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How Managers Prevent Salespeople from Committing to SFA

Failing to see things through sales reps' eyes dooms many SFA implementations.

By **Pam Baker** on **March 13, 2008**

Despite market gains, **SFA** (Sales Force Automation) is still struggling to get widespread acceptance among the ultimate end users: **salespeople**. That is not likely to change soon. The disconnect between enterprises seeking to boost sales and sales representatives trying to avoid bureaucracy may be worse than management suspects.

"If I believe it has been put in place as a measure-and-monitor spy tool by management, I will at best resist. At worst, [I will] flood you with meaningless data," confessed Tony Latimer, sales coach at **The Really Big Impact Company**.

Make Believable Arguments

To get any meaningful returns from SFA investments, enterprise management needs to start by addressing the SFA problems within their own organizations. Managers need to be genuine in their support of the SFA system. This will help bridge the gap between management and salespeople.

"I'll start by stating the obvious point that any 'convincing statements' given in support of **SFA initiatives** have to be truthful when they are made and sustainable over time," said Tim Williams, systems architect at **Raytheon Company**. "Working out what truthful statements can be made and supporting the SFA initiative to ensure that commitments remain true may require some effort, investment and sacrifice by sales management."

But the bridge may collapse long before it reaches the midpoint if management does not begin by tuning into the salesperson's perspective. "You might consider asking salespeople why they don't embrace it. Otherwise you get answers from sales managers and VPs who probably don't have a clue why sales folks resist using it," advised Jerry Edwards, who works in business development at **Dick Hannah Auto Group's** Portland, Ore. offices. "Well, they probably know but live in denial."

Edwards expanded, "It boils down to the sales force not liking accountability to a process usually focused on activity regardless of results or quality of information in the system. For example, it never ceases to amaze me how the top salesperson gets constant coaching because they don't make enough outbound **calls**. That is because the automated system requires the activity whether it is needed or not."

Sales Staffers Are Your Customers

Involving sales staff in the SFA-buying process is another important step in resolving SFA-implementation issues. "In reality, having managed two implementations as the internal sponsor, the way to convince [salespeople] to use the system is by having them involved in the design and implementation every step of the way," said Steve Willson, partner at **Panoptika Inc.**, a Toronto-based boutique consultancy that helps clients understand their customers' perspectives. "Look at them as the 'customers' for your product. Then it becomes a case of them buying, not you **selling**."

Wilson continued, "In the long run this approach is much less **costly** than having a system that no one wants and no one uses."

In the end, these types of revelations from the sales perspective will lead to the best solution for your SFA-adoption problem.

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