

through the paces

Simulation can help evaluate sales applicants and current employees

SELLING SKILLS determine the performance of your sales force. Typically, only the top 20% of any sales force is highly skilled and carries the entire organization. Even a modest improvement in the number of highly skilled sales reps can substantially boost company's revenues.

The level of selling skill is a critical consideration when hiring and training. Hiring highly skilled sales reps can generate several times the volume of low or mediocre skilled reps. Knowing the level of selling skill when training allows sales managers and trainers to maximize the value of their training dollar.

With the advent of video over the Internet, sales managers are now turning to computer-based simulations to help evaluate selling skills of their applicants and assess the training needs of their sales employees.

HOW DO SIMULATIONS WORK?

A flight simulator presents a pilot with a number of challenging situations in which a wrong decision can have disastrous consequences. Sales simulations operate in a similar manner. However, instead of trying to land a plane in a snowstorm, the sales rep must handle customer complaints and objections, make cold calls, tell customers something they do not want to hear, and most importantly, close the sale. All these real life situations are critical to the success of any sales rep, no matter what industry they work in or how large the customer.

Dr. Charles Handler, an expert in online assessments and the author of a recent review of online assessment tools (www.rocket-hire.com), says, "Simulation tools, such as the Sales Simulator(tm), are one of the most effective tools for measuring sales skills and predicting sales job performance."

A typical simulation will present the sales rep with 15 to 20 scenarios via video. At a critical point during the scenario, the video will stop and sales reps will be presented with a set of responses and asked to identify the best and worst among them.

HOW THEY CAN HELP YOU

Sales managers are integrating simulations into their hiring practices to ensure that the time they spend interviewing leads to hiring top performers.

In a slow economy, a job posting attracts hundreds of applicants. Instead of spending valuable time sorting through a pile of resumes, companies are now asking candidates to take a simulation. Because the simulation is available on the Internet 24/7, applicants can take it anywhere and at anytime.

The results of the simulations are stored in an online database where they can be sorted and ranked by score. From a pool of hundreds of candidates with unknown and differing



By Igor Kotlyar, Ph.D

levels of skill, the simulator instantly identifies the top performers and creates a "hot list" of applicants.

The benefits of simulation do not end there. The simulation can also create an interview guide that assists sales managers in asking the right questions. For example, if the report shows that a candidate has weak closing skills, the simulation will create a list of questions that will allow the interviewer uncover skill gaps in that area.

NOT JUST FOR HIRING

Simulations work just as well for training your existing staff as they do for your new hires. The same simulation that helped you choose your new sales rep will also tell you how you should train them. Since the simulation provides a report of their strengths and weaknesses, you can target their training on the areas where it is needed most.

Keith Church, of Prudential, uses an online simulation to identify the most promising agents and to pinpoint their training needs "The report gives us a snapshot of their skills," says Church, "Once we know the weak areas, we sit down and establish a plan for improvement."

By using simulations to hire top performers and developing the skills of existing staff, sales managers can double or triple the number of top performing sales reps in their organization, directly impacting the bottom line.

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