INSTITUTE OF SALES MANAGEMENT
WINNING EDGE
RAISING THE VALUE OF SALES

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Printed by: Ridgeway Press
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International Standard Serial No. UK ISSN 1746-6849
Our programme of events offers unique learning and networking opportunities to sales professionals at all levels.

The ISM also works closely with other professional bodies and selected commercial partners to provide the most topical events programme to both our members and the wider sales profession.

Listed below is a selection of forthcoming dates for your diary.

For the most up-to-date information on all ISM and ISM-supported events, visit www.ismprofessional.com/events

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**ISM 30-MINUTE WEBINARS**

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**ISM REGIONAL EVENTS**

ISM Regional Events have been created to ensure that ISM members get maximum engagement with, and benefit from, the ISM wherever they are located. They provide an active forum for members from a diverse range of industries, organisations and sales disciplines to network, exchange views and share best practice with their peers. Members are free to attend as many events as they wish. Non-members are welcome to attend one group meeting, but will then be required to join the Institute to continue. To find details of events around the country - and catch up with our Regional Events blog – visit ISMprofessional.com/events

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**BRITISH EXCELLENCE IN SALES MANAGEMENT AWARDS (BESMA) 2019**

Watch out for 2019 entry details!
Visit ISMprofessional.com for the latest news

**SALES INNOVATION EXPO 2019**

27-28 March – ExCeL London
The largest and most important event for professional sales leaders. With some of the best-known names, thought leaders and industry experts offering cutting-edge advice and demonstrating the latest technologies, products and services, this event is sure to equip sales directors and managers with the latest systems and tools to improve sales performance.

**NATIONAL SALES CONFERENCE 2019**

28 November – Ricoh Arena, Coventry
NSC19 will again be co-located with National Sales Exhibition at the Ricoh. This year, the event will host five conference streams for different sales roles, including Leadership, L&D, Academy, Inside Sales, and Graduate – aimed at rising sales stars – which launched successfully in 2018. Visit www.nsconference.co.uk

20% ISM member discount

For the most up-to-date information on all ISM and ISM-supported events, visit: www.ismprofessional.com/events
NEW AND VIEWS FROM THE ISM

TOM MOVERLEY reports on ISM activities, and highlights themes and articles in this issue of Winning Edge

Congratulations to all winners of our prestigious British Excellence in Sales Management (BESMA) awards. It was a great evening and as ever the quality of the winners was outstanding. The host for the event, comedian Jack Dee, is the chairman of the radio programme I’m Sorry I Haven’t A Clue – our BESMA winners clearly have a lot more than just a clue and the judges enjoyed hearing from them. Clue, as the show is affectionately known, is described as the “antidote to panel games” and I’d like to think we are the antidote to poor sales practices. Pictures of all the winners are in this issue of Winning Edge on pages 10–15. We are already looking forward to this year’s BESMA – see the ISM website for details on how to enter.

We have been busy with lots of other things recently. On the awards front, we are a partner with the Middle East, North Africa & Asia Award organisation and I was present, with ISM corporate account director Dave Millichap, at the 2018 awards event in Dubai. Dave gave the opening address and was on stage to congratulate all the evening’s winners.

On Dave’s patch we have also welcomed three new corporate partners – Bentley Systems, a US-based company that develops software for the design and operation of infrastructure; Yara UK, a specialist in environmental and industrial systems that improve air quality and reduce emissions; and BRE, a building science centre for construction professionals. See page 48 for more.

We have also been lining up attendance at various events and shows, webinars, regional events and others – check the website for details, and also our ISM LinkedIn page.

Generating value is an ever present theme and addressed in motivational terms by Gavin Ingham, who asks you to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to taking back control (now where else have we heard that...) of your time and activities. The aim must be to generate value in the mind of the buyer and that probably means putting in much more effort on your part.

Also addressing value is Paul Johnston, who looks at the sales-buyer conversation as a critical space where value is created. As he says, backing up Gavin Ingham, “The key thing to know about customer value is that it is subjective. It can only ever be determined by the customer and it is a moving target.” The article explores how skillfully using the art of conversation to define and create customer value is an indispensable part of the sales toolkit.

Tying into this is our proposals expert, Sarah Hinchliffe, who looks at the role of storytelling in B2B proposals. You need to have a plot that gets your prospect from a problem or ambition to an endgame or vision where they have achieved their desired outcome or result. The best stories play on one’s imagination and this is clearly one of the ways that customers can realise value for themselves. It’s a technique long used in B2C of course.

Another expert, Philip Norman, discusses how to bid for public sector work, which is a sector that could undergo a renaissance after Brexit given government promises on spending on the NHS, but EU rules are likely to still be play during the transition phase. Philip was a public procurement professional in a previous role and really knows his way around this subject, and he has also refreshed his jargon buster and do’s and don’ts, which we first carried a few years ago.

Finally, I draw attention to two “heavyweight” features, on behavioural economics and using data more effectively in the sales process. Data is only useful if you turn it into insights, note the authors of the latter article. I second that.

Tom Moverley is director of the ISM.
The term “mentor” brings to mind an old wise man or guide – because its origins lie in Homer’s Odyssey: before leaving to fight the Trojan War, Odysseus left his son Telemachus in the care of his friend Mentor, who then guided the young man as he grew up.

Today, a business mentor is someone with experience who is willing to share their insights in guiding a more junior colleague. The ISM has launched its own mentor scheme, where members choose a mentor from the profiles of carefully selected ISM Fellows. The mentor will then offer support and advice to help the mentee in their sales effectiveness and professional development. More details and a list of current mentors can be found at ISMprofessional.com

In its fifth year, National Sales Conference (NSC) 2018, supported by the ISM, achieved a record attendance of 900 sales leaders and sales professionals. NSC, the UK’s only independent CPD-accredited sales conference, had Coventry’s Ricoh Arena rocking as delegates gave a thunderous reception to a superb speaker line-up.

Sales leaders and executives from every corner of British industry were treated to a powerful presentation from Sir Clive Woodward (pictured), who famously coached England to glory at the 2003 Rugby World Cup, before going on to head a successful Great Britain team at the London 2012 Olympics. He provided a fascinating insight into how to build winning teams, driving home the message that “winning teams are made up of outstanding individuals”, and explaining how the right mindset is key to reaping rich rewards.

It was a theme that resonated throughout an inspirational event, when delegates also heard from, among others, Phil Hesketh, best-selling author and expert on what makes buyers tick, and Steve Head, sales guru and master of motivation, who brought the house down with a series of hard-hitting yet hilarious home truths.

Steve Lindsey, managing director of NSC organiser Lincoln West, says all the speakers showed quality and commitment: “They made this a truly inspiring conference, offering sales leaders and sales professionals the opportunity to dry their powder, reload and take aim at their 2019 targets with fresh ideas, renewed belief and boosted motivation,” he says.

Lindsey is setting a target of 1,200 delegates for NSC 2019, which will take place on 28 November – and will again be co-located with National Sales Exhibition at the Ricoh. This year, the event will host five conference streams for different sales roles, including Leadership, L&D, Academy, Inside Sales and Graduate – aimed at rising sales stars – which launched successfully in 2018.

For details, visit www.nsconference.co.uk

UK vendors are failing to provide B2B customers with the content or the high quality buyer experience they need to make purchase decisions, a factor that is slowing down the sales process and putting deals in jeopardy.

Respondents to research by Showpad, a sales enablement platform, finds that the last B2B purchase they made was impeded by a lack of available information (in 34% of cases), information that was not relevant (39%), and confusing information (34%).

In addition, the study reveals that while UK buyers do most of their research online – with three-quarters spending up to 20 hours researching – they actually prefer to interact directly with sales representatives.

Showpad surveyed more than 650 buyers globally who have been involved in a B2B purchase over the past year. Key findings indicate that their purchasing journey has become longer and more complex, with the experience provided by vendors playing a crucial part. The study suggests that while sales teams are still relevant, they need to evolve to meet buyers’ expectations.
Talking Point
CULL THE CAMPAIGN

“The traditional sales and marketing campaign is no longer feasible in a 24/7 world, as brands need to be ready to engage with each individual customer at any moment in time. In tandem, companies must stop thinking that they can guide their customers through a set journey, but shift to handling customers as volunteers, rather than victims.”

Robin Collyer, senior director, marketing and decisioning, Pegasystems, a US supplier of CRM software

FELLOWSHIP
FOR SHE’S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

Jessica Williams of Just Williams is a new Fellow of the ISM

Jessica Williams, pictured above (front) with her team at the Tees Businesswomen Awards 2018, is founder and managing director of sales consultancy Just Williams, which focuses on the key issue many businesses face of how to increase sales consistently and effectively. Williams has worked in the sales industry for over 14 years across a broad range of sectors, advising, managing and growing organisations through implementing a structured sales strategy and developing relationships for long-term growth. As she explains, “Just Williams provides an alternative to the standard sales model by providing a fully trained end-to-end sales team, from telemarketing and CRM experts to event management to sales specialists.”

She continues, “Being part of the ISM, the leading professional body for salespeople, is essential to Just Williams’ ethos and integral to our ambitious plans to professionalise the sales industry. Having recently launched the North East board, in association with New Results Training, we’re looking forward to elevating and repositioning sales as a leading profession in our region and beyond.”

MEMBER UPGRADES
ARE YOU DUE AN UPGRADE?

Congratulations to all new ISM Fellows

Newly upgraded ISM Fellows include Terry Blackman, Marc Booth, Paul Durrant, Paul Meaden, David Moonie, Joanna Shaw and Serg Van Kleef. This prestigious achievement recognises the vast level of knowledge and experience they have gained during their sales careers, as well as their dedication to the industry and their commitment to their ongoing development as outstanding sales professionals.

If you would like to be considered for a membership upgrade to better reflect your knowledge, experience and credentials, please send us your up-to-date CV or LinkedIn profile. The ISM membership committee will then review your application.

All members studying for an ISM qualification automatically qualify for Associate membership, and some of these members, in particular, may be entitled to an upgrade in their status.

If your request to upgrade is approved, you will be able to use the relevant post-nominal letters after your name (eg. FISM) on your email signature, business card and social media profile to demonstrate your commitment to your continuing professional development. Displaying your membership of, and designation from, the ISM, the UK’s leading professional body for the sales industry, will significantly strengthen your customer proposals, enabling you to stand out from the competition.

For details, contact Rachael Bourke, membership manager, at rbourke@ismprofessional.com

SHORT SELLING
NEWS ROUND-UP

HISTORY LESSONS
Interpreting the history of your organisation in new and different ways will help the direction of your branding and innovation today. Research from UCL School of Management, based on 10 years of data, examines how producers of iconic products and brands, such as Alfa Romeo cars, Alessi kitchenware and Vespa scooters, use historical artefacts collected in corporate archives and museums to support product design, brand communication and HR management.

PUBLIC APPROVAL
Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the UK public consider that business behaves ethically, according to a survey by the Institute of Business Ethics. This is the highest approval rating since the survey began in 2003, when the figure was only 47%.

SOLD SHORT
UK businesses are failing to retain their customers, says a survey by Copper, a CRM system supplier. The length of relationships has declined compared with 10 years ago, with around half of sales and marketing professionals claiming their customer relationships are now 3 to 10 years shorter than then. Only 14% have seen relationships become longer.

NEW COACHING
Sales Leadership, a new book by Keith Rosen, published by Wiley, addresses the importance of global sales leaders, “who require a different kind of coaching that aligns with their role, core competencies, and individuality to achieve personal goals and company objectives”. It follows Rosen’s award-winning Coaching Salespeople Into Sales Champions, the best-selling management book on Amazon since 2009.

SPEAK UP
A new title published by Capstone, How to Present to Absolutely Anyone: Confident Public Speaking and Presenting in Every Situation, by Mark Rhodes, is filled with practical advice and tips for salespeople who dread, or simply want to improve, their ability to speak effectively in public.

ANY IDEAS?
If you are an ISM member and would like to become a contributor to Winning Edge, please send your articles or ideas for consideration to Adam Brook, the ISM’s head of marketing. You can email him at: abrook@ismprofessional.com
According to data from the International Monetary Fund, the UK is the world’s sixth largest exporter of goods and services. In August 2018, the UK government set out its new export strategy, with the aim of increasing the country’s total exports from 30% to 35% of GDP. At 30%, our exports are broadly similar in volume to those of Canada, France and Italy, but substantially behind those of Germany, the world’s third-largest exporter of goods and services. The government has stated its ambition that, given the strengths of the UK, we should be “at the top of this pack, not in the middle” and towards the top of the G7 group of industrialised nations.

GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES
Global trade is growing and changing rapidly, representing a world of opportunity for UK businesses. Markets outside the EU are expected to generate approximately 90% of global economic growth in the next 10-15 years, while the growth of the digital economy and trade in services is rendering geography meaningless for businesses operating in many sectors.

Markets such as the Middle East, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and India must be seen to be believed. There is no doubt that these dynamic and fast-paced economies are set to power global economic growth for decades to come. Factors such as population growth, driven by robust birth rates and longer life expectancies, along with increasing levels of disposable income in these areas, underpin the significant emerging opportunities.

The UK, one of the largest and most successful economies globally, should and must be poised to take advantage of this growth. UK companies’ research and development capabilities sit within the top tier globally, supported by a highly skilled workforce and some of the world’s leading universities. We benefit from world-leading creative, finance and professional services sectors, and UK businesses also have access to a highly capable export support market, along with those world-leading financial institutions.

THE SALES CHALLENGE
While UK businesses may well be positioned to take advantage of these trends, it will be sales professionals at the forefront of capitalising on the opportunities for growth. If we succeed in capturing a greater proportion of world trade, our businesses and communities will benefit in the decades to come. So the question is, are we ready for the challenges ahead?

While many large companies are well versed in...
international sales and business development, it is our dynamic SMEs and their sales professionals that must now rise to the occasion.

Sales professionals embarking upon their export sales journey will face many hurdles. Most obviously, they include language barriers, currency complexity, and varying time zones. In addition, the export sales professional will need to select an appropriate route to market, and navigate cultural differences (which should not be underestimated), local legal frameworks, international customs duties and shipping issues. Other challenges include establishing appropriate contractual agreements, pricing negotiations, and selecting and managing suitable, reliable agents or distributors.

The sales professional must also work to establish suitable payment terms, manage receivables and drive demand, while remaining compliant in terms of anti-bribery and corruption legislation, including the Bribery Act (2010), which applies to UK companies operating anywhere in the world and sets one of the highest standards globally.

Finally, as a business grows, many sales professionals will be involved in building a structure, recruiting overseas and dealing with the many challenges that come with deploying, managing and driving the performance of sales professionals overseas.

It is sales professionals who will take the lead in navigating through these many challenges in order to exploit new opportunities, and as a profession we must be ready to rise to this task. The UK government has done an excellent job of making resources and training available to facilitate this journey and should be commended for its efforts.

SUPPORT FROM THE ISM
The ISM, as the UK’s largest professional body for sales professionals and the authoritative voice of the profession, has rightly stated its ambition to support the sales profession in meeting the export sales challenge. The ISM will champion the cause of export sales professionals, while promoting and celebrating their hard-fought successes. It is also the responsibility of those of us who have been fortunate enough to gain experience and knowledge of managing international export sales and sales teams, to work with the ISM in order to share our knowledge and experience with our peers throughout the sales industry.

The ISM is embarking upon an initiative to create a series of Sector Interest Groups (SIGs) and will be establishing a SIG for Export Sales. Through championing the important role of the export sales professional, sharing the best available resources, and bringing together its members via the SIG, the ISM stands at the forefront of efforts to support the UK sales professional and UK businesses on the journey ahead.

TECHNOLOGY

IS YOUR DATA UP TO DATE?

JAMES ISILAY urges the use of ‘revenue AI’ to identify areas for net revenue growth

As companies increasingly adopt CRM technology and improve their data governance, they now have more customer and prospect data than ever. Yet, with a challenging economic climate and looming Brexit, it is not poor products or services that are compromising business success – it is companies’ inability to close new business or identify a new market opportunity.

Data starts to go out of date the minute it hits the CRM system – and companies are wasting huge resources targeting the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong message. They need a far better approach to identifying the core market, which must be underpinned by real-time insight that encompasses not only standard contact information but also the key events that indicate a prospect’s readiness to buy. With a constant feedback loop provided by revenue applied intelligence (AI), companies can rapidly identify revenue opportunities, reach out to prospects and deliver business value, taking away the pain of new business acquisition.

DATA WAKE-UP
Customer and prospect data can be both an incredibly valuable resource – and a liability, depending on its depth, relevance and, critically, timeliness. Data is always changing and as a result these data resources are continually degrading. New opportunities must be recognised; an existing customer moving to another company creates a new business opportunity, and champions promoted within an organisation can mean the chance to upsell or expand. To gain the data confidence required to identify and close new business, and achieve revenue growth, a completely different approach to data sourcing is required.

Static CRM data is no longer good enough; organisations need access to fresh, accurate and GDPR-compliant data. In addition to the two dimensions of company and people, adding the third dimension of events and fourth dimension of real-time data completely transforms the way in which a business can identify and reach its total addressable market.

Access to an accurate customer data resource will immediately plug the gaps in the existing information and enable companies to ensure that time is not wasted by reaching outdated contacts. But that is just the start: the real bottom line opportunity comes from using “revenue AI” to better understand the core market, from purchase triggers to decision-making executives. And with each new outreach campaign, the responses are fed back into the system, providing further insight and understanding of individuals and their reaction to specific messaging. It is revenue AI’s positive feedback loop that ensures the sales and marketing activity continues to retain momentum and deliver value.

TRUSTED INSIGHT
A deep, accurate customer data resource can transform the timeliness and accuracy of sales and marketing activity. The change is fundamental: no more reliance on the single star salesperson – who then ups and leaves. No more focus on irrelevant or unachievable metrics. Instead, companies can take a far more scientific and structured approach that leverages trusted, real-time insight to identify the total addressable market, define the relevant contacts and embark on a far more effective outreach.

JAMES ISILAY is CEO of Cognism, a specialist in sales software that combines company, people and event data in real time, so sales can access B2B leads when they are most likely to buy. Cognism won Customer Service Team of the Year at BESMA 2018. Visit cognism.com
MATT BALLER testifies that professionalism and ethics are the keys to lasting sales success

“..."I don’t like salespeople. You can’t trust them – all they want is their commission. It’s best to avoid getting friendly because they’ll just manipulate you into buying stuff you don’t need.”

That’s how I used to see salespeople – and many people still do. It’s also why I resisted moving into a sales role for years – I’m committed to excellent customer service first and foremost. I like to help people. I like to fix things. I get a buzz from finding solutions to seemingly insurmountable challenges. So I pushed back, explaining that I’m not right for sales.

LOW EXPECTATIONS
Eventually, I was persuaded to make the leap, as long as I could still manage accounts, which was non-negotiable... But I expected the worst, thinking that I’m inherently too much of a nice guy for the cut and thrust of selling. I’m not devious enough, not sly enough, not able to blag my way into people’s wallets by pretending to be something I’m not. I’ll even turn business away if it’s not right for the client – shock horror... How, I thought, will I ever make it in sales?

And so I became the proverbial accidental salesperson. I suffered imposter syndrome and waited to see how out of my depth I would be.

HOW WRONG I WAS
The further I went down this rabbit hole, the more I realised the secret that everyone’s looking for of how to close more deals, get more referrals, smash those targets and have more satisfied customers. Companies spend untold amounts of money on seminars and courses to find this silver bullet – much of which expenditure I fully support (we should all invest in our development) – but I had discovered the key secret, above all other factors...

THE SECRET OF SELLING
You must want to help people – and then focus on doing exactly that.

It’s that simple. Cheesy clichés aside, it really is down to genuinely wanting to help – actually caring about the client, their challenges, and the solutions you work on together, rather than just saying the things you think will close the deal.

And yet we continue to complicate and obscure this simple message.

I won’t be popular for saying it, but among the many excellent courses and books out there, there’s a continuous stream of things written decades ago, with piles of fluff added to make them look shiny and new. Worse, there’s plenty of content focusing on manipulation tactics, power plays (my pet hate – don’t treat your customers like they’re stupid), and generally trying to force clients down the path you want them to take, whether it’s right for them or not.

There’s nothing wrong with ethical persuasion. It’s usually necessary to help guide the client, especially if it’s a complex solution you’re selling or a subject they’re new to. But when you cross the line into conscious manipulation, you’re part of “the problem with salespeople”, and you’re what most of us are fighting against.

ETHICAL PAYBACK
I make it my personal mission to change as many people’s views of sales as possible – by telling the truth. It’s sometimes amusing to hear the reaction of a potential customer if I find myself advising them not to buy the service they called up about, perhaps because they don’t need it or have misunderstood it. It’s also incredibly rewarding when they come back 6 months, a year or 3 years later – when they actually do need our help (sometimes at a different company). Or someone they have referred to me reaches out because they’ve been reassured that I won’t try to foist needless services onto them.

You may say I’m naïve. I don’t have your targets, I don’t have your boss, I’m not in a commission-only role, I’ve not been in sales for decades, or that I can’t possibly understand your position. Justify it how you like, but if you define an A-player purely by their short-term revenue generation, I don’t want to be one. For me, an A-player is a true professional who always takes a morally impeccable approach to sales, aims for the win-win – and smashes target year after year as a result.

Help your clients first and the results will follow. You and your company’s reputation will see compounding returns, guaranteed.

MATT BALLER is commercial account manager for Valpak, a consultancy in environmental compliance, recycling and sustainability solutions. Email matt.baller@valpak.co.uk or visit www.valpak.co.uk
ON THE MOVE
EQUIPMENT FOR DISCERNING PROFESSIONALS

CUPRA ATECA
RACING CERTAINTY
This is the first car from Seat’s new Cupra brand, which hails from the firm’s motorsport division. It’s an SUV called the Cupra Ateca and is claimed to have one of the most advanced four-cylinder petrol engines. The 2 litre unit shifts the Ateca to 62 mph from a standing start in 5.2 seconds, helped by a new seven-speed transmission driving all four wheels. The standard spec gives you 19 inch alloys, LED headlights, navigation system with 3D mapping, sports seats, and four driver profiles – normal, sport, Cupra and individual (whatever they are). And four exhausts too... At this point you’ll have spent the best part of £36k, and you’ll have to stump up more for a Beats audio system, electric tailgate and heated front seats, among other extras. You will also have to pay £515 in vehicle tax as CO2 is 168 g/km. Deliveries start at the end of Q1 2019 from 25 Cupra dealers in the UK.

APPLE
A number of tools have been launched that allow you to assemble content to send to prospects, including video (such as sending an email video). A product that has received good reports is OneMob, with which you can create a webpage of content including videos, documents, website links, buttons, YouTube and social media. You can record and upload your own video and track activity. See onemob.com

APP

MOBILE PHONE
FAST CHARGE
We’ve seen tie ups between mobile phone makers and car brands before but this OnePlus 6T McLaren has the useful Warp Charge 30, which gives you a day’s power in a charging time of 20 minutes. It’s a high spec phone with 10 GB ram, comes in McLaren’s colour, papaya orange, and is yours for £649.

PEN PHONE
BOND STYLE
We don’t usually feature Kickstarter products but we’ll make an exception for this James Bond style mobile phone that’s styled as a pen. The Zanco Smart Pen, which looks like it has a good chance of being shipped, combines a phone, camera, MP3 players, stylus pen, voice recorder and laser pointer. It’s intended to complement your smartphone as a backup and the recorder and presentation options look useful. See kck.st/2F9DJMn

NOTEBOOK
THE ART OF ZEN
If the 17 inch from LG (below left) is too big and you also want a 2 in 1, Dell’s latest Latitude, the 7400 2-in-1, will be out soon. Dell’s XPS range is usually to the fore but the Latitude looks to have a nice Apple-like design with its aluminium case, which houses a 14 inch screen that can be used in notebook, tent and tablet modes. A nice touch is that it senses when you approach and presents the Windows hello sign on, and locks when you move away.

LAPTOP
ON THE BIG SCREEN
There aren’t many 17 inch laptops around now but LG is flying the flag with this Gram model 17, which fits a 17 inch screen in a 15.6 inch chassis and weighs in at just 1.34 kg, so is the lightest such machine. That screen has 2560x1600 pixels with a 16:10 aspect ratio, and the Gram 17 can also manage up to 19.5 hours on its battery, has Thunderbolt 3, and military standard durability. LG has also launched a 2-in-1 14 inch model in the Gram range.

