

Say no to sloppy selling

GRAHAM FRENCH explains why you should take time to review your sales process



When the going gets tough, it has been said more than once, the tough get going. Doing more of the same, however, isn't necessarily going to enable you to blast those revenue targets away.

Work harder... sure, but working smarter will provide a greater payoff. There's still too much sloppy selling going on: salespeople not preparing properly for meetings, poor qualification of opportunities, and lack of understanding of the decision process. 'Winging it' may have been sufficient in the good times, but sloppy selling is a killer now.

Sales chiefs should look for ways to cut out non-productive selling effort and sloppiness in the way their people sell. Allowing salespeople to do it their way, simply because they are comfortable doing it, isn't sensible in a deep downturn — especially if you can prove to them there's a better way to sell.

Stop doing what doesn't work

What some managers have done in changing the way they sell has delivered a payback. According to the sales VP of one CRM software company: "We doubled our win rate by modifying the way we sell."

This involved a strict adherence to a sales process that focuses on using tactics that have been proven to work for them. So, find out what works for your team and do more of it. Stop doing what doesn't pay off.

Let's be specific. The CRM software vendor examined the sales tactics it had been using. These included writing introductory letters to appropriate 'C-level' executives, conducting free workshops, offering trials of its software, doing customised — as opposed to generic — demonstrations, and conducting in-depth surveys of the prospect's needs, prior to making a proposal.

Stalled deals always the biggest percentage

The firm started by looking at all opportunities that had

been forecast to close over the previous six months. Analysis showed that it had successfully closed 28% of them and had lost 10% to the competition. But the majority (60%) were stalled or 'no decision yet'. It began to see 'no decision' as its biggest competitor.

Even allowing for being caught in a worsening recession, with deals being put on hold or cancelled, the fact that so many of the opportunities were stalled pointed to the need for much better qualification of opportunities. How many of those stalled deals were never likely to close, yet had received lavish time and resources from the vendor?

