

Effective Selling Through Psychology: Dimensional Sales and Sales Management Strategies

Sales presentation skills and salesperson job performance

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to examine the relations between important sales presentation skills and salesperson job performance. **Design/methodology/approach** – Data on each construct in the model was gathered and the relations analyzed using LISREL software. **Findings** – Salesperson experience, and to a lesser degree training, underlie sales presentation skills. Salesperson skill at using adaptive selling techniques and closing are related with increased performance. **Research limitations/implications** – Additional sales skills need to be considered and salespeople other than those in the B-B environment should be studied. **Practical implications** – Sales managers are urged to ensure their B-B salespeople develop their skills in adaptive communication and closing as one means to improve sales performance. **Originality/value** – The findings highlight the importance of salesperson experience and training in developing the skills that contribute to sales performance.

Keywords Sales, Presentations, Sales management, Personal selling, Skills, Sales training

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Due to its vital importance to both the firm and to individual salespeople, improving sales performance is of great interest to both managers and researchers. Towards this end, sales managers often emphasize properly recruiting, training, and managing their salespeople, while sales researchers continue to focus their efforts on developing effective frameworks to explain and predict this most important of all salesperson job outcomes. For example, Walker *et al.*'s (1977, 1979) expectancy theory-based model was one of the earliest comprehensive efforts to describe sales performance. Weitz (1981) suggested a significantly different means to explain salesperson job performance in his contingency model that is based on salesperson and sales situation characteristics. While these two explanatory frameworks have inspired the greatest amount of subsequent research, other methods to explain sales performance, including Plank and Reid's (1994) hybrid model and Teas and McElroy's (1986) attribution-based theory, continue to be explored.

Churchill *et al.* (1985) note that while differing sales situations, market conditions, product types, etc., all likely affect which factors contribute to sales success, one of the most striking and important commonalities across differing explanations of salesperson job performance is the importance each ascribes to selling skill. It is interesting to note that while sales researchers have examined many of the relations

proposed by these models, the nature and role of selling skills and their relations with job performance remain ripe for extensive further investigation. The purpose of this paper is to improve our ability to explain salesperson job performance by more fully explicating the nature and relative effects of a set of specific sales presentation skills that sales managers perceive to be highly important. First, this set of specific sales presentation skills along with two salesperson characteristics that potentially underlie these skills is described. Next, the complete hypothesized model describing the relations between the characteristics, skills, and job performance is introduced and the method used to analyze it is explained. Lastly, the results of the analysis and their implications for both managers and researchers are presented.

The hypothesized model

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relations among salesperson characteristics, sales presentation skills, and job performance. In this model, two characteristics of the salesperson (i.e. years of selling experience and quality of the sales training he/she has received) are held to be positively associated with each of the important sales presentation skills. The sales presentation skills used in the model consists of the salesperson's skill at using active listening, adaptive selling behaviors, handling customer objections, closing sales transactions, negotiating with customers, and identifying potential prospects. In turn, each of the presentation skills is hypothesized to be positively associated with sales job performance.

Antecedents to sales presentation skills

The hypothesized model contains two salesperson characteristics that may potentially underlie the entire set of sales presentation skills: amount of selling experience and the quality of sales training received. In describing the differences

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at www.emeraldinsight.com/0885-8624.htm



Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing
21/9 (2006) 311-319
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited ISSN 0885-8624
DOI: 10.1108/08858620610681414

311

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