WINNING EDGE
The success of the UK’s top sales professionals was celebrated at the recent British Excellence in Sales Management Awards.

The finest UK sales professionals have been honoured at BESMA, the country’s premier celebration of sales excellence, organised by the ISM. BESMA recognises the success of the nation’s best sales directors and managers, sales executives and sales and marketing teams. The 2018 winners were announced at a glittering ceremony held at London’s prestigious Grosvenor House.

BESMA seeks to reward the efforts of individual sales professionals and teams in driving company performance, as well as recognising the key role of sales in creating a thriving UK economy. The 2018 awards attracted hundreds of entries from leading organisations across the UK and Europe.

The evening’s celebrity host, comedian and TV personality Jack Dee handed out the coveted trophies. Many congratulations to all the winners, who are pictured on the following pages.
CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR
COGNISM

EXTERNAL SALES TRAINING PROVIDER OF THE YEAR
KSA SALES SOLUTIONS

CPD PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR
CRAIG WATTS, REDROW

SALES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OF THE YEAR
MERCEDES-BENZ VAN TALENT PROGRAMME
SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (OVER 50 SALESPEOPLE)
AO FINANCIAL SERVICES, AO.COM

INNOVATION IN SALES
TONIA TYLER, REDROW – MYREDROW

SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (UNDER 50 SALESPEOPLE)
CONCORDE GROUP

SALES MANAGER OF THE YEAR
MARC BOOTH, SIEMENS DI

SPONSORED BY ZOHO
SPONSORED BY REDROW
SPONSORED BY GEBERIT
KEY ACCOUNT MANAGER OF THE YEAR
JAMES KING, REDGATE

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER OF THE YEAR
HARRIET MILLARD, MAKE IT MATTA

SALES PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR
ANDREW JENKINS, AUTODESK

BEST SALES EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR
AO, COLIN WOODFINDEN
This ISM special award is in recognition of an individual in the sales industry who, over many years, is highly regarded by peers, gives exceptional commitment and demonstrates very high levels of professionalism. The award is based on the informed opinion of the directors and management of the ISM, but also the much-valued feedback from our members, as well as taking into consideration how the recipient has exercised a positive influence from corporate, individual, ethical and strategic perspectives. Respect, knowledge, leadership and inspiration are just a few of the qualifying traits.

Thank you

As with any event there are always people who work behind the scenes, often for many months, to ensure that all aspects of the event come together in such a way that the evening is a success and enjoyed by everyone involved. The ISM would like to say a very big thank you to the following in helping to secure the success of the 2018 BESMA evening:

• Jack Dee
• Broadland Digital
• Croft Design Associates
• Maddison Media
• Purple-Zebra
• Grosvenor House
• The Tzars
‘BESMAs’ are awarded by the ISM after a rigorous judging process. The awards feature 18 categories celebrating the very best in sales practice and the teams and individuals behind it. All categories in the 2018 awards were judged by an influential and respected judging panel, chaired by Kerry Nutley. The judging is a robust, credible and transparent process, involving pre-scoring and a face-to-face panel discussion. We thank all the judges – listed opposite – for their efforts, and show some of them above, with finalists, providing a flavour of Judging Day.
AO: ELECTRIFYING PERFORMANCE
AO, one of the UK’s leading online electrical retailers, celebrated a fabulous BESMA night, walking off with two awards: Sales Team of the Year (for companies with over 50 salespeople), and Best Sales Employer of the Year. Founded in 2000 as Appliances Online, AO has grown rapidly by offering customers the best possible experience. As Colin Woodfinden, AO’s sales training manager (pictured), explains, “We know that any success we have as a business stems entirely from our people being able to be authentic, loving what they do, and striving to be the best they can be.”

Woodfinden continues, “Nowhere is our commitment to our staff more evident than in the training we give to our Aftercare sales division, which offers product warranties. Our internal sales training has been endorsed by the ISM. In fact, our ISM assessor commented that our sales induction is one of the most thorough she has ever come across. “It’s very much a consultative sale. The service element our salespeople provide is extremely important to us because, as an online retailer, customer feedback is critical to our success.” AO is one of just 20 businesses in the world to have more than 100,000 reviews on the online review site Trustpilot, and of those it is one of only 10 that has an ‘Excellent’ rating.

The Aftercare sales team has expanded to 150 salespeople. “It’s not the kind of place where someone has to retire before you can get a promotion,” says Woodfinden. “The majority of our sales managers joined us as sales executives, and it typically takes them around 11 months to progress into a management role.”

Karl Hinchcliffe, director of Aftercare, adds, “We constantly strive to deliver a great customer experience as well as hit sales targets, and recruiting the right people is key to maintaining that. We focus on recruiting graduates as they are a good fit culturally, and generally they are hungry for progression opportunities.”

Hinchcliffe is keen to dispel the myth that business-to-consumer (B2C) sales roles are somehow inferior to business-to-business (B2B). “Typically, B2C roles are considered a less lucrative option than B2B positions,” he says. “But we go against the grain in this respect. A lot of our salespeople and managers earn £60,000-£80,000 a year.”

Alongside good pay and benefits, AO is becoming an ISM Recognised Centre, enabling it to offer Ofqual-approved ISM qualifications. Woodfinden concludes, “Our sales roles are challenging, so we need to recruit the best people and give them the support they deserve. Offering the chance of ISM qualifications is as good for them as it is for us. It’s a genuine ‘win win’.”

“Our ISM assessor commented that our sales induction is one of the most thorough she has ever come across”
House builder Redrow was another double-winner at BESMA 2018, with success for both Craig Watts, winner of the title CPD Practitioner of the Year, and Tonia Tyler who won the award for Innovation in Sales. Winning Edge caught up with Watts (pictured), whose dedication to personal development has seen him rise quickly to become one of Redrow’s top sales performers. He works on new housing developments in the company’s East Midlands region, and impressed the judges with a combination of great organisation, self-learning and training that he committed to on leaving an unfulfilling role as an export administrator. “I went into house sales with the mindset that I had to make this work, as I was not going back,” he says.

To fulfil his promise to himself, Watts set about several development aims. In came the 10x Planner, an organisational system that allows you to map out schedules and goals, and a library of books and audiobooks – everything from Way of the Wolf to the Secrets of Successful Sales. “My car has become a mobile library with books on philosophies and sales strategies,” he says. “I have also developed my voice and presentation skills with Toastmasters, and of course I’ve taken up all the in-house training on offer at Redrow on aspects such as qualification and persuasion, as well as the legal and financial sides of the homes market.” Not least, he is also taking the ISM Certificate in Sales and Marketing, via partner Oxford College of Marketing, and will probably roll it on to the full Diploma.

Breaking out of a one-dimensional way of doing things is challenging, but critical to Watts’ personal development journey. The ISM Certificate, for example, is adding challenges such as learning about the B2B world as well as B2C. His investment in development has paid off. He has won a Redrow award for top sales consultant in the East Midlands region, not just through sales numbers but also scores of over 90% in crucial parameters – such as ‘mystery shopping’, where pretend customers gauge sales approach, knowledge, and customer satisfaction. He says it is about being able to adopt different approaches to customer situations – customers range from those wanting to buy quickly, to those who can take years to eventually move to the right house. “And it isn’t just about the one person in front of you – you often have to find out about their family too and the reasons why they might want a particular home,” he says. “Inviting customers and their extended family to meetings can make everyone feel more comfortable, especially first-time buyers.”

Above all, Watts exemplifies motivation to succeed – not only for himself, but also for colleagues around him at Redrow.

The architect of the company’s UK sales training is Matthew Hotten (pictured), Geberit’s people and organisational development manager, UK and Ireland – and now BESMA’s Corporate Sales L&D Professional of the Year.

When Hotten joined in October 2015, the company was still a relatively small business in the UK, but it was on the cusp of major expansion following the acquisition of Sanitex, owner of the Twyford ceramic sanitary products brand in the UK. Until that point, the company had had a sales force of around 50 and, in common with many SMEs, it had no formal sales training programme. “Historically, we had been doing some rather patchy, sporadic sales training,” he explains. “As a result, our salespeople were working to various different standards and all doing the job in a slightly different way. Some were doing it really well, and some not so well.”

Hotten was faced with a rapidly expanding salesforce and a brief to sell a wider range of products in a greatly enlarged marketplace. This made him keen to instill a ‘Geberit Way’ – an effective, reputable and repeatable way in which all the company’s salespeople would sell to customers. To this end, he introduced a six-step sales process.

“It wasn’t revolutionary by any stretch of the imagination, but it was good solid sales best practice,” he says. “I wanted it to be an established requirement, and that is what it has now become.”

He continues, “I was very keen for this process to be benchmarked properly, so I asked the ISM to look at our sales training methods and materials and, if they met the required standard, to endorse the programme. The ISM not only endorsed it, but made the company an ISM-approved centre, accrediting it to deliver ISM qualifications on an ongoing basis to suitably trained staff.

“Today, every new and existing salesperson within the business has been through the Geberit Way sales programme,” says Hotten. “There’s a lot for new recruits to get their head around, but we don’t believe in just giving people a car and a CRM system and throwing them out into their territory. That’s an outdated sink or swim approach and we want them to have the very best possible start.”

He concludes, “These guys will have letters after their name. It means a great deal to them to achieve a very worthwhile qualification. With that comes real kudos and considerable benefit to them as professionals pursuing a sales career.”
STACKING UP VALUE

GAVIN INGHAM discusses how you can really add value to the sales process
In the previous edition of Winning Edge (2018 Number 3) I examined the importance of salespeople being brutally honest with themselves. In this follow-up feature, I urge you to be equally realistic about the value that you actually add for your customers.

VALUE, VALUE, VALUE
Everyone talks about the importance of adding value, but few salespeople really know what value is or how to add it for their clients. The value versus price conversation takes place every day all over the world as salespeople moan that their clients just do not see the value in what they are offering. They complain that their clients are comparing apples with oranges. They complain that their clients are just not getting it. And they complain that their clients are just not getting them.

TOUGH LUCK
If someone does not see the value in what you do or what you offer, then they are right. If someone does not believe that your special “added value proposition” is worth the extra and decides to buy something cheaper instead, then it is you who has screwed up.

Value is always formed in the mind of the buyer. It doesn’t matter how good you say you are. It doesn’t matter how good you think you are. It doesn’t matter how good or how relevant you think your solution is. It doesn’t even matter how good it actually is. The only thing that does matter is what the client thinks. And if the client thinks that you’re not worth what you’re charging, guess what? You’re not.

Many salespeople ask me how they can add more value. They ask what they need to say or do to demonstrate value. They ask how they can persuade their clients of the intrinsic value that they bring to the party. But they are focusing on the wrong part of the equation. Clients decide value, not you. You cannot persuade them that you add value. You cannot convince them that you’re worth what you are charging. You have to actually add value from their perspective. You have to help them see it. You must help them work it out for themselves.

To do that, you need to acknowledge that you’re not adding enough value right now. You have to accept that you’re currently playing ball on the same court and with the same rules as all of the other happy-clappy salespeople. You need to get off that level playing field and do something differently. You need to be contrarian in order to turn the tables in your favour.

For most salespeople, that means you need to work out how you really add value, approaching every client as an individual, truly understanding their business, their challenges, and their plans. You have to care about them and what is right for them, and then you need to make you and your solution the only option in their mind.

It sounds easy when put like that...

PUT THE EFFORT IN
Stop lying to yourself about how much effort you actually put in. Most people have an inflated opinion of their abilities, an inflated opinion of what they are worth in the marketplace, and an inflated opinion about how hard they work. If you are one of them, until you acknowledge this basic fact, there is nothing you can do about it.

Look around your office at 9am. What are people doing? What do they do at lunchtime?

Late in the afternoon? How many are in the office early and late? How much time do they spend by the water cooler? Drinking coffee? Chatting about what was on the television last night? Off sick?

One of my friends manages a sales team in a northern UK town. A couple of years ago, it snowed quite heavily overnight. The following morning, half of her team of 10 failed to show up, four were late, and just one was on time.

Ironically, the one who was on time lives on top of a moor and had walked 6 miles in deep snow to get to work. He made the effort. Three of the five who did not arrive lived locally and could have walked it in under half an hour. Pathetic.

I hear people talk every day in offices all around the world about work-life balance – about how they are working so hard and they have no time to breathe... About how many sacrifices they make and how unappreciated they are. But they still have time to go out for lunch, go to the gym,
and visit the pub. Looks like they already have quite a balanced life to me.

