



best practice makes perfect

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Biography of Steve Hull

A talent for designing software led Steve Hull to develop Online Group Holdings plc, which he built into the market-leading company for ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems in the drinks and logistics industries. When he sold it to Alphameric plc in 2000, Online Group Holdings plc employed 120 staff.

Two years later, Steve became involved with e-Sales Consultancy, which a friend had launched to develop sales-automation software. Steve purchased the company and renamed it Sawfish Software. The product developed into a best practice and CRM (customer relationship management) solution, automatically managing the critical events in the relationship between customer and company.

best practice is not just a business 'buzz word'

Wikipedia, the online free encyclopaedia, defines Best Practice as 'a management idea which asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc'. But Best Practice is much more than this.

Best Practice is a vital element in sales team motivation and management if a business is going to keep up with the competition. Employ Best Practice and a business will reduce its lost sales leads, increase production, have fewer problems and allow each member of its sales team to raise their game to match that of the best sales person.

Employ Best Practice and watch the company succeed!

how best practice improves a sales force

Sales are people-based departments, and every department has its superstar performers. It is not just personality which makes a sales person succeed; it is a combination of attitude, urgency, tenacity, understanding and follow-through. A customer wants to know that the person they are speaking to understands their business and will fulfil the promises they make on time and on spec.

By instigating Best Practice benchmarks, a business empowers each and every member of its sales team to step up to the standard of the best sales person. With understanding of proven processes, employees can monitor and ensure their own continual improvement. Additionally, new members of the team can learn quickly with tried-and-tested processes in which management is confident. When each member of the team knows exactly what ought to be done, how, when and by whom, management can watch sales processes being executed consistently and efficiently.

I strongly recommend that you assess and implement Best Practice for your own sales team. But don't then assume it's a 'fait accompli' and a task never to be revisited.

evolving best practice

Best Practice must evolve because a new idea or a new process may make a company's Best Practice even better. For example, Amazon has developed a one click ordering method to eliminate the chance of buyer hesitation, or internet failures. Improved Best Practice for easyJet has involved a steady process of reducing the 'frills' enabling a quicker turnaround for the firm's jets, leading to cheaper tickets.

In the current business climate, rapidly developing technology and increased globalisation mean that companies are often required to adapt quickly to tackle emerging markets or arrest their losses in declining markets. Being focussed on the Best Practice for the development of the business can help you tackle changes promptly, efficiently and effectively.

Continuous development of Best Practice with the sales team can be a motivational tool as well as a means of improving the bottom line. Look around for new ideas – whether they come from new employees, competitors' businesses or a completely different industry. Best Practice should evolve into better practice - and even better practice! And for every business, it must continue to evolve.

best practice solutions

Many businesses are now looking for software solutions to guide staff through their Best Practices. A customised software solution will help staff to adapt to procedures more easily, and can also prevent management from feeling out of touch with the progress of a lead or the on-going relationship with a client. Alternatively, a paper plan can provide a well-documented system which is easily understood by all.

Whichever method a company chooses for its implementation of Best Practice for its sales team, the benefits are multiple and many problems can be solved by having the processes mapped out.

Best Practice should evolve into better practice - and even better practice!

the benefits of best practice

The number of leads lost by a business can be easily reduced if there are clear processes followed for each new lead which comes in, and a visibility of each stage which has taken place. If the business processes are routinely grinding to a halt at a particular stage, then Best Practice should bring this quickly to management attention. Once the problem is recognised, the team can develop an alternative which alleviates the problem.

For management, to have hands-on experience of the sales team's activities day-in day-out is in most cases impossible, making assessing the development and needs of staff difficult. However with clear and well-understood Best Practice throughout the sales team, not only can staff monitor their own development more easily, but management are more easily able to gauge where training is required and more specifically what training would be of benefit. This in turn prevents a waste of time and money on either inappropriate training, or funding courses for all staff when only a percentage of staff require a particular element of training.

sales team buy-in

Every manager knows that introducing a change to procedures and practices is often received with reticence and a communal dragging of feet, especially where reporting is required at each stage of the client relationship. But if in turn this enables management to forecast more accurately and help and encourage the sales team towards hitting targets, then the benefits will be felt by the team as well as the managers.

So when introducing new Best Practice procedures, or updating current processes, it is essential that management work hard to get buy-in from the sales staff, clearly communicating not just the procedures, but the expected benefits to the sales team. Most importantly, the sales team should feel that they are being listened to during this process, and that any questions or queries they have are being addressed. For the sales team to adopt the procedures, it is essential those procedures make sense.

add value to the organisation

Finally, let us tackle the bottom line. By implementing Best Practice to the sales team a business is fine-tuning its engine. It should run more efficiently, reducing the number of leads lost, minimising time-wastage, and increasing company productivity. Imagine each member of the sales team having a customer-focused approach, and systematic management of each client relationship. With Best Practice a firm can 'literally' watch its departments working more closely and more efficiently, and its staff empowered and growing in their roles. Additionally, Best Practice processes allow a firm to ensure it meets all service level agreements or regulatory stipulations.

So not only is production increased, but disruption is decreased reducing wasted time and lost income.

Best Practice adds value to an organisation. An efficient sales team builds confidence with clients; lost enquiries do not. With well understood practices, departments can work efficiently and easily together within a company. And increased productivity helps a sales team hit and even exceed its targets.

case study: Sawfish Software Ltd

When considering examples of Best Practice in practice, I could have picked one of many companies we've worked with, but I believe in practising what I preach so I looked at the development of Best Practice within my own organisation.

The original procedures were put in place by the more experienced members of the sales team, but the firm's best practice has always been subject to continuous assessment and updating. Regular meetings do generate new ideas, and the processes are frequently tweaked. Because staff are in the meetings and part of the development, they 'buy into' any changes without resistance.

By using Sawfish Software's SalesFlow solution for Best Practice and Customer Relationship Management, the managers and directors have an instant overview of the business enabling accurate sales forecasts, and analysis. Best Practice in the sales and customer service processes has benefited both Sawfish Software as a company, as well as customers and prospects.

why practice best practice?

- Set process guidelines across the business
- Benchmarks continuous development of staff
- Increase production
- Reduce lost leads
- Highlight regular problem areas