

## Smarter Selling Builds Solid Foundations for Future Business Growth

Improving revenue performance is almost always a result of a mix of strategic efforts. For The House of Marketing - an independent marketing consultancy based in Mechelen, Belgium - re-thinking its sales approach proved to be an important part of the jigsaw, contributing to 30-40 per cent growth over a two year period.

Adopting Miller Heiman's *Strategic Selling*® programme to track, plan and manage sales opportunities across its expanding international operation, the consultancy now has a clear focus, enabling it to improve the odds of winning business in the shortest amount of time.

The House of Marketing provides strategic marketing advice, project management, and interim management services to clients in a range of industry sectors spanning ICT, FMCG, B2B and B2C. Formed in 1994, the consultancy has grown steadily through building long-term client relationships and providing exceptional service delivery. Its strength lies in a hands-on, results-oriented attitude that helps clients to bridge the gap between marketing theory and practice - the 'knowing-doing' gap.

Having successfully established a reputation in Belgium, The Netherlands and France, the consultancy took its first steps outside Europe in 2007, opening a subsidiary office in China's economic centre Shanghai.

As the company expanded and moved into new markets, sales responsibility widened from the five founding Partners to include an international team of Managing Consultants. Partner, Michel Halet said, "As is often the case in such situations, we didn't have a universal framework in place to manage the sales process. Everyone had their own way of going about things. It very quickly became apparent that we needed a more pro-active and

disciplined approach in order to maintain a consistent revenue stream and really make the most of new opportunities."

The House of Marketing uses a tried and tested 'integrated marketing model' to help its own clients achieve sustained success. Understanding the business value of a clearly defined and repeatable process, the consultancy naturally looked for a proven methodology with these qualities when re-engineering its own approach to sales management.

### New Structure Identifies Winnable Business

Although the company already worked with a preferred supplier on sales presentation coaching, on the recommendation of another marketing consultancy it took the opportunity to talk with Pascale Hall, Miller Heiman's Belgian partner. As a result, The House of Marketing began using *Strategic Selling*® in 2006, with programme training being delivered by Miller Heiman's Blended Learning solution.

Michel Halet explains: "One of Miller Heiman's strengths is what you see is what you get. *Strategic Selling*® is successful because it's very structured and practical. Applying a simple set of rules and a common language to already familiar sales concepts keeps everyone working towards goals in the same way. **The Blue and Green Sheets** are particularly useful tools. They not only provide 'permanent coaching on the job' but actively keep the sales pipeline fresh and productive."

In fact, the company has integrated the Miller Heiman Blue Sheet into its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. In practice, this gives them a single, structured sales funnel of all qualified leads at different stages, and enables them to prioritise the opportunities they have the greatest probability of winning.

“We are now in a much better position to see whether prospects fit well with our ideal customer profile. At our weekly sales meetings we discuss every prospect in the final two stages of the funnel and how we can improve our chances of closing the business. The clarity and visibility that *Strategic Selling*® brings helps us to make the right commercial choices and allocate time and effort wisely. It gives us the knowledge and confidence to walk away from resource-intensive prospects with least likelihood of success,” says Michel Halet.

The discipline and consistency that *Strategic Selling*® instils has also proved a real advantage in The House of Marketing sales meetings, where typically half the team attends in person and the other half participates by conference call. “The vocabulary people use has the potential to impact how we progress opportunities,” explains Michel Halet. “Since we've been using *Strategic Selling*® everyone talks about sales situations in the same two languages - English and Miller Heiman. This makes it easy for everyone to contribute and promotes a clear understanding of what needs to be done next.”

A particularly welcome outcome of introducing the programme has been how it has helped The House of Marketing cope with market fluctuations. When there has been a slight slowdown, perhaps due to seasonal influences or client budgets, rigorously applying

*Strategic Selling*® techniques has enabled the consultancy to restore sales pipeline momentum in a matter of a few weeks.

This is a good example of how Miller Heiman methodology makes it easier to get back on track when things go wrong.

### Blended Learning Delivery - Cost Efficient and Effective

So how has the company gone about embedding *Strategic Selling*® into its operation? Everyone involved in sales - currently around a quarter of consultants - has been trained in the process, and as new recruits come on board regular workshops are run.

The decision to opt for Miller Heiman's Blended Learning solution has worked well both on a personal level and for the company.

The consultants use e-learning programmes to familiarise themselves with the basic concepts and process, and this is then reinforced through instructor-led classroom training. The flexible, self-paced e-learning accommodates individuals' learning styles and work/life commitments, and importantly does not encroach on active selling time. The classroom sessions not only underline the mechanics and benefits of the *Strategic Selling*® process, but also provide opportunities for the consultants to brainstorm and feed off each other.

The House of Marketing is committed to capitalising on the significant sales growth it has enjoyed over the last two years, and to getting the most from the Miller Heiman model. In parallel with investing in developing consultants' soft skills, the company plans to continue working closely with Miller Heiman to find the best way of reinforcing *Strategic Selling*® methodology so that everyone uses it fully and accurately. These techniques connect with the practical call planning strategies provided by Miller Heiman's *Conceptual Selling*®, a programme that is also being used by a growing number of House of Marketing consultants to help win complex sales.