Don’t get me wrong here. I am not saying that everybody should work super-sized hours. I am not saying that everybody should focus on sales and work before everything else. I am not saying that a happy and contented life might not be one where you focus on loved ones and family first, always going home for lunch and leaving work on time. My grandpa did that, and he was super-happy with his lot – but that’s for another time.

TAKE BACK CONTROL
What I am saying is that you should stop lying to yourself. That lie is toxic and misleading and will stop you working harder if you want to or need to. Measure and monitor your activity. I was reading an article about obesity, and it was saying that one of the problems with people trying to lose weight is that they forget what they have actually eaten. Even when they were asked to write down what they ate, many forgot to write everything down.

Salespeople are much the same. They work hard. They are busy. But they forget what they actually do during the day. They forget how little of what they do is actually linked to the results they get. They forget how much of their activity is focused on tasks that actually drive sales. When I ask salespeople what they actually do on a day-to-day basis, they look at me as if I’m mad, but few can actually account for their time.

The problem with this is that if you are not in control of your time, then you have little hope of achieving what you want to achieve. The sooner you face up to the fact that you don’t know what you do with your time, the sooner you can do something about it – and the sooner you can start doing things that are going to bring you the results that you want.

THINK LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR
One of the most powerful exercises I ever run through with salespeople is to look at their habitual activities and get them to ask themselves, “What activities will help me make more sales?” For many, this simple question helps them to adjust their daily activities to bring them much better results. The key is to think like an entrepreneur, not an employee.

Many people think that someone else owes them a living. When things go wrong, they blame their company. When they don’t get the results they want, they blame the management. And when they lose sales to the competition, they blame the reputation of their company. They might complain about their salary, their working conditions, and their prospects, but they think that it is someone else’s job to sort these things out for them. They think that they are worth more money, but they never do anything differently or consider how they can add more value to achieve the increase they seek.

What I am saying, however, is that great salespeople do not have an employee mentality – they have an entrepreneurial mindset. They do not wait for people to do things for them. They do not blame others. They are self-starter who make things happen for them. They take action, and they hustle.

COMMIT TO SUCCESS
Here are a few things to think about:
● Do you make things happen, or do you blame others when they don’t?
● Do you put your energy into devising a sales strategy that will help you maximise your sales results or moan about your territory?
● Have you devised your own personal marketing plan that engages and entices your prospects, or do you wish that your company would get a new brochure and a new website?
● Have you implemented your own training strategy that will make you an expert in your industry, a world-class salesperson, and an authority for your clients, or do you sit around wishing that your company would invest more in training you to be better at your job?

If you’re not answering “yes” to the first part of each of these questions, then maybe you need to do a bit of soul searching. Being successful in sales is not hard. It rarely requires a PhD in rocket science or any other subject. It doesn’t require superhuman skills or abilities. But it does require passion, dedication and commitment.

If you make a decision and commit now, you can set yourself on the journey to joining an elite group of salespeople who enjoy enviable livings and incredible lives from the rewarding profession that is selling.

I know successful salespeople who have everything they could have ever wished for. Some sell cars, some houses, some complex IT systems, or ideas, or many other products and services, but they all have one thing in common – they committed themselves to being the best that they can be. They focused on how they really add value to help their clients, and they made a decision to work hard and keep working hard until they succeeded.

How much do you want to be one of them?
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Sales enablement tools are all the rage at the moment, with many promising to be the silver bullet for growth. Based on the Simon-Kucher annual Global Pricing & Sales Study, with findings from 1,925 companies across major industries in over 40 countries (www.simon-kucher.com/en/global-pricing-sales-study-2017), the majority of firms have invested in digital initiatives, with three-quarters focusing on sales enablement tools to improve their top line. As an example of optimism bias shaped by hype, no less than three-quarters of these initiatives failed to grow revenues.

Yes, we believe every company has to have a digital plan, but that plan can’t be about the technology. It has to be about how you make more money. That requires a focus on all the users – sales reps, managers, leaders etc. – and having the tools used effectively. We need to take their behaviours (both rational and not) into account.

I learnt the lesson about over-focusing on the technology a long time ago. I remember sitting through a customer relationship management (CRM) project discussion where the client sponsors were very disengaged during the new sales process design and usability discussions and then suddenly came to life when we started to discuss the technical solution. As an example of optimism bias shaped by hype, no less than three-quarters of these initiatives failed to grow revenues.

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**FOCUSBING ON SALES ENABLEMENT**

In our previous articles in *Winning Edge*, we’ve covered sales incentives and strategy – this time we’ll turn our focus onto getting the most out of sales enablement tools from a behavioural point of view.

**PEER PRICING – A CASE STUDY**

“I look up the lowest price allowed and offer it straightaway”

This interview comment was typical of a situation we were asked by a client to change. We applied our Peer Pricing* method (described in bias number 2 opposite) to help the company support its salespeople in pricing a range of deals, and also change their incentives. This resulted in the average discount falling from 34% to 28%. We could see peaks now at each of the levels corresponding to targets from the tool. Interestingly, the sales conversion rate was unchanged. The sales team increased prices without losing volume, which flowed through to the bottom line.

*Peer Pricing is trade marked by Simon-Kucher & Partners
2. “NO-ONE PAYS LIST PRICE”
(ANCHORING)

What guidance does a rep have on where to set prices for a customer? It is fairly typical for the rep to have a list price (or rate card), though they’ll usually say, “No-one pays list price.” Usually, the only other “anchor” is the discount limit (i.e. the point at which they have to escalate for permission). With no further guidance on the discretionary level in between, this limit has a “magnetic effect” on discounting behaviour, thus dragging levels down towards it.

There is a better way though. By using our Peer Pricing technique we can set the target discounts at realistic levels between “list” and “limit”, based on a range of similar deals (peer groups).

By colour coding the peer groups like traffic lights, we provide each rep with deal-specific guidance (anchoring), rather than leaving them to use the same level as the last deal they did (thus overcoming confirmation bias). The reps still make the final decision, but we are now also able to use peer pressure, as we have the ability to track their dealmaking with simple metrics (e.g. “how many Green deals did you complete this month?”). The final piece of the puzzle is then to tie this in with their incentives.

“A digital plan can’t be about the technology. It has to be about making more money”
3. “THE SPREADSHEET’S ON MY HARD DRIVE SOMEWHERE” (DUNNING-KRUGER EFFECT)

Microsoft Excel still remains one of the most regularly used sales tools. The downside of Excel is that calculation errors can be very difficult to spot. During our work we’ve regularly seen spreadsheets with mistakes that have gone unspotted for years. These spreadsheets often lie outside the “system”, sitting on the individual laptops of the salespeople.

We know that some salespeople don’t realise the limits of their Excel skills (Dunning-Kruger effect). For example, we’ve seen rebate structures where the achieved volume and resulting payout levels within a contractual agreement actually result in the company making less profit as each volume threshold is passed. While not the most sexy enablement tool, pragmatic rebate calculators can be provided to salespeople, who can then just focus on setting levels and thresholds to see the potential outcomes of any deal scenario.

4. “THEY SELL WHAT THEY KNOW” (AVAILABILITY BIAS)

There are only so many products that a salesperson can remember or feel comfortable selling. Consequently, we often see very concentrated sales across just a few products, even when the product portfolio is quite extensive. How can we help salespeople cross-sell a wider range of products?

Here, we are seeing the influence of more consumer-orientated approaches, such as Amazon’s popular “People who bought this also bought this”, in sales enablement tools. These techniques use data mining and predictive analytics on the full range of deals conducted to create “next best offer” suggestions for the salesperson. They can be confident that the suggested pairing is a sensible one, even if they don’t know the product well, due to the range of similar deals closed by their colleagues.

5. “WINNING AWARDS OR WINNING DEALS?” (AGENCY PROBLEM)

A company’s website is becoming an increasingly important sales enabler as more of a buyer’s product/service evaluation is conducted online prior to speaking to a salesperson. The website should act as a funnel, supporting buying decisions, and with a clear call to action (even if the transaction is conducted offline).

Those goals are not necessarily the same as those of the web design firm, who can often be more focused on showcasing their creative talents, often in the hope of winning awards (i.e. an agency problem). When not resolved, we’ve seen redesigns resulting in a much more professional looking website, but where the number of leads generated dropped significantly. Therefore, it is important to ensure that lead generation objectives are specified as part of the supplier evaluation criteria (and potential success fee) in the brief issued to the web design firm.

6. “HOW DID WE MISS THAT?” (FRAMING EFFECT)

“I’ve looked at these numbers for years and never spotted that.” The difference? The client in question looked at “the numbers” in a long list. Knowing that our eyes are one of the most powerful analysis tools we have, we reframed the same data into a visual chart. Suddenly, we were getting their team pointing at each of the low margin outliers (customers in this case) and asking who each of them were.

Sales performance dashboards are usually part of any enablement project. Representing the sales data in a visual way, for example through scatter diagrams, helps identify interesting cases for further investigation and thus provides more insight into customer/sales rep behaviours.

SUMMARY

Yes, sales enablement tools are important, but the focus must not be on the IT. It must stay on the task of making more money and on the importance of human behaviour in that.

It is worth noting that despite the proliferation of sales enablement tools, the single most important sales topic mentioned in our Global Pricing & Sales Study was value selling – it is just as important in the digital age. Having salespeople with the right skill set, who are able to articulate the value of their offering and its relevance to their customers, is vital.

### SALES PERFORMANCE DASHBOARDS – A CHECKLIST

Sales performance dashboards are becoming increasingly important (see bias number 6 below), so here are a few useful tips to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>It’s better to have five reports that get looked at than 50 that don’t, so start small and expand later</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go beyond averages</td>
<td>Averages are great for budgeting but lousy for developing insights as they hide all the outliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it visual</td>
<td>Our eyes are one of the most powerful analysis tools we have, so think about charts and graphs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set thresholds</td>
<td>Thresholds enable exception reporting on priority cases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow analysts to download data</td>
<td>Data needs to be extractable from the dashboard so power users can create their own analyses</td>
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**PETER COLMAN** is a partner at global strategy and marketing consultancy Simon-Kucher & Partners, where he leads the sales effectiveness practice for the UK and Ireland. He specialises in commercial excellence programmes to address strategy, sales, marketing and pricing topics. Email peter.colman@simon-kucher.com or visit www.simon-kucher.com
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In this feature I’m going to look at the sales-buyer conversation as a critical space where customer value is created. I will pull ideas from my experience of 20 years as a senior and board-level marketing and sales practitioner, and some of the insights that have come from my academic and commercial research about the art and practice of selling in a B2B context. These ideas connect with material about how salespeople are a source of customer value in themselves that can be found in my co-authored book, *Value-Ology: Aligning Sales and Marketing to Shape and Deliver Profitable Value Propositions* (Kelly, Johnston, Danheiser, 2017).

It’s sometimes easy to overlook the fact that doing business is fundamentally a social activity. We focus on the commercial details of the proposition and the benefits of the solution and pore over these in win-loss meetings. Yet when we chat with colleagues about the way business is going, someone always says, “At the end of the day, people buy people.” There is a great deal of wisdom in this intuition. Of course, product and service solutions must provide the relevant and distinct value that the customer is seeking, and at the same time I also believe good sales professionals instinctively understand that social interactions make an important difference to the way business is done.

The idea that people matter in selling situations stands in direct contrast to the claims in the often-discussed “Challenger” sales approach of Dixon and Adamson that the idea of relationships is dead and that all that matters is providing a provocative new market insight to catch the customer’s attention.

The other truism often put forward by non-salespeople is that if you are a good talker then you are naturally a good salesperson. Experienced sales professionals know otherwise. They know selling is something more than an ability to sell sawdust to a wood mill, more than being silver-tongued and likeable. This is not to say these things are irrelevant, but much more is going on in successful sales interactions with customers. The intangible, invisible and social aspects of buyer-customer interactions are so meshed with who we are as the salesperson that, as former Citibank CEO Lynn Shostack once said, “The person is perceived to be the service.” This means that how the salesperson conducts customer interactions has as much value as the product or service solution they are selling.

