

In Practice
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BellSouth Business Technical Training Transformation

by Jill Sutton

The BellSouth Business Training and Development Organization is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive training plan for 1200 large business telecommunications salespersons and technical specialists. The sellers operate across nine different states and are responsible for revenue growth of 3.5 billion per year. Since BellSouth is one of the leading players in the telecommunications industry, it is critical that the BellSouth sales professionals possess the skills and competencies to compete effectively in the ever-changing high tech telecommunications industry.

Need for Change

Historically, BellSouth has offered their new employees and incumbent employees a comprehensive training curriculum consisting of sales skills and technology training, provided in an instructor-led format.

However, due to the constant changes in the telecommunications industry, and the need for the sellers to stay up to speed on new technologies, changing competitors, and updates to products and services, the training curriculum needed to be more flexible than ever, with just-in-time capabilities that allowed for constant modifications and updates.

Also, the Large Business organization consolidated and changed its basic selling structure so that the majority of salespeople would no longer be specialists, but would be responsible for selling across all lines of the business, including network, equipment, and long distance. It was obvious that a shift had to take place in the way the technical training was formatted in order to provide the sales force with the information they needed, when they needed it.

The Transformation: Quantum Leap

In order to do this, the Training Organization completely transformed

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the core technology-training curriculum for the sales professionals. The former program, called "Data Leap," involved about nine weeks in the classroom and covered only general technology, not specifics about BellSouth products and services.

The newly designed curriculum, now called "Quantum Leap," is a blended model that includes e-learning courses, generic and BellSouth-specific courses, and an option for sales professionals to test out of the classroom component, increasing their time in the field to drive revenue. With the new format, in order to gain certification of the new technical curriculum, the sellers/students can either pass the assessment to validate their competencies and qualifications to represent the BellSouth products, or they can complete the e-learning primer and an abbreviated classroom module.

The new Quantum Leap curriculum is also modularized into the following key four key compartments: Network, Voice CPE, Data CPE and IP Services. This modular format allows learners to test out of modules where they already have expertise. This new structure allows them to focus on the key categories they need to learn first to get up to speed in their current jobs.

Once sales professionals are "Quantum Leap Certified," they should possess an application level mastery of all of BellSouth's key products and services. The new "Quantum Leap" curriculum also gives the student the opportunity to compare and contrast each of these product sets as well as analyze the competitive environment.

The Curriculum

In the classroom, competencies are demonstrated through role-plays and simulations, culminating in comprehensive casework. Discussions are geared toward providing solutions to customer business problems by assessing and qualifying the client environments, then recommending the appropriate BellSouth solution.

The e-learning courses familiarize the sales professional with fundamentals of data networking, internetworking, security, and wireless data technologies. E-Learning courses are also offered in basic Cisco topics in order to build skills that develop an understanding of the various network architectures a seller might encounter.

We have also developed a second Quantum Leap track to take identified students to a "higher degree" of proficiency on various technological applications. This track has two paths, one for the salesperson and one for the technical specialist job.

Business Results

Here is an example in terms of savings and productivity gains with 50 new hires with the new "Quantum Leap" curricula compared to the prior model:

Former Program, Data Leap Curriculum (classroom-only)

- 45 days of classroom x 50 new hires = 2,250 selling days
- \$1.5 M Quota/Rep (on average)
- 250 selling days/year = \$6,000/day in quota
- 2,250 days x \$6,000 / day = \$13.5M opportunity cost

Redesigned program, Quantum Leap (blended model):

- 18 days of classroom x 50 new hires = 900 selling days
- 3.75 days of e-learning X 50 sellers = 187.5 selling days
- Total selling days = 1,087.5
- \$6,000 day in quota x 1,087.5 = \$6.5 M opportunity cost

**Savings: \$7M/yr in opportunity costs,
Gain of 1,162.5 selling days,
Reduced travel costs of \$100,000**

A New Learning Culture

To achieve this much needed technical training redesign, the training team not only had to redesign the content, methodology and delivery mechanism of this training, but also had to address deeply rooted cultural barriers against e-learning with a multifaceted marketing campaign and build advocacy among the sales management. By doing this, not only did we streamline the training and improve proficiency, but we also helped to create a learning culture that is more accountable, flexible, and cost-effective. Definitely a "Quantum Leap"!

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