

Get Your Sales Team to Work Smarter (Not Harder)

Selling Power Editors

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For sales leaders, problems are opportunities for improvement. But many sales leaders don't spend enough time drilling into the sales force's everyday activities to identify (and discourage) those activities that aren't productive.

[Sales Force Activity Snapshot \(SFAS\)](#), designed by global sales and marketing consulting firm ZS Associates, is one tool that is helping sales leaders do just that.

Consider the case of a leading player in the agricultural industry: the challenge for this organization was to drive sales effectiveness in the United States and such global territories as Russia, Spain, Canada, Brazil, and southeast Asia. ZS Associates embarked on a long-term consulting engagement to provide a holistic strategy encompassing all areas of the sales force, including territory and compensation-plan design, sales operations, sales strategy, and customer engagement. As part of this initiative, ZS Associates leveraged SFAS to gain insight into where and how salespeople were spending their time.

The results? ZS Associates found that the sales organization was investing too much time in building forecasts. "It was as bad as I've ever seen," says Brian Chapman, a principal at ZS Associates. "Some of it was related to the seasonal nature of their business, but most of it seemed to be related to the processes they had in place."

While it's true that businesses in the agricultural arena must contend with unpredictable weather and long, slow-moving supply chains, burdening the sales force with administrative work in the name of gathering forecasting data had two consequences. First, field reps weren't spending enough time in the field selling and engaging customers. (According to Chapman, who has spent 10 years consulting with hundreds of sales organizations for ZS Associates, the amount of actual selling time the sales force clocked was "frighteningly low.") Second, sales managers were spending almost no time coaching salespeople and helping them prioritize their selling activities.

What were reps and managers spending their time on instead? Like many sales organizations, meetings were eating up precious selling time. “For example, [this agricultural company’s] sales team in Vietnam had a unique channel structure, and partners were spending inordinate amounts of time coordinating with distributors,” Chapman says. “They just have a culture in which they pull people out of the field and get together frequently for small meetings in groups of about ten to strategize. It was pervasive and added up to death by meetings.”

Another major issue was that salespeople were responsible for internal administrative activities related to shipping and price quotes. “They pushed all that onto salespeople because they didn’t have a dedicated team or person to call,” says Chapman. “So you end up with a lack of centralized support, which leads to a lot of reliance on people who have simply been around for a long time and have tribal knowledge about such things as how to move a pallet from here to there, or what to do when a price quote isn’t showing up as approved in CRM. That was an unnecessary burden on people who should be in the field with customers instead of in an office.”

While fixing such challenges can be complex, gaining ground-level insight is an important first step. If you want to start seeing better results, it pays to perform some kind of performance audit at routine intervals. Armed with such insight, sales leaders can put their organization on the path to greater effectiveness and work smarter – not harder.

Learn more about how the [Sales Force Activity Snapshot \(SFAS\)](#) can help your organization.