I recall in my early career being summoned by a major distributor to its head office. I was in for a roasting from the senior team. Our product lines hadn’t been very competitive, our account attentiveness was below expectations, and they wondered whether the product design guys ever listened to feedback from the customer, and if we even cared about their business. I was with the distribution team for about 5 hours. The first hour was an absolute ear-bashing. And then something happened. We started having a conversation. We talked about why things had gone they way they had, why they thought we were missing the mark, what our competitors were up to, and how we could go forward together to achieve the success that we all thought was possible. We ended up having a positive and productive meeting and the word back to my CEO was that I’d cut the mustard with them because I’d listened, been candid about problems, took responsibility, and worked with them on mapping a way forward for our business together. Sure, no deals were closed that day, but the conversation created customer value that we could leverage in the future.

ABOUT CONVERSATION
There is a Chinese proverb that says, “A single conversation across the table with a wise man is worth a month’s study of books.” It emphasises the significance of face-to-face interactions. I’ve come across many organisations where desk research...
has been conducted into customers and markets by the marketing department as if it is somehow more objective and dependable than sales feedback. I emphatically disagree. Market research serves a purpose, but it can never replicate the richness and specific insight of the one-to-one customer conversation. Of course, sales feedback can be dismissed as anecdotal and too specific for generalised conclusions, yet the customer may say just one thing that could transform your business.

Conversation is an essential aspect of business life. It’s a no-lose game and we take it for granted, without thinking too deeply about what it is and how we do it. This is interesting because my research suggests that the nature of sales conversations says something really significant about the calibre and value of the salesperson.

This significance lies in the very particular way experienced senior sales and key account managers use conversation to position their interactions with customers as “not selling”. Now that’s weird isn’t it? We are in the business of selling and yet the aim of the conversation is to seem like we are not selling. The reason is that experienced salespeople want to ensure there is clear blue water between themselves and novice salespeople who are identified by sales guru Jill Konrath as pushy peddlers typically associated with commodity products. Novice sellers lack value because, it is claimed, they lack maturity, commercial savviness, general understanding of business, and have low social sensitivity. I’ve heard them delightfully described as “space cadets”.

In contrast, an experienced professional explained their use of conversation like this: “I’d try and find out when they might be happy just to have a chat with me,” which suggests a degree of self-confidence and lack of pushiness in the interaction, and, “I’ve always had situations where we’ve been invited to go and have a conversation with the client,” which suggests a mutual respect and recognition of worth. The value of conversation for the experienced sales professional demonstrates deep sector experience, commercial awareness, civility, adaptability to changing situations, a solution-seeking attitude, and informed foresight about future opportunities and threats.

It all comes down to professional identity. Through skilful use of conversation, experienced sales professionals are able to cultivate and present an identity that the customer values.

CREATING VALUABLE CONVERSATIONS
We can use social sales skill to create valuable customer conversations. But being conversational isn’t merely about being popular and nice. So called relational warmth factors don’t generate customer value in themselves — commercial teeth have to be shown too. Take the well-liked sales rep who, on every sales visit, spends time over a cuppa chatting with his customers about life, the universe and everything. But he never does any business... Having social sales skills isn’t about the size of your contact list on LinkedIn either, or the number of likes and shares you get on your social media posts. Social sales skill in customer conversations is different. Social sales skill is about how, done well, customer conversations generate business and customer value.

Effective sales conversations create customer value by using two key social capabilities: first “social perception” — the ability to read customer motivations, intentions, preferences; and second, “social adaptability” — the ability to move comfortably between different buyer-seller contexts and change interaction and conversation styles to suit different situations. These are characteristics of what psychologists call “high self-monitoring people”, who are skilled in reading social settings and the intentions of others. There is a difference between this ability and the popular idea of emotional intelligence. The latter is about self-awareness and what is happening in the present, whereas social perception and adaptability are about awareness of others and what is likely to happen in the future.

The sales conversation is the space where social sales skill is used, and two things are essential for such skill to create business and customer value: dialogue and the use of the sales imagination.

DIALOGUE
Sales conversations make proper use of dialogue to create value. People often think that when two people speak that is a dialogue. This is a mistake. Dialogue can involve several people at the same time, and it means a sharing of points of view. Critically, it is the opposite of monologue, which can also happen between two people, except in a monologue people listen to respond rather than understand. They simply exchange tit for tat statements from their own perspective rather than working towards a new and improved mutual understanding of the world. Key aspects of effective dialogue are being genuine, ensuring mutual openness, being non-manipulative, appreciating all points of view, and being non-judgmental and not blaming. The sole purpose of seller-customer dialogue is to come to a common understanding of business needs, to identify moments of change in terms of needs or priorities, and identify the likelihood for commercial exchange.

Dialogue helps the participants in the conversation build up a picture of what is valued.
Often, buyers make statements such as, “What we are seeking is better value for money,” or “We want to understand where the added value is in the solution.” Without true dialogue, there is a real risk of misunderstanding or missing details because statements like these are generalisations. There is a significant aspect of the so-called “customer’s mental map”, their picture of the world that is missing. These missing elements require filling in with careful probing and respectful questioning. Often, salespeople are tuned into tracking buying signals and overcoming objections in the conversation, rather than filling in the missing areas of the mental map. As US intellectual Randolph Bourne said a century ago, “Good talk is like scenery – continuous yet constantly varying and full of the charm of novelty and surprise.” The sales aim, of course, is to reduce the number of surprises caused by missing information, and to avoid this a good conversational strategy is to invite customers to express what they are keen to move away from (pain points) and keen to move towards (value points).

**SALES IMAGINATION**

Sales imagination plays an important role in sales conversations too. This is the ability to see what others can’t. Some sales professionals are good at it and create value, others are less good. Our imagination is the only ability we have that allows us to “see” things that are invisible. Sales imagination is the ability to read the ebb and flow of the sales conversation, to sense the feelings and sentiments of the customer, to see possibilities that will benefit the customer, and to anticipate snags and traps that can be avoided. It is the ability to see the potential consequences and implications of action.

Imagination also uses a special type of reasoning that differs from the analytical reasoning that we use so much in everyday business thinking. Imagination makes use of so-called “abductive thinking”. This is the ability to “stretch” from one context to another, such as medical surgeons visiting Formula One teams to see how they could improve their operating processes. It’s an ability to think more broadly and to spot unlikely patterns and connections.

The imagination in the context of the sales conversation shouldn’t be confused with artistic creativity and daydreaming because it is very much to do with seeing commercial possibilities. For the ancient Greeks, imagination was linked to the idea of phantasia, from which we get our word fantasy, and this is one of the reasons it has been branded rather juvenile by hard-nosed businesspeople. For the sales imagination to work it has to be grounded in reality, or absurd ideas can result. Getting the balance right between complete lack of imagination on the one hand and pure fantasy on the other is vital. So, conversational strategies that utilise imagination are “supposing” and “what if” and these can only work when dialogue is in place. This enables the salesperson to ask questions such as, “Suppose we were able to deliver essential components by drone delivery to your remote distribution depot?” or “What if we could deploy an AI solution that anticipated workload bottlenecks?”

So when we say, “people buy people”, I’m suggesting that what we mean is people are buying the ability of sales professionals to use their social sales skills; buying the value-creating power of their dialogue and their imagination. While both of these things are invisible and difficult to measure in themselves, they are still very much an essential aspect of the sales professional’s worth to the customer and their employer.

**AVOIDING COMPLACENCY – THE CONVERSATION PAYOFF**

The key thing to know about customer value is that it is subjective. It can only ever be determined by the customer and it is a moving target. It is made up of a complex range of elements from price, perception, relation, and a variety of attributes such as efficiency, effectiveness, know what, know who, attentiveness, cost of ownership and so on. For example, in *Value-Ology* we identified over seven core types of commercial value. It means every customer can have a different take on value and it can change according to their shifting priorities and needs. Businesses lose sales when they lose touch with the value expectations of their customers. Research from US academics Scott Friend and Jeff Johnson indicates that, even if your relationship with your customers seems enduring and dependable, customer relationship familiarity can breed contempt, which in turn leads to sales complacency and loss of business. Companies often have no idea why they have lost business when it happens. They have abdicated the conversational opportunity to pick up signals that are the murmurings of impending customer detachment. The value of conversation means you are always in touch with change. The simple formula for this is: the frequency of customer conversation has an inverse relationship to business complacency.

The good news is that social sales skills are trainable and can complement conventional technical and sales management training. Sales teams can be trained to make better use of dialogue to ensure value creation. Research shows that people who are more skilled in social perception and social adaptability can leverage the use of conversations and dialogue to be more successful in business. Conventional training in sales techniques such as closing and objection handling, and sales management methodologies such as Spinnelling, are only part of the picture. Skillfully using the art of conversation to define and create customer value is an indispensable part of the sales tool kit.
RESULTS THAT COUNT

RICHARD HIGHAM and ALAN TIMOTHY continue their series on data-led insights to help achieve impressive sales growth

In this feature we look at understanding high growth sales results. The sales result is what drives the business. If sales results targets are missed, all the other budgets in the plan are irrelevant. Here, we look at ways of gathering, interpreting and presenting the sales result in ways that make sense to the key players, builds the credibility of the sales organisation, and increases the likelihood of achieving sales goals. We will address four questions:

1. What data should I gather on our sales result?
2. What are the best ways of gathering the data?
3. How do we analyse sales results data?
4. How can I make best use of sales results data?

WHAT DATA TO GATHER

In a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world it is essential to have the right data to work from. It is also essential to be able to triangulate – to look at the data from a number of angles. Here we look at the data that can be really useful. Some will be obvious and some less so.

Where possible we show the percentage of smaller (less than £3m turnover) and larger companies that use this data. These percentages are drawn from a survey of 216 UK industrial companies by David Jobber, Graham Hooley and David Shipley: Organizational size and salesforce evaluation practices, published in the Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management in 2013. We show the percentage for smaller companies followed by the percentage for larger companies (X%/Y%).

Sales volume:
This is the obvious starting point and is used by 87% of smaller companies and 93% of larger. Although this measure seems uncontroversial, do consider questions such as: “Are you measuring gross sales or net sales?” “Is the timing of income recognition clear?” and “Will your figures be recognised as accurate by both finance and the sales team?”

Sales volume by product line or category: (61%/80%)
Make sure your categories are clearly defined. One firm we saw split sales by category but had no agreed definitions, so sales support staff simply entered projects where they thought they fitted best. The product mix figures were greeted with incredulity by the salesforce and were therefore rendered useless as a diagnostic tool.

Sales by customer: (48%/60% – includes customer type).
Having data on sales by customer should be easy but ensure you know what you are looking at. Is this a standalone customer or part of a group? Are you taking into account channel sales?

Sales by active account:
This will help you in predicting future sales as you bring more new accounts on board.

Sales by key account:
This allows measurement of account profitability – crucial if you manage strategic accounts. But it can prove difficult if gathering data from multiple buying points, geographies and channels.

“If sales results targets are missed, all the other budgets in the plan are irrelevant”
Sales by customer size:
If you segment by customer size this can be useful especially in identifying where to allocate resources and establishing profit from different customer sizes.

Sales by channel/salesperson team:
You can gain greater granularity by cutting the data in a variety of different ways.

Sales by period/season:
Identify trends and predict future patterns accurately.

New versus existing customers:
(58%/54% measure volume of new account sales). Measuring the split between business from new and existing customers will allow you to calculate coverage requirements and compare cost of selling between new and existing relationships. The commonly used working figure is that it takes seven times more effort to win new business than to resell, but your figures could be very different.

Cross selling:
(14%/16% measure customers buying the full range). Identifying the number of products/services taken by each customer could generate major growth opportunities through the application of white space strategies. As well as looking at top line sales volumes, it’s worth looking at other measures.

Units sold (including time for professional service firms):
If your selling price can vary from customer to customer it can be very helpful to measure units sold rather than sales volume. This will allow you to allocate production or service delivery resources.

Gross margin:
(59%/49%). If you can calculate this per customer or product you will be able to make much better informed decisions about concentration of focus (the C of the ACE model). It could also be used as a more nuanced approach to sales compensation.

Net margin:
(38%/43%). Not always appropriate or easy, but again can help with customer segmentation. It also helps the sales team understand the impact they have on the business as a whole and demonstrates to finance that salespeople are not one-dimensional...

Share of market or wallet:
Measure penetration of a market sector or individual account. Data on market or company spend can vary significantly by sector and product category. However, it should be possible for an effective salesperson to calculate the size of the market and the wallet for an individual customer. Where you know the overall spend in several instances you can extrapolate this for other customers with similar headcounts or turnover. Do be sure to measure the available wallet rather than the whole wallet. For example a customer may spend a total £x on a particular service, but if 50% of this is tied into a 5 year contract, then the available wallet is in fact only 50% of x.

