



Prescription for success in emerging markets

Common skill set unites Boston Scientific's fast-growing Emerging Markets sales force

BETTER PATIENT CARE

Boston Scientific's minimally invasive surgical products have earned the company an outstanding reputation among leading physicians and hospitals around the world. The company's mission is to improve the quality and delivery of patient care through reduced costs, shorter hospital stays, less trauma to the body and less likelihood of needing future treatment. In 1996, with 85 percent of the world's population in emerging markets countries, Boston Scientific embarked on a plan to develop a direct presence in widely dispersed, critical new markets. This was a challenging and ambitious undertaking, given the huge differences in languages, cultures and healthcare markets.

“We needed to establish a common language and bring continuity to our aggressive growth plans — quickly!” That’s how Alexander Zinke, director of strategy and market development, describes the situation facing Boston Scientific’s Emerging Markets operations in the fall of 1997.

“Our team is committed to establishing a leadership position for Boston Scientific in key emerging markets countries. In two years we hired nearly 200 sales and marketing employees in 20 countries on six continents, to expand our market share and increase the size of the markets for our products.”

Covering Canada and the major countries in the Asia Pacific, Latin America and Middle East/Africa regions, Emerging Markets had a tremendous opportunity. The first step was to transition from selling through local distributors to selling through its own direct sales force.

In an industry known for innovation and rapid technological change, the immediate challenge was to hire and train an international sales and marketing team made up of people from widely diverse ethnic and corporate cultures. Two years into the process, the Emerging Markets management team realized that it needed to do much more than product training to ensure a consistent approach to developing customers. What it needed was a common sales process that could be translated and adapted around the world.

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Boston Scientific—international sales

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Seeking a partner

Zinke and his team began looking for a solution that could be delivered in and adapted to a wide variety of languages and cultures—a solution that would extend beyond a single training event.

They needed a partner that could supply proven participation-oriented courses for marketing managers, staffs, sales representatives and their sales managers.

“The ability to provide local follow-up after the initial training was vital,” Zinke says. “We wanted to train people in their own language, with a program that was adapted to their culture. This meant not only

Professional Selling Skills (PSS) and Professional Sales Coaching (PSC) programs and adapted these to meet several specific needs:

- A selling strategy based on meeting customers’ needs rather than product “feature dumping”
- Shared product knowledge, focusing on key products
- An integrated sales and marketing approach to serving customers’ needs and developing long-term customer partnerships

Who to train

“We rely heavily on teamwork between sales and marketing as we develop a sales presence in new

the marketing people,” says Zinke.

“It is critical to prepare managers to coach and reinforce the skills and attitudes. The marketing connection is essential because if the marketing folks are not using the same language and approach as the sales force, it is much more difficult to build strong partnerships with our customers,” he adds. “We trained marketing people before the entire session so they could do the product training using the PSS framework. It enabled them to approach it from that mindset.”

An international initiative

To achieve these goals, Boston Scientific launched an integrated sales training and development initiative, beginning with a five-day global sales and marketing development meeting. The goal of this multilingual, multi-cultural event was to establish consistent expectations and provide initial course training that will be carried on in the local countries. The meeting, held in January 1998, was a significant leap of faith—and a sizeable investment in time, money and human resources.

A team of international trainers, flown in to California from the U.S., Mexico, Brazil, Korea and China, presented the three-day PSS

training in five languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and Mandarin). This was followed with two-day product knowledge training, using the newly learned needs satisfaction selling process, extensive role plays and case studies. Sales managers spent two additional days completing PSC and learning more effective ways to coach their teams in the new skills.

Even before the January 1998 meeting, marketing managers had participated in pre-training activities. This helped them prepare for their presentation of key product information, using the same process and language the salespeople were learning.

Respecting cultures

“Our purpose was to make the PSS training valuable for every participant, and we made a real effort to meet participants on their own terms. We didn’t want the message to be, ‘You’re part of a U.S. company; therefore, you will receive training in English and from U.S. instructors,’” explains Zinke.

