

Miller Heiman Process Intrinsic to Symbian's Business Future

Licensing software for mobile digital data systems involves Symbian in complex, all-encompassing business relationships with the 'Giants' of the telecoms industry. So rigour and strategic focus were both decisive factors when the company selected Miller Heiman for its universal sales process.

Symbian – owned by Ericsson, Panasonic, Nokia, Samsung, Siemens and Sony Ericsson – was set up in 1998 to translate a strong technological capability into commercial success.

The company, which employs over 1000 people, is now at the heart of the wireless community, creating advanced standard operating systems, used primarily for the development of feature-rich mobile phones. It licenses the Symbian OS platform to the world's leading handset manufacturers, which account for over 85 per cent of annual global mobile phone sales.

Symbian continues to maintain and extend its leadership of this rapidly growing market. In the first half of 2005, more than 14.5 million Symbian OS phones were sold worldwide, a 191% increase on the equivalent period in 2004.

The company has built close, co-operative working partnerships with major companies across the mobile industry and because its engagement with individual customers is very complex, iSymbian uses Miller Heiman's Strategic Selling® and Large Account Management ProcessSM (LAMP®,) to drive business and manage these relationships,

as Vice President of Sales, Andy Brannan explains, "In adopting Symbian software, the customer has to be willing to relinquish key business activities to us, which requires an act of faith on their part. In turn, we have to understand precisely what level of engagement to have with the customer in order for them to get value, which can require re-organising our engineering resources."

When Andy Brannan joined the company in 2001 there was no overarching sales approach. He says, "The majority of staff were technically gifted, and although not necessarily sales-orientated they appreciated the need for engineer-to-engineer co-operation, whilst the talented salespeople that had been recruited had their own processes and experiences."

Strategic Solution

It became apparent that to move forward and engage with large companies, Symbian needed to define a sales process and have a clear idea of what success looked like. Given the enormous scale and scope of its business relationships and commercial potential it was clear that only the most robust of sales processes would do.

“The decision to work with Symbian is a strategic one that invariably requires main board approval, so there was no place at Symbian for a sales process that was anything but strategic,” says Brannan.

“Our aim was to win more business and close business more quickly, so it was imperative to have a common parlance and a process to capture and track the views of the key influences. In particular, we were looking to develop a better understanding of who within the customer organisation could make decisions”.

“Our cross-functional account teams needed clear goals for each account. These goals are then divided up into specific objectives with owners and project timescales. Working in a limited resource environment we also needed to become more effective at evaluating the value and likelihood of success on the various opportunities.”

Andy Brannan had experience of Miller Heiman amongst other sales processes, having previously held other senior sales roles in the technology sector. He considered its robust approach to be most closely aligned to Symbian’s goals and its own value proposition, particularly in terms of gaining the customer’s agreement to re-organise their resources to work more collaboratively.

Speed was of the essence and the decision was taken to adopt the methodology, both as the company’s ‘deal focus’ (Strategic Selling®) and for the management of accounts (LAMP®).

Benefiting from Consistency

Eighteen months down the line, 100 people from Symbian’s UK headquarters and international offices in Sweden, USA and Japan had attended Miller Heiman workshops. As the customer interface is through Symbian’s cross-functional teams, staff from the Sales, Engineering, Marketing, and Finance disciplines have been trained, in addition to the Executive Board.

Electronic versions of the programmes are used routinely. All new business is ‘Blue Sheeted’ and reviewed with a subset of the management board on a monthly basis, while a full ‘Gold Sheet’ review of all accounts also takes place twice a year with the Executive Board. As a measure of how the process permeates the culture, when the new CEO was appointed he was given ‘Blue Sheets’ and ‘Gold Sheets’ to quickly bring him up to speed on all major business situations.

The benefits of having a consistent sales framework and vocabulary are being felt both at a corporate level and by individuals, according to Andy Brannan.

“There are now over 700 million mobile phones sold world-wide each year. With so much at stake, maintaining the trust of our customers is critical, therefore it’s crucial to have mechanisms like LAMP® & Strategic Selling® in order to track customer views and way up the risks and benefits for all” he says.

The discipline of completing Strategic Selling's 'Blue Sheet' analysis means that **Symbian can be much more specific about the different influencers in any sales situation, and weigh their relative importance in the decision-making process. Now people understand that not all views are equal this wasn't always the case.** Members of cross-functional teams can see what is happening in particular accounts and have a shared language for discussion and problem solving. They also have the information to make objective decisions about which business opportunities to pursue, based on the likelihood of success.

Greater Efficiency

How does Andy Brannan sum up the difference Miller Heiman has made to Symbian's business? Whilst acknowledging that change usually meets with some resistance, he says that the reaction to Miller Heiman has been universally positive. People feel that not only is the methodology adding value and increasing efficiency, but that it also provides a means for everyone to contribute to goal setting and to report progress.

Moreover, there's a strong feeling that the company is more efficient in its external communications, in closing deals and as an internal organisation. For example, it's noticeable that meetings are less protracted now that there is a common sales framework and language, everyone is clearer about what they are trying to achieve. Speed is critical in such a fast-paced industry.

Training new staff in the processes is ongoing and Brannan sees the relationship with Miller Heiman as intrinsic to Symbian's business approach in the future.

“Adopting our operating system is absolutely fundamental to our customers' business in terms of their market differentiation, competitiveness and future success. In practice our relationship with each licensee is pervasive, in that every department in both companies will liaise with each other. With the Miller Heiman process we are able to map out our objectives and track our progress in these critical relationships – all on a single page.”