Number of new customers won:
(39%/36%) This will allow you to identify the success of new business programmes and to predict future growth. You can also deduct the number of customers lost to identify net new customers.

Other data:
In order to calculate useful ratios you could also be gathering data on:
- Number of calls/contacts – this will allow you to calculate both cost per call and also the value generated per call
- Number of proposals/quotations
- Number of orders to give average order value.

WAYS OF GATHERING SALES DATA
The challenge here is to gather enough data to be useful without burdening, frustrating and distracting the frontline sales team or creating a ridiculous workload for sales support. The impact on selling time and motivation of over-engineered sales reporting should not be underestimated. The principle should be to automate as much as possible and minimise manual entry. Most customer relationship management (CRM) systems have a powerful range of reporting tools, at least in theory. Providing the system is kept up to date (and estimates on the failure rate of CRM systems vary from 20% to 66%) then much of this data should be available to you.

Another approach is to use an app such as i-snapshot (i-snapshot.com) to gather and communicate data at the point of sale.

ANALYSING THE SALES DATA
Data is only useful if you first turn it into insights. One of the best ways to do this is to choose the ratios that will be most useful to you in leading the sales organisation. They in effect become the intelligent KPIs for the sales team. Here are some sales management ratios you could consider.

Conversion ratios:
Orders, value, profit or units divided by quotations; or orders, value, profit or units divided by number...
of sales visits. Compare these for new and existing customers and across the team. Try and analyse the conversion ratios (best, worst and mode) at the different steps of your sales process. You will then be able to apply the right resources to the right people at the right time.

**Cost of selling:**
Number of sales visits divided by expenses/payroll. Based on our analysis of over 20 million sales visits, the working figure for a sales visit in UK is £120. However, this figure may vary significantly from business to business. In one example, we identified that the amount a sales rep needed to generate from each visit to cover the cost of the visit dropped from £13,899 to £9,259 when the call rate went from 8 a week to 12 a week.

You could also look at expenses and or earnings as a percentage of sales for the company as a whole or for individuals and teams. This will be very helpful as you develop coverage models.

**Rebuy rate:**
The number of customers rebuying period on period (the period should vary depending on the length of your sales cycle). Analyse the buying patterns of existing customers to identify longevity, lifetime value and cross-selling opportunities.

**USING THE SALES DATA**
The risk with all data is that it takes effort to gather and then is not analysed. Even if it is analysed it can still produce the response, “So what?” All too often we over-engineer and thus overwhelm the salesforce with the data.

Look for the handful of sales results data that will help you change the efficiency of the sales machine. The principle of 5+ or -2 is a good one. Five seems to be the ideal number of items for a dashboard. It is rare that you would want to drop below 3 or go above 7. You may want a different dashboard, however, for keeping your management colleagues informed. Remember, you will want to include leading indicators on activity, concentration of focus and result, so keep the results dashboard as lean as you can.

Consider your audience and the situation when you present your sales data. In one-to-ones remember to keep a future focus. Review of the result should rarely take more than 15% of the time available. Think about how you will present sales results in team meetings and communications with the sales team. Are you trying to foster internal competition or internal collaboration? Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses but be deliberate in the way you present sales results. At one end of the scale we have seen sales meetings where no reference is made to the results achieved. At the other end of the scale we knew of a sales director who would get his team in for a sales meeting each month. Before each meeting he would fire the salesperson with the lowest result for the month. He would then convene the sales meeting showing a whiteboard with the results league table. Then he would get the person with the second lowest result to go to the whiteboard and wipe of the name of the salesperson with the lowest result. “Tell me X, who is now in last place on the results board?” “I am boss.” “So what will happen if you’re in last place next month?” “You’ll fire me boss.” “That’s right; so just make sure you’re not bottom of the table next month!” Neither of these approaches are good uses of sales result data...

Think about the other audiences who could benefit from coherent and compelling presentations of the sales data and adapt the way it is presented. We are seeing a significant change in the way sales directors are presenting sales results data to boards and management teams. The approaches we have advocated in this article are raising the credibility of sales and demonstrating how sales adds tangible, sustained value to the business as a whole.

Do remember that the sales result, while really important for the business, is a lagging indicator. It tells you where you have been, but not where you are going. So how can we best make use of sales results data? The answer is three-fold. First, do not rely on the lagging indicator – balance your analysis with leading indicators. Second, do not focus on absolute figures, but look at trends and divergence from budget – for example, use a rolling 12-month analysis rather than just year-to-date. Third, analyse your results data early enough to do something about it. Build in stage goals at least quarterly and take remedial action at a point when it will make the difference to the year.

**AND FINALLY...**
If you are thinking that your sales results data is not quite as it should be yet, then use the advice above to take steps to put this right. But also reflect on the words of the father of computing, Charles Babbage: “Errors from using inadequate data are much smaller than those from using no data at all.”

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**RESULTS RULES OF THUMB**

**Good results data is crucial for professional sales management, so:**
- Think what results data will be most useful to you
- Balance this against the difficulty of gathering it
- Make sure the data is accurate
- Avoid manual entry of data wherever possible
- Do not tolerate multiple entry of the same data
- Identify the most useful ratios that will improve performance
- Consider how you use results data with different people
- Keep asking, “How is the data helping deliver future sales results?”
PHILIP NORMAN urges sellers to research, engage and influence – before bidding for public sector work

In my previous life as a CIPS-qualified public procurement professional, with a 9-year career spanning both government and the NHS, I awarded around £500m of public contracts to suppliers – but I never awarded a contract to a business I had not previously met or heard of. Surprising?

Then read on.

This article is for companies that have had little or no success with public sector bidding so far, or companies that are thinking about bidding for the first time. I hope to shed some light on the bidding process and show you how you need to start thinking if you are going to be in with a decent chance of winning.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Public sector bidding is shrouded in mystery and many companies believe that winning public contracts is just about the bid and getting this right. Of course, this is an important aspect of the bidding process, but the bid is just the tip of the iceberg. There’s a lot more to it.

Winning public sector contracts is first and foremost about identifying the most appropriate potential buyer of your goods and services and then forming a long-standing relationship with them. Only then is it really worth spending time putting your bid together.

Here, I will suggest some simple steps to first research which public bodies to pursue. I will then explain a bit about why you need to engage and influence the buyer and how this can be done effectively. Many potential bidders believe that this is against public sector procurement rules, but that is a myth.

I hope to help you look at your bidding techniques in a different way and challenge the way you approach the public sector contract. I wish you good luck.
CASE STUDY: POSTAL SERVICES

For hundreds of years the UK had only one postal services supplier – Royal Mail. Then, in 2008, the market was liberalised, creating a fantastic opportunity for new postal services companies. One such operator had a fantastic offering that had the potential to deliver significant savings for the public sector. The problem it faced, however, was that it had no existing relationships with public sector buyers, and no management information. As a result of these weaknesses, when it participated in the tender process – and in spite of making a reasonably competent and competitive bid – it lost out (and this was always to Royal Mail).

To address this problem, we undertook a research project on behalf of the company, obtaining key information on selected public bodies (covering areas such as spend, contract status, value, likely tender pipeline etc). This provided the intelligence to start to influence individual public bodies to ensure any future tender project gave our client the chance to tender successfully. The company began to engage effectively with the big UK public procurement organisations to inform their procurement strategies, ensuring that it was a key influencer in the development of these.

The outcome was that, over subsequent months and years, our client won numerous contracts and became a genuine competitor to Royal Mail in delivering postal services to many public bodies in the UK.

<× participants. There is a pre-published evaluation process and criteria, so everyone knows how the tenders will be evaluated, and on what basis the contract will be awarded.

Before I continue, I do need to stress that what I am about to say here is not as a result of underhand procurement practices or a deliberate approach... But the fact of the matter is that to deliver the most effective procurement in a short space of time, public sector procurement professionals quickly have to understand the product or service and the market. In order to do this, they typically engage with “subject matter experts” both internally and externally. And, you do not get greater expert knowledge than the suppliers themselves, who operate within their respective markets on a full-time basis. If you are a supplier who has been in touch with the buyer prior to them looking to increase their knowledge in your market, they will remember you and may well call upon you when they need some help and advice about your market.

Make yourself known to them and, if you have made the right impression, they will remember you when the time is right.

INFLUENCE: BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BUYER

You must play a long game. If you bid on an opportunity without any previous relationship development with the buyer, your chances of success are considerably reduced.

When I worked as a public sector procurement professional, I would engage those suppliers that had been savvy enough to harness a relationship with me. I extracted their knowledge and, in turn, developed a procurement strategy that reflected the market and delivered the procurement objectives. These suppliers would assist in developing the procurement strategy and, in some cases, the specification too.

The net result of this approach was that a handful of suppliers contributed to the development of the tender requirement, so when the tender

CHECKLIST OF DO’S AND DON’TS

Do...
✔ Complete the tender in full and do exactly what is asked of you
✔ Complete the tender in a particular format, if asked
✔ Hire a consultant to help you complete your bid if you do not have the time or experience
✔ Enter into dialogue with the buyer if you are unclear of any aspects of the tender. The tender will provide instructions for communication
✔ Be creative – work out your unique selling point and make your response relevant to the requirement
✔ Price at a point that is sustainable for your business
✔ Send your tender in 24 hours prior to the deadline

Don’t...
✘ Go for contracts that you cannot fulfill, or you will be wasting your own time and that of the public sector – and buyers can have long memories
✘ Confuse the pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) and invitation to tender (ITT) phases (see “jargon buster” box opposite), where both of these stages are used in a process. The PQQ is about selection criteria and shortlisting. The focus is always backward-looking, so you need to demonstrate your credentials as a company before getting the chance to actually bid for the work on offer. The bidding is through an ITT, which is forward-looking and focuses on how you will seek to perform the contract
✘ Ignore the word count or fail to fill in any part of the tender document
✘ Submit stock corporate sales material and standard boilerplate copy
✘ Include bold statements that cannot be backed up with the appropriate evidence
✘ Introduce inappropriate or ill-prepared people. If you are invited to undertake or receive a presentation, your representatives should all be well versed in the requirement and in your company, and of course, be presentable and affable
✘ Submit your tender late, even by a minute
✘ Forget to inform your nominated referees, as this gives a poor impression and you may even end up with a bad reference
landed on their desks they knew exactly what they were bidding for. Because of this, they had a head start and more often than not won the contract because they had been willing to play a long game with the buyer when other suppliers were not.

One of the first questions we ask any prospective client is, “What is your relationship with the buyer,” ie, to what degree do they know you? If it is clear there is no relationship or the buyer does not know them, then we highlight this as a key point of consideration in the bid/no-bid decision process for pursuing tender opportunities, and in some cases even advise them not to pursue the opportunity.

THE BID: DEVELOP YOUR TENDER RESPONSE

Because you have developed the relationship and played a long game by being a trusted subject matter expert, the subsequent tender will not turn up any surprises and, in fact, might even allow you to enjoy the tender process.

Ahead of time, you can undertake several further activities that will enhance your internal bid development process. All bids require key contributors from within your business, or external experts (such as bid writers or specialist consultants) that will add value to the final submission. Ensure these people are primed and ready – the tender timelines are notoriously tight. Make sure you are registered on the relevant tender portals. Imagine going to all that effort just to miss the opportunity or receive it later than your competitors. As soon as the OJEU notice is published the buyer will disappear for the duration of the tender process, so do not expect them to notify you. The instructions as to how your bid will be evaluated will be clear and this must form the backbone of your bid development process.

Hopefully I don’t need to say this, but if your bid is not positively evaluable, then the initial investment in research, engagement and influence will be wasted, as the bidder will most likely fail in its objective.
Although the term “storytelling” has become a business buzzword in the 21st century, the art of storytelling has been around since our ancestors lived in caves and drew on the walls. Stories have the power to entertain, educate, preserve culture and instil moral values through accounts of imaginary or real people and events. Stories also have the power to sell, as shown by the “significant objects experiment” (significantobjects.com), where 100 cheap objects with an average value of $1.25 were sold for a total of $8,000 simply by adding a story to each.

