



Product Training for Salespeople: Oddly, It's Not about the Product!

Overview

This Frogkick *Green Paper* explores Product Training for sales personnel from these three perspectives:

- [If It's Not About the Product, What Is It About?](#)
 - ["Watch the Donut, Not the Hole"](#)
 - [The Three Best Practices to Ensure Success](#)
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If It's Not About the Product, What Is It About?

From the elaborate new product launch, to the quick refresher for a seasoned sales force, the story is all too often the same. An expert Product Manager delivers an all-inclusive presentation of the multiple features that clearly show (in mind numbing detail) why this product is superior and special. *But the sales results needle never registers a blip!*

Why is that?

Because your sales team takes this product-centric view unloads it onto their customers... spraying content without any consultative exploration of needs.

It may seem paradoxical, but the most effective Product Training is *not* about the product. In fact, *the most successful way to introduce (or reinforce) a product or service is in the context of how that capability will be used by your customers to solve their specific problems.*



“Watch the Donut, Not the Hole”

As the classic Burl Ives song advises, our goal for effective Product Training must focus on what matters.

Too often the internally focused view uses product training as an attempt to bring participants to the same level of comprehensive technical expertise that the Product Manager has cultivated.

To the contrary, your Product Training should be focused on ensuring that your sales teams learn how to sell the product effectively, and that means:

- Uncovering the customer business needs that the product addresses
- Identifying how the product meets those needs
- Communicating the associated value delivery in customer-centric terms
- Evaluating an opportunity and formulating an appropriate sales strategy, including:
 - » Target customers
 - » Qualifying criteria
 - » Sales process
 - » Market messages
- Demonstrating an understanding of “where to locate” and “how to use” internal sales support resources, including:
 - » Knowledge assets
 - » Marketing collateral
 - » Internal expertise and SMEs (subject-matter experts)



The Three Best Practices to Ensure Success

There are three “best practices” that will ensure successful Product Training:

1. Choose Content Carefully
2. Organize by Modeling the Process
3. Emphasize Application

Let's look at each of these individually...

1. Choose Content Carefully



Every single content point must be individually evaluated and grouped into one of the three buckets that Elliott Masie proposes for knowledge storage:¹

- **Memorize**
- **Familiarize**
- **Reference**

At the tip of the iceberg, the very smallest bucket is likely to be the “memorize” category. Here you would include only the most critical elements that must be learned by rote, such as: primary business needs addressed, key qualifying criteria, market messages, product category differentiation, etc.

A bit larger, but still relatively small, is the information that user's should have “familiarity” with. This would include content such as breadth of available customization opportunities, framework of the customer's business case, etc.

¹ <http://www.masie.com/masie/default.cfm?trends=348&page=trendsdisplay>



By volume, the vast majority of your information is likely to be “reference” in nature. For this information you want your audience to know two things, and two things only:

- What is available
- Where it is available

Frankly, this type of content (such as detailed product features or technical specifications) is rarely absorbed and even less frequently retained. There is literally nothing to be gained (and precious time and learner energy to be wasted) when presenting reference content within your Product Training program.

By design, your training strategy should allocate the amount of time spent on each knowledge category as a direct inverse of the volume of content contained in each bucket. That is:

- The bucket with the least content (memorization) receives the greatest amount of time and emphasis in your program
- While the bucket with the greatest volume (reference) is addressed with the “what” and “where” but no time is spent on the actual content itself

2. Organize by Modeling the Process

We recommend that all content be organized and delivered in the context of how you want that information to be used. Since your sales team will be responsible for identifying opportunities, communicating solution value, and closing business, it's best to structure the information to support the world they live in day-to-day.



For example, you might organize Product Training content into modules that:

- Map the customer business problems and opportunities that the product addresses
- Communicate the value delivered by the product (from your customer's perspective)
- Provide a clear understanding of competitors as well as their relative strengths and weaknesses
- Deliver go-to-market support
 - » Customer presentations
 - » Marketing collateral
 - » Proposal shells
 - » Financial models (pricing and value delivery)
- Present high-level models for key processes:
 - » Sales cycle
 - » Post-sale implementation

3. Emphasize Application

Adult learners learn by doing and that means providing a safe environment where they can process the new product information, incorporate it into their sales strategies and test alternatives.

Your objective is to design and deliver a learning experience that goes beyond providing information to focus on field application, including:

- Model behaviors
- Standards of excellence
- Skills Practice (with coaching) that uses the new resources



As a guideline, the relationship between “information” and “model-practice-application” may be as much as 20%/80% in relative emphasis.

In the context of Product Training, some appropriate applications exercises might ask participants to:

- Identify appropriate prospects
- Generate question sets that:
 - » Determine if business problems exist
 - » Help customer prioritize those problems
 - » Ensure that the customer is a qualified opportunity
- Anticipate and answer typical objections
- Generate and answer FAQs

For more information on how
you can make the most of your Product Training,
please call 732-897-8800
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*We'd be happy to provide a free needs analysis
to help you get started!*