



A recent article in *Sales and Marketing Management* magazine focused on the strategic way to purchase sales training. The article outlined some key elements of how to buy sales training so it will leave a lasting impression on your salespeople, be worth the investment, and improve the bottom line. We decided to see how Critical Path Strategies stacked up against the article's recommended criteria.

Assess your needs.

What's not working? What are some of the most critical gaps in your salespeople's knowledge or skills?

CPS' team of seasoned, senior-level consultants collaborates with clients to identify the most important customer-focused initiatives that will optimize selling operations, drive a more effective use of resources, and increase accountability.

We can help you gauge what your training requirements are in a couple of ways. At the management level, our Chief Sales Officer Agenda provides a high-level framework to help you surface strategic issues and identify the most critical areas for improvement within your organization. We work with you to create your desired state, and then identify where to spend your time, resources, and money to achieve it.

CPS also offers a customized online self-assessment survey for your salespeople to identify their strengths and weaknesses. We compare their responses with management's perception of them and actual sales results to identify critical gaps. CPS then recommends a curriculum that will address the perceived shortcomings.

Be sure to measure.

What metrics does the vendor use to measure your return on the training initiative?

CPS employs Kilpatrick evaluation levels to determine the value-adding effectiveness and efficiency of its sales training.

- **Reaction.** We ask participants to evaluate the training immediately after completing the session to assess their satisfaction (happy sheets). By the way, since 1999, 95 percent of the participants have rated our training sessions Outstanding or Above Average.
- **Learning.** Looking at participants "before" and "after" training, we quantify the extent to which participants' knowledge, skills, and other attributes have changed. Are they doing what they were taught?
- **Behavior.** Surveys to assess behavior may be used to show how learning outcomes change behaviors in ways that can be evidenced through customer and business outcomes.
- **Business results.** Using evaluation metrics that move beyond the individual learner, we examine the contribution learning has had on the organization (team, business unit, or functional unit). For example, has the sales pipeline expanded?

Do your homework.

Who is on the vendor's client list? Are they eager to provide you with references?

CPS has trained almost 20,000 professionals with Fortune 500 and emerging-growth companies alike—locally, nationally, and globally. We're happy to provide you with the names of clients where we have met needs and requirements similar to yours.

Does the vendor tailor the training? Do their people's style align to your sales force's behavior styles and competencies?

One size does not fit all—we customize our training for each client's unique environment, including terminology, process, and tool requirements.

We spend a lot of time up front trying to understand the client's culture, environment, and business problem. Next, we find the best practices that are most likely to be successful in that environment. We work to articulate the solution, build a project plan to complete it, and then measure the results.

Who will be training your team? Can you interview candidates and make the final decision about which people will be on your team?

Our facilitators have broad selling experience across different-sized companies, different sales environments (new account selling vs. strategic account management), and multiple industries. We recommend facilitators who best align with our clients in terms of experience, training audience, personality, and facilitation style. But we encourage clients to interview our facilitators to make sure they are a good fit.

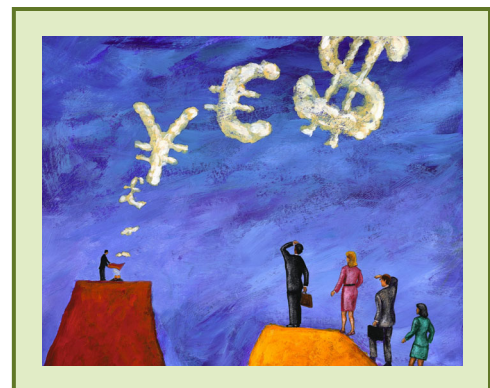
Does the vendor employ blended learning?

Not everyone learns in the same way so CPS uses a variety of facilitation methods in its sales training. A combination of face-to-face or interactive lecture, exercises, real-world applications (i.e., business cases, analyst calls), and e-learning makes sure that the investment in training contains the right content and uses the right media to achieve the behavior changes required to execute your company's sales strategy.

Will the vendor train the trainer?

CPS is happy to do this for our clients. In its simplest form, CPS allows the trainer to co-facilitate the session. We use the following more complex process to actually train the trainer:

- Trainer participates in training session
- Trainer observes the session
- Trainer co-facilitates the session
- Trainer facilitates the session with CPS observing
- CPS certifies the trainer



Test before you buy.

Does the vendor hold pilot programs so you can try the training on?

We welcome executives with a keen interest in observing our strategies for selling organizations to attend one of our training sessions to determine whether we are a good fit for your organization. Our sessions are small and are led by highly qualified facilitators whose selling and management experience enables lively presentations and personalized coaching during the session.

We also develop and conduct custom-tailored pilot programs so that clients can take a “test drive” and see us and the content in action before making a major financial commitment. This is for both of our benefit—we want our training to be as successful as you do.

Don't forget to follow up.

No training sticks without a follow-up program.. How can you make sure that whatever you trained your salespeople on will be coached, supported, and sustained over time?

We employ a number of tactics to help refresh and sustain the value of our training. In the near-term, we provide managers and team leaders with effective “traction” coaching and mentoring to drive early team success. These are offered either face-to-face or remotely in 1-on-1 or 1-on-many formats. Our e-learning courseware provides an effective way to reinforce sales skills, processes, and methodology. At the same time, we offer subsequent sessions for new hires to ensure that the sales process and methodology are consistent throughout the organization.

Longer term, we recommend holding a customized refresher course a year after the original training.

Don't assume bigger means better.

For many large training companies, their business model is built on contract trainers selling and delivering their products, not unlike a franchise. It can be effective if the content is a perfect fit for the client's environment. However, our clients rarely see a perfect fit. They prefer custom-built content based on CPS' or client-observed best practices. Custom training like this is difficult for large companies to scale and they shy away from it. CPS—and our clients—find customization increases the value of the training investment of time, energy, and money.

Depending on your situation, there are lesser-known firms that can deliver equal value for a smaller investment.

We work hand-in-hand with our clients to grow their business, and we have the success stories to back it up. We believe in value delivery—our effective and efficient approach focuses on what's most important, providing our clients with 80 percent of the value in 20 percent of the time. After working with CPS, our clients typically report that their revenues grew 100 to 500 times the amount that they invested in CPS.

CPS facilitators are former sales managers and executives, not former trainers. We know what works in real life—we've tallied a collective 500-plus years of in-the-trenches sales leadership. We've also played corporate roles beyond the traditional sales function, which allows us to look at the big picture of the corporate environment as well as the specific picture inside the sales group. This broad experience helps sales teams learn through the eyes of the executives to whom they are selling.

We also recognize that salespeople are supported by internal subject matter experts, sales delivery colleagues, and customer support representatives. We consider them part of the customer-facing team, and focus on helping salespeople enroll them into the sales process. The salespeople might create the value vision, but the entire team must work together to deliver it.