STORIES AND SALES PROPOSALS
While stories are common in the world of business-to-consumer marketing and sales – from the smouldering romance of the Gold Blend adverts of the 1980s and 1990s to the long-running Oxo family – stories in business-to-business sometimes need more thought. Let’s explore how the components of a story can help shape our creativity when writing a business proposal. Along the way we’ll call on a few experts, including the folk on the Pixar movie team – renowned for consistently making brilliant stories.

GOT THE PLOT?
A plot is a sequence of major events leading from somewhere to somewhere or something to something. A plot often relates to a problem that needs to be solved or a quest for a physical or emotional goal. The cause and effect of each major event drive the story forward.

The German writer, Gustav Freytag, described five stages of a plot, to which most stories conform, in the form of a pyramid (as illustrated in the column opposite). Pixar has a tried and trusted formula for outlining a plot – by filling in the following blanks, you can tell just about any story: “Once upon a time there was...Every day...One day...Because of that...Because of that...Until finally...” Pixar urges us to focus on a core idea (a mother lode) to hang everything on. We can add sub-plots, but they should relate to the main plot – perhaps a deeper dive to develop aspects of the storyline. Avoid parallel plots (like solving a crime alongside an affair between two of the characters), which only serve to dilute the main story.

Turning to our proposal, our plot is getting our customer from a problem or ambition to an endgame or vision where they have achieved their desired outcome or result. The major
events are the points in the journey we will take them on to get from start to finish—maybe checking their needs, then creating a solution, then implementing the solution and realising the benefits. We can use sub-plots to enhance different aspects—for example, our commercial and technical plots.

**CHARACTER-FORMING**

Characters in a story are real or imaginary. They play out the events, and triumph or suffer in the causes or effects.

To bring characters to life, their personalities need developing. Perhaps they are heroes or villains, larger than life or shrinking violets, dazzlingly handsome or sorrowfully ugly. As they unfold, we will learn to love them or loathe them—the best characters evoke strong emotions.

Few of Pixar’s characters are humans—they are toys, cars, insects, fish, to name a few. They are all vividly brought to life and, without noticing, you become absorbed in their worlds and their struggles and victories.

When they are reading our proposals, our customers need to be entertained and influenced to love or hate the characters. We need to know our customers and what they care about, so we can write for them.

We can make the features of our solution the heroes, and the features of our competitors’ solutions the villains. But to be heroes, our features need to be developed from flat, one-dimensional characters into endearing multi-dimensional characters by matching them to a customer requirement and bringing out their benefits and value.

**THEME TIME**

The theme is the message or purpose of the story, a point or lesson that the audience can recognise—not necessarily straightaway, but by the end. Although Pixar’s movies have big, colourful stories, there is always a theme underneath. *Finding Nemo*, for example, isn’t just about the adventures of a father clownfish dashing around oceans to rescue his kidnapped son—it’s about parenting. Similarly, the *Toy Story* trilogy isn’t just a bunch of toys rollicking around—it’s about loyalty, handling change and doing the right thing. Remember the old end to many a tale: “…and the moral of the story is…”

Andrew Stanton, one of the Pixar team, talks about needing a strong theme. And that’s what we need in our proposals. Our themes create the compelling reason why the customer should choose us. Business coach and storyteller John Bates also has great advice: “Give us what matters to us,” he says. “Pick three points and don’t cram unnecessary information in. Bring just the key things to the top.”

Hurrah to Andrew and John. Proposals that cram in every differentiator or unique selling point in a “pile ‘em high” fashion won’t cut it. They will confuse and alienate. Between one and three themes, carefully crafted to express benefit and value for the customer, then woven through the proposal, will beat a shed load of bragging.

**A HEALTHY DOSE OF EMPATHY**

For a story to stick, we need to identify with the plot, the characters and the theme. Soundbites from Andrew Stanton—“make me care”, “tell it from the heart”, “create wonder”—emphasise the point. Pixar suggests empathy is the “third level of liking”. The first two levels are superficial, based on physical attractiveness and positive personal traits. True empathy comes when you engage more deeply and get under the surface, possibly even sharing and supporting each other’s challenges.

Remember that buying is as much about emotion as logic. John Bates comments: “None of the facts and figures matter until you have some sort of emotional connection.”

So, we need to create empathy on the page through emotional connection. Connect on the first two levels by using your customer’s name (or “you”) often, and explaining “what’s in it for them” by describing the outcomes they will achieve either personally or corporately.

Mirror your customer by using their language and playing back any discussions or diagrams they have shared with you.

Show you care by writing from the heart and making strong, positive commitments about getting things done. Reinforce this by showing vulnerability by being open about any risks and issues you or they face and how you will deal with them together.

Get away from dull business-speak when you can by using vibrant, action-based language and images. And share stories of how you’ve solved similar problems before.
A CAUTIONARY TALE
On my journey through the lands of storytelling, I have found some techniques that don’t quite suit the world of proposals. The two that get a thumbs-down are:

- Stanton: “Give them 2 + 2 instead of 4” — meaning that you need to make your audience work hard. Sorry, no. Our job in a proposal is to make it as easy as possible for the reader to find what they need and want. They are time-poor and will much prefer the company that gives them great signposting.

- Bates: “People don’t connect with your success, they connect with your mess” — akin to “bad news sells” (but good news doesn’t). Although proposal best practice does counsel us to explain how we will address relevant weaknesses, and we know that the best relationships are built on sharing and resolving challenges, we don’t want too much negativity in the document.

There are probably more, but we want to end on a positive note.

AND FINALLY...
My narrative ends fittingly with a denouement — interestingly a word that translates as untie, rather than tie up (all the loose ends). The diagram below definitely ties things up by bringing the various strands together.

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**BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS (AND THE MIDDLE BIT)**

Both your “Once upon a time” and your “Happily ever after” need to be captivating. Andrew Stanton suggests making a promise at the beginning — one that you can come back to at the end. Freytag introduces us to the terms exposition (introduction) and denouement (resolution) — solid front and end anchor points either side of a roller coaster of a story. Strong beginnings and endings make your story complete and fulfilling.

In your proposals, remember to get to the point at the start. Don’t waffle around with please and thank you and how delighted you are to be submitting a proposal. Instead, tell them how you will solve their problem and what the outcomes will look like. Do this in the executive summary and each section of the proposal. At the end of the executive summary and each section, summarise and bring the customer back to outcomes for them.

The bits in the middle are where you paint the picture of the journey you will take together to get from problem to outcome, developing your characters and themes. Ensure you have a logical and balanced structure throughout.

There will be times when your customer makes it hard to set out your story in a format and structure that suits you. But don’t forget, you can start a story in the middle and then fill in earlier and later gaps. Whatever constraints your customer puts forward, these are simply like the obstacles in the movie that fox the protagonists and cause some action to get back on track.

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In the last edition I discussed the importance of resilience in sales and looked at why having a positive mindset is so difficult to maintain: our “inner caveman” makes us naturally designed to seek out the negatives in any new situation because of our survival instinct. Here, I want to follow up by providing some tips to help build resilience. As I mentioned in Part 1, however, I firmly believe that resilience cannot be taught, but is built through the accumulation of life’s experiences and learning from them — from knowing that you have faced a similar situation in the past and survived.

What can be taught, however, are the skills of mindfulness and self-awareness, giving you the ability to put things into perspective and break through all of the noise of a situation and focus on what it important. To start doing this, the first thing you need to do is ask yourself: “On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being death), how bad is this problem?”

BEGIN ‘ACTIVE THINKING’

Once you begin to look at the challenge you face in those terms you can start to look for solutions. In order to get yourself out of a negative situation you need to take action. As I mentioned in Part 1, one of the biggest causes of stress is the feeling of being powerless. Take control.

In order to shift your mindset into active thinking, ask yourself questions such as:
- How can I contain the problem so that it doesn’t get worse?
- What can I do to limit the problem’s scope or duration?
- How can I reduce the downside of this adverse event?
- How can I increase the potential upside of this event?
- What aspects can I control?
- How can I best respond?

Where are the opportunities in this situation?
- Ask yourself, “But what if things work out well?”
- Focus on what you can influence.

In his best-selling book, The 7 habits of highly effective people, Stephen Covey talks about only focusing on the things you can influence. We spend a lot of our time and energy focusing on things we have no influence over and cannot change, and the more you focus on these the more prominent in your
brought that make and model to the forefront of your consciousness, where it remains lodged.

One of the biggest causes of stress is feeling powerless over a situation, with your concerns constricting your thinking and reducing your circle of influence (illustrated on page 44). Active thinking is about trying to focus on the things you can influence. What can you do to widen your circle of influence over a situation (the circle on the right in the diagram)? Once you start thinking in this way, your brain will start to look for opportunities instead of hardship.

**MAKE A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO BE AN OPTIMIST**

It takes a lot less energy when you perceive something as a challenge instead of a hardship. If you view a situation as a threat, your inner caveman starts acting up.

In contrast, when a situation is viewed as a challenge, your body releases hormones such as endorphins, dopamine and serotonin that promote cell repair, trigger relaxation responses, and stimulate efficient energy use. Resilient people feel that they can cope with whatever life throws at them. This doesn’t mean that when something goes wrong they pretend that everything is fine and that things will fix themselves. It simply means that they see the situation for what it is, but they’re confident that by taking the right action they’ll be able to overcome the adversity and continue on their way. I once heard that in the military, when troops are faced with overwhelming odds, instead of saying, “We’re outnumbered”, they are trained to say, “We’re in a target rich environment.”

**CHALLENGE YOUR EXCUSES AND OWN YOUR FEELINGS**

Challenge every excuse you make to yourself and take ownership of your feelings. Just because you know that it is your “caveman” thinking, doesn’t mean you can use that as an excuse, just as if you had a dog and it bit somebody, you can’t turn around and say, “It wasn’t me, it was the dog.”

**LOOK AFTER YOURSELF**

Don’t feed your caveman. Drinking, drugs and overeating never help. You may think they do at the time, but again, this is your caveman brain doing the thinking, the part of the brain that looks at pleasure, pain and reward. If you are run down, ill and lethargic you are naturally more prone to stress – your body knows you are not at your best and you are vulnerable, so cortisol is released in order to protect you.
But once he had done it, within 2 years, seven other athletes had also broken the 4 minute barrier.

**Opportunity** – Normally, when a cross goes behind the receiving player, it is derided as poor. But because Giroud had the right attitude he saw it as an opportunity. With the right attitude, you will also find opportunities in unlikely scenarios.

**Action** – He took the action of attempting the shot, and his action was rewarded with some “luck” by striking exactly the right spot. Like Giroud, when golf legend Arnold Palmer holed an unlikely chip, his playing partner commented, “That was lucky.” Palmer replied, “The funny thing is, the more I practise, the luckier I get.”

**Conquer Anxiety**

Finally, I’d like to share two really quick techniques to relieve nerves and stress, and to help bring you back into the present when anxiety kicks in.

The first is a sensory awareness exercise. When you begin to feel stressed, overwhelmed or simply about to “lose it” in an argument:

- Simply name five objects you can see in the room with you
- Name four things you can feel (“chair on my back”, “feet on the floor” etc.)
- Name three things you can hear right now (or three sounds that you like)
- Name two things you can smell right now (or two things you like the smell of)
- Name one good thing about yourself.

The second is a cognitive awareness grounding exercise that enables you to reorientate yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:

- Where am I?
- What day is it today?
- What is the date?
- What is the month?
- What is the year?
- What season is it?
- How old am I?

These grounding techniques can be useful in many circumstances, not least when you are about to deliver a sales presentation.
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I am often asked, “How can you use neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) to create high-performing sales teams?”

When creating a high-performing team, or refining an existing team, it is important to go through the logical levels of high performance created by Robert Dilts, a developer, author, trainer and consultant in NLP since its creation in 1975 by John Grinder and Richard Bandler.

Imagine you see your team as this high-performance garden. Green grass, flowering shrubs, brilliant colours, trees with deep roots that can withstand any weather, with consistent fruit produced from the trees, and a garden shed with the perfect tools to keep the garden lovely.

Now imagine your current garden is full of weeds, rotting bark, long overgrown grass, limited fruit, and is bland and grey in colour, with no shed in which to keep your perfect tools. I am sure you would agree that this is not the garden you want.

Dilts’s methodology allows you to go through the levels of high performance and identify blind spots, increase motivation and refine the skills that enable you to understand what high performance looks like, sounds like and feels like in your team. It enables you to create the exact garden you want to in order for your team to grow and flourish.

ENVIRONMENT
Where and when are you most effective as a team? What environment does that look like, sound like and feel like?

