the heart of my quest to create a team of Professional Fleet Advisors.”

## About Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions

Hitachi Capital Vehicle Solutions ([www.hitachicapital.co.uk](http://www.hitachicapital.co.uk)) is a provider of total vehicle solutions to corporate and retail customers. Services range from the provision of contract hire of both company cars and specialist vans, through to rental, personal leasing packages, hire purchase, direct used car sales and outsourced fleet management services.

## About AchieveGlobal

AchieveGlobal ([www.achievglobal.co.uk](http://www.achievglobal.co.uk)) provides research-based learning solutions that aid clients in developing leaders and acquiring, growing and retaining profitable customer relationships. Working with AchieveGlobal's trainers and consultants, clients can translate business strategies into business results by improving the performance of their people in the areas of leadership development, customer service and sales effectiveness.

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