Winning tactics

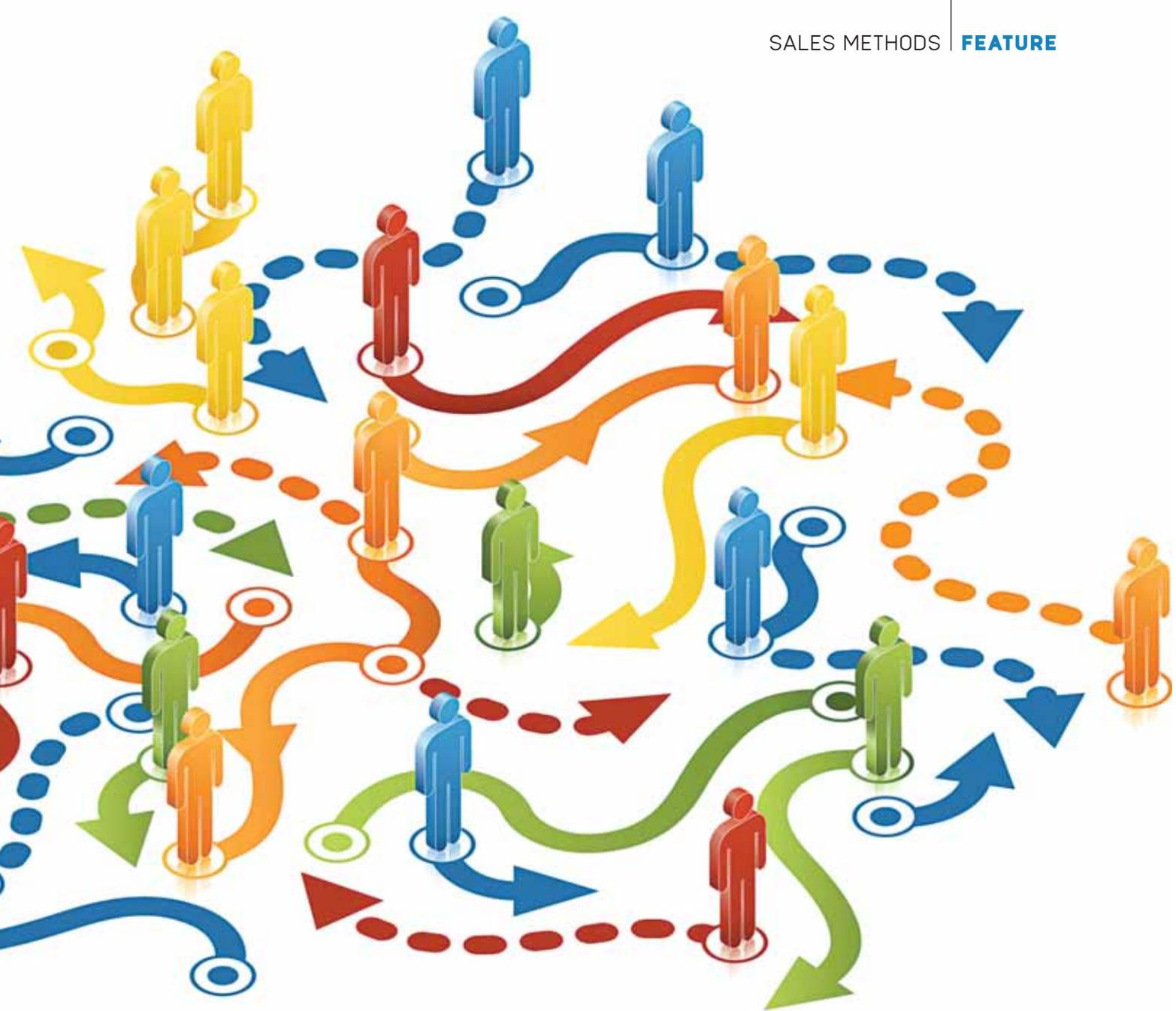
The CRM company analysed the tactics it had deployed in the opportunities it had forecast to close. The results showed that in 70% of wins it had carried out a workshop with the prospect's organisation. Trials of the software also featured highly as did, in descending order, customised demos, surveys, inviting senior executives to its HQ to build a face-to-face relationship and visits to reference sites.

Frequency of use

You would imagine that, since these selling tactics were so obviously linked to success in closing, they would have been extensively used. Not so. It turned out that the tactics most highly correlated with success were, in fact, relatively rarely used.

Workshops and trials — activities strongly associated with wins — had been used in fewer than 10% of the opportunities. Customised demos had been used in fewer than 40% of cases. HQ visits had also been used in only about 10% of cases.

You may think that this isn't surprising. Workshops and



trials, for example, may not be routinely used because they take up huge amounts of scarce pre-sales resources.

Back the winners

But if they work, why wouldn't you want to do more of them? Why not devote scarce sales and pre-sales time and energy to well-qualified prospects that are willing to work with you on exercises like these? And cut out or reduce the time you spend with those 'prospects' that won't commit their time?.

Another vendor looked at the success rate of one tactic — the inclusion in its selling process of senior executives from the prospect's organisation. It found that involving both senior IT executives and senior user-department executives was a factor in 75% of wins. Yet this tactic was deployed in the sales process in fewer than 20% of the opportunities it forecast to close.

Will these selling tactics work for you?

Possibly not, so not every company should adopt these tactics. But they worked for these particular companies. The trick is to identify specifically what has worked for



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you — and what has not worked so well — and act on the information. Taking the time to examine which activities are highly correlated to success will pay off.

Prove what works best to the sales team

Discover the facts and present them to the sales team. Because it's not opinion or theory, but factual research about what has actually worked for you, your salespeople will be more likely to sit up and take notice. It is the best way to encourage everyone to focus their energies on using winning tactics.

Doing this kind of analysis will take some investment of management time. And perhaps you won't double your win rate. But looking for ways to improve it has got to be the smart thing to do.

One thing is for sure. Employing the wrong tactics — those that can be proven not to correlate with winning deals for your company, is a mug's game. ■

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