Our external environment, where we work and where we live, has a direct impact on our external behaviour and motivation. Consider that it is both ours and the team’s environment that dictates our attitudes, behaviours and motivation.

Imagine you are a gorilla in the jungle with all the other gorillas. You have trees to climb, fruit to eat and other gorillas on the same mission as you, with the same passion. They are all pushing you to be a better version of yourself. You can imagine how you and the team would flourish. Now imagine you are a gorilla on your own in a desert in a dry and hot environment with no one to support you, limited water and limited food. You can imagine how demotivated you would be.

It is worth considering these questions when crafting or evaluating your sales team environment in order to make sure you all properly aligned:

- What is working in your environment?
- What is not working in your environment?
- What do you want instead?

BEHAVIOURS
What are our standards? Where are we going? What behaviours will take us there?

Remember, if we are disempowered or empowered it directly affects our physiology, our state and then our external behaviours – and therefore also our results.

What behaviours are we tolerating as a team? Who do we aspire to become, and what behaviours will enable this?

The interesting thing is that behaviour is linked to our results as individuals, teams and towards our clients or customers. Every behaviour is perfectly designed to get us a result, whether that’s the one we want or the one we don’t. You
can usually tell everything you need to know about a team by looking at its behaviour. Pay attention, not to what people say, but what they do. The behaviour is either useful or not useful for the direction in which you are going.

When working to get the best out of a sales team, ask the following questions. When you ask these questions it is important to write down the first thing that comes to mind. If I asked for your email address, how quickly would it come to you? That’s right, that quickly. All change is unconscious, and those answers and insights create high performance:

- What do you do that’s working for you?
- What do you do that’s not working for you?
- What don’t you do that’s working for you?
- What don’t you do that’s not working for you?

SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES

The skills and capabilities of the team are in direct proportion to the results you create. The interesting thing is that most teams focus on what they are not very good at. Why? Because that is what everyone else does. It’s important to look at your aspirations both as a team and individually. What strengths do you already have? And if you developed your strengths, which ones will accelerate performance? Where are your opportunities for skill and capability development? Skill and capability development must be part of the workflow. Coaching, small workshops, team meetings and webinars must be consistent to enable your team’s skills to be developed and honed.

- What skills and capabilities do you do well?
- Where are your aspirations, and what skills will get you there?
- What skills and capabilities do you want to develop?
- What are your strengths and how do you build on and hone them?

BELIEFS AND VALUES

Our individual beliefs are so important and whether you think you can, or you think you can’t, you’re right. Most limiting beliefs are learned and they are designed to keep you safe. This is great if you are wrestling a tiger in a jungle. Not so useful if you are trying to hit a sales target.

When you have a limiting belief it is always worth reframing it. “I can’t” – what would happen if you could? “I am not confident” – in what ways could you trust yourself? Remember, beliefs either empower or disempower. Sales is almost like a pro sport, and what do athletes do? They warm up before training and performances to get into peak state and go above feelings, because that’s where top performance lies.

- What beliefs would empower you daily?
- What beliefs do you hold that are not useful?
- What would be some more useful beliefs?

Our personal values and team values provide motivation and drive. If one of your team is not performing, there might well be a values misalignment. What values do the best salespeople hold? What values does your underperformer hold? What’s the gap?

The reality is that everyone has different values and it is important to respect that. What are the collective team values, and are they in alignment with where you are going? If your team’s values are not aligned with your customers’ or clients’ values, this can cause conflict and you will get results that are not useful to you.

Here are some questions to ask to ensure high motivation and alignment. Elicit these values and build your team around them:

- What’s important to you about your customers or clients?
- What’s important to them specifically?
- What’s important to you as a team?
- What’s important to you personally?
- In what ways can you satisfy your values?

IDENTITY AND PURPOSE

What is the one North Star you are all aiming towards, what’s your highest purpose as a team?

Our purpose has to be so big that it would take a lifetime to get there. This will drive a huge amount of motivation, and who you become in the process would be far greater than who you are at the moment.

Remember that without purpose and direction nothing happens. It’s your purpose that enables you to go the extra mile for each other, for your customers and clients.

- What purpose do you stand for?
- Who are you that’s more than your role?
- What’s the one mission you are all on?
- What is the highest intention of your work?

You have just learned Robert Dilts’s logical levels and how to apply this to create a high-performing sales team. It’s important to work on all levels of your team garden, from the roots all the way up to the fruit.

Your perfect garden starts with environment, behaviours, skills, beliefs, values and your purpose. Get your team into a room and place the questions on flipcharts and spend 2 hours answering the questions I’ve outlined here. Then agree on the next steps in each area and be accountable for the change. Bring this to life.

“IT’S YOUR PURPOSE THAT ENABLES YOU TO GO THE EXTRA MILE FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR CLIENTS”
ISMPARTNER PROFILES
THE ISM LAUNCHES NEW CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

In recent weeks the ISM has been proud to announce a series of important new corporate partnerships. Here, we are delighted to introduce some of them - and we’ll be profiling more in future editions.

BENTLEY SYSTEMS: PERFECTING THE ART OF SELLING
Bentley is a US-based software development company that supports the professional needs of those responsible for creating and managing infrastructure. Founded in 1984, it has over 3,500 employees worldwide, and generates annual revenues of $700m in 170 countries.

Simon Horsley, vice president, global product advancement sales at Bentley, explains, “We must excel in both product sales and account management.” Bentley’s corporate partnership with the ISM will initially mean that 30 of its UK-based sales colleagues can access the benefits of individual membership, facilitating their ongoing professional development and enhancing their approach to working with customers.

Horsley continues, “I’m continually aiming for us to perfect the art of selling here, and I could see that the ISM provides a great environment for peer-to-peer learning. I wanted myself and my sales team to be exposed to the thought leadership, best practice, resources and networking opportunities that the ISM offers.”

The collaboration will also help with recognition and teambuilding. “Six of my colleagues attended the recent BESMA 2018 awards ceremony, which they described as inspirational,” he says.

REDSPIRE: SERIOUS ABOUT SALES ENABLEMENT
Redspire is a CRM consultancy and Microsoft Gold Partner, specialising exclusively in Dynamics 365. Redspire works collaboratively to drive digital transformation, improving clients’ processes and helping them better understand and engage with customers. The company has particularly strong capabilities in financial services, public sector, government and media.

Iain Rose, ISM Scotland chair, first introduced Mark Gibson, Redspire’s sales and marketing director, to the idea of ISM Corporate Partnership. As Gibson explains, “As a fast-moving business at the forefront of sales innovation and customer experience, we were inspired to join the ISM to support our accelerated growth plans.”

He continues, “Like the ISM, we’re serious about sales enablement and we achieve this through Microsoft BI-driven digital transformation that realises organisational change. There’s a real synergy between our business, our overarching goals and the tools and resources the ISM offers members. We’re looking forward to a prosperous partnership in 2019 and beyond, and sharing best practice with our fellow members.”

BRE: BUILDING SALES SKILLS
BRE is the world’s leading building science centre, providing the training, publications, advice, and digital tools that enable construction professionals to work smarter.

Miles Watkins, group business development director at BRE, says, “Our mission is to build a better world together through our customers using more of our products and services, which are all designed to create environmental and societal benefits. To make that happen, we’re on a drive to become much more responsive to our customers.”

He continues, “Historically, we’ve been very good at developing our technical professionals such as engineers and physicists, helping them build their careers alongside their professional bodies – and now we’re keen to do the same with our commercial specialists.”

The collaboration with the ISM will ensure recognition of the company’s salespeople – internally as well as externally – and facilitate ongoing professional development.

Watkins adds, “We see ISM corporate partnership as a ‘win win’, helping our salespeople, creating happy customers, and boosting our performance.”

YARA UK: A NEW SALES FORMULA
Yara UK is a leading industrial chemicals business. It is particularly well known for AdBlue, a fluid that can be added to diesel engine exhaust systems to reduce harmful nitrogen oxide emissions.

Paul Norman, Yara’s UK and Ireland manager, transport and industry reagents, a longstanding member of the ISM and now a Fellow, explains the rationale for corporate partnership: “Let’s be honest, sales hasn’t always had the greatest reputation, and the ISM provides credibility to the profession,” he says.

Norman, who gained a Master’s degree in sales management at the University of Portsmouth as a mature student, is committed to learning and to an ethical approach to sales. “The ISM is a key part of making my sales team as knowledgeable and professional as possible,” he says.

As ISM members under the partnership agreement, Yara UK’s sales team is able to tap into a host of ISM member benefits, including sales resources, knowledge sharing and networking opportunities. “Over the last 10 years, as an individual member, I’ve personally found the support of the ISM to be invaluable, not least in enabling me to share experiences with, and make contacts in, other industries, which can be a fresh source of ideas and inspiration,” continues Norman. “I want my team to enjoy those opportunities too. I’m sure it will be beneficial to our business – and help them in their careers.”
Become an ISM Corporate Partner

The ISM is proud to partner with a wide range of organisations, from major blue-chip companies such as Aggregate Industries, AO, Geberit, Redrow, Siemens and Virgin Media Business, to many smaller firms, education providers and others.

Corporate Partnership with the ISM provides unique engagement, learning and networking opportunities. Join us and boost your sales performance.

REAP THE REWARDS OF CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ISM:

- Position your organisation as an ISM Partner, dedicated to sales methods that are professional and ethical
- Align your organisation with the ISM’s code of conduct
- Reinforce your organisation’s professional status, enhancing customer conversations and sales proposals
- Benefit from a sales skills audit - to identify key areas for salesforce development and coaching
- Achieve company-based Professional Sales Certification for your sales teams
- Access OFQUAL-approved sales qualifications
- Support your sales staff with a continuous professional development (CPD) plan
- Attend unique networking events with top business leaders and sales experts
- Influence the ISM’s mission to gain Chartered status, to elevate our representation of the sales industry
- Strengthen existing recruitment and retention strategies
- Deliver and/or take part in webinars to the ISM’s global audience
- Be a part of BESMA (the British Excellence in Sales Management Awards) the UK’s top sales awards

Find out more...

If you are interested in enhancing your brand’s credibility, while developing and recognising your salesforce, ISM Corporate Partnership can help! For more information, contact Dave Millichap, ISM Corporate Account Director, at dmillchap@ismprofessional.com or call him on 07481 109875.
ISM MEMBER BENEFITS

Don’t delay, benefit today!

Did you know that as an ISM member you are entitled to a wide range of benefits and services? We can help you progress throughout your sales career in a number of different ways, such as by providing learning opportunities through our high quality content and insight from senior leaders within the sales industry

ISM MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS INCLUDE:

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Displaying your membership designation, such as EISM or FISM, from the leading professional body for the sales industry demonstrates your commitment to ongoing development as a sales professional. It also significantly strengthens your customer proposals and enables you to stand out from the competition

QUALIFICATIONS
We offer professional and accredited sales qualifications approved by the government’s qualifications regulator, OFQUAL

REGIONAL EVENTS
ISM events provide great networking and learning opportunities as we invite senior speakers to present on topics relevant to the sales industry

CPD SYSTEM
Track your Continuing Professional Development activities, such as event and webinar attendance, and sales-related reading, here. Engaging with the ISM’s CPD system ensures that you are kept up-to-date with industry knowledge and enhances your ongoing professional development

ISM MENTOR SCHEME
All our mentors are ISM Fellows. They come from a range of sectors and are on hand to provide guidance and support to other members, assisting in their professional development. The scheme operates on a one-to-one basis, with mentees choosing the ISM mentor they would like to be paired with, based on which profile best matches their specific individual requirements

SALES LITERATURE
Members can borrow the best in informative sales and business books for up to 21 days across a range of titles and topics

VIDEO LIBRARY
Bite-sized thought leadership interviews with senior professionals from a wide variety of different industries, including both SMEs and large blue-chip organisations

WEBINARS
Our webinar programme brings the wisdom of top sales leaders straight to you, with essential insights into improving your sales techniques

WINNING EDGE
Free subscription to the ISM’s industry-leading quarterly magazine, which comprises news, comment, advice and thought leadership on all aspects of the sales profession

FREE LEGAL HELP
Access instant, authoritative support from Lyon Davidson solicitors

LIFESTYLE DISCOUNTS
On travel, insurance, shopping and more, bringing down the cost of consumer and business purchases

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For further information, visit ISMprofessional.com