

Sold on a philosophy that wins sales

Rob Barham, of Tack International, tells **Andrew Cave** of his winning ways with customers

MYBESTDEAL

SALES trainers teach that in order to sell, professionals need to research and understand the needs of the client they're targeting but how many sales people actually put this into practice?

Rob Barham has little excuse not to since he is chief executive of Tack International, a global sales training and management consultancy with clients including BT, Royal Bank of Scotland and Shell Oil.

His best deal illustrates his philosophy that understanding a customer's needs is paramount to securing sales. It's also a story that starts and ends with his current employer.

Barham, 45, worked as a door-to-door carpet-cleaning salesman after leaving college, and then joined parcels group DHL.

"DHL used Tack as a sales training provider and a lot of my early influences were shaped by the Tack philosophy," he says.

"I was appointed to sell to small banks and financial institutions but the person dealing with larger companies resigned a couple of months after I joined and they asked me to pick up his responsibilities.

"So at the age of 24, I was dealing with the likes of Midland Bank, Chase Manhattan and Citibank. It was a little bit scary."

Barham's work involved managing the international pick-up, sorting and delivery of travellers' cheques for Midland Bank, which was later taken over by HSBC. And he used the principles he was taught by Tack.



Rob Barham says sales people should always be on the lookout for opportunities to help their customers grow their business

"Their philosophy was that you have to really understand your customer's business and always be thinking around problems and working out how to serve the customer better," he says.

He put this into practice at Midland's travellers' cheque operation for the tourist market in Spain, where Midland competed heavily with Barclays for the clearing of travellers' cheques cashed at Spanish banks.

"Barclays used Securicor and Midland used us,"

Barham recalls. "They were shipping travellers' cheques back to the UK.

"I once picked up the customer at 3am and drove him to the DHL sorting centre and together we sorted some of the large volume of his own shipments.

"This helped him understand the huge effort that went on behind the scenes and dispelled any concerns about the speediness of his shipments."

It also helped Barham come up with a suggestion.

He noticed that cheques were taking a long time to be sent by regional Spanish banks to Madrid, where they were picked up by DHL and shipped back to the UK.

"They were taking an awfully long time to get to Madrid," he says.

"By talking to my customer, I knew he had a personal interest in looking for business improvements beyond his own logistics operation.

"I suggested a change to pick-up the cheques direct from the resort towns rather

than the main office. As this meant more locations it was a more expensive way of collecting the cheques, but the upside was they saved the three to five days it took to post the cheques to the main office.

"The extra interest they earned by depositing the cheques earlier far outweighed the extra cost of the service."

"You got about 600-700 travellers' cheques to the kilo and they had an average face value of £80," he says.

"You can work out the

interest and the benefit from getting the cheques earlier.

"As a result of this new service, Midland won more business from continental banks and, as its travellers' cheques courier, DHL benefited too.

"It did not make a jot of difference to the volume of transactions between Midland and the Spanish banks it was dealing with.

"It gave DHL a real foothold in these businesses and I started looking at doing the same for ski resorts in the winter months."

Barham went on to run his own sales and marketing business and then served as sales and marketing director of a packaging business before getting an opportunity three years ago to join the staff of Tack, the company that had inspired his sales philosophy.

"I joined as sales director and nine months later I became chief executive," he says.

"I have always believed in Tack's sales philosophy. Sales people should think about their part in building the company's credibility as a whole.

"Your customer is more than one person. Collectively they have regular contact with other people and departments within your business other than sales.

"Make a point of sharing and exchanging the knowledge you have of the customer with the other departments to create better opportunities of winning the respect of your customer. And always be on the lookout for opportunities to help your customers grow their business."

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