As one might expect, there was some resistance to the initial training. For example, some participants from India and other countries had difficulty with the concept of asking probing questions. They said, “It’s not polite to ask



translating the words, but ensuring the approach would be appropriate for the local market.”

Boston Scientific selected AchieveGlobal as its long-term partner and together they developed a comprehensive training initiative based on the widely used

markets. Everyone has to know what the mission is for that country, and the PSS terminology, process and skill set has to be part of the fabric of what everyone does. We decided to provide the same skills and language for all of our sales representatives, their managers and

questions of a doctor who feels superior to a salesperson. Therefore, this module doesn't apply to us."

The trainer's answer? "Yes, it does apply to you. We're not saying you must walk into a sales call and go through a scripted set of questions. What you're learning is a process to develop a long-term business partnership with your customers. You can find questions that will work, and we'll work with you to make the appropriate modifications for your culture."

A year of follow-up

Equipped with skills and knowledge adapted to their markets, the salespeople returned to Latin America, Canada, the Middle East, Africa, Canada and several Asia Pacific countries to use their new selling skills. Throughout 1998, managers coached employees on how to sell key products. They created developmental action plans for themselves and for their sales representatives to do the same. Meanwhile, the international marketing managers attended a follow-up session focused on integrating the new selling concepts in new product launch packages.

The ongoing challenge was to develop a global partnership between Boston Scientific and AchieveGlobal to reach every country on a

regular basis. Dedicated local resources provided culturally specific, ongoing training, reinforcement and support, instilling a philosophy of needs satisfaction selling and a goal of long-term customer partnerships.

Follow-up sessions were delivered in 13 cities around the globe, in native languages. These locally focused sessions were conducted by facilitators from the January meeting and included skills mastery and product knowledge tests as well as role plays using real customer situations to improve the integration of product knowledge and the new selling process.

In the last quarter of 1998, coaching follow-up sessions for regional, country and local sales managers focused on evaluation and development of representatives, and conducting effective field visits.

The work done throughout 1998 enabled the 1999 Emerging Markets global sales and marketing meeting to take training to a new level. The meeting culminated a year of follow-up training, coaching and developmental action plans, and integrating the PSS process into product launch packages.

Participants were ready to demonstrate and fine-tune their selling skills and product knowledge through

role plays. In cases where people from different countries could both speak English, a Chinese sales representative might critique a Brazilian sales representative because they had the same knowledge of the process.

Results

What does Zinke see as the results of this initiative?

- Continued rapid sales growth averaging about 30 percent per year.
- Salespeople becoming solutions providers, problem solvers and partners—much better at asking questions to understand customer needs and the needs behind those needs.
- In several countries, especially in India, Canada, Korea and in Brazil, evidence that the PSS skill set has been a major contributor to continued revenue growth and market growth.
- Employees accepting role plays as a way of life, and demonstrating that the realistic practice has prepared them to better serve their customers.
- On the qualitative side, a common language for selling—PSS—has taken root. No more "feature dumping." Because the products are technical and innovative, people had tended to rely on their knowledge of features and

on relationships. If they knew a physician who bought Boston Scientific products, they would simply "tell" them about new products—very different from their current practice of consultatively selling to meet specific needs.

- Managers used to accompany the sales representative to a customer visit with a focus on helping to get the order. The groundwork has now been laid for them to focus more on developing their salespeople, not just getting business.
- Sales managers have developed a consistent coaching environment. They are required to meet with sales representatives to discuss development action plans once each quarter.

"We see the development of our sales and marketing skills as an ongoing process," Zinke concludes. "Top management commitment is critical to driving the sales process and sales and marketing teamwork on a daily basis. People are using and practicing the PSS skills. The most satisfying result is watching sales and marketing employees from India, Brazil, Australia, China and Canada developing their own skills and creating long-term customer partnerships based on a common process through PSS." ■