

CASE STUDY

ABB AND MERCURI INTERNATIONAL

- BRINGING VALUE BASED SELLING TO THE WORLD



ABOUT ABB

ABB is a technology leader that is driving the digital transformation of industries. With a history of innovation spanning more than 130 years, ABB has four customer-focused, globally leading businesses: Electrification, Industrial Automation, Motion, and Robotics & Discrete Automation, supported by the ABB Ability™ digital platform. ABB operates in more than 100 countries with roughly 147,000 employees.

We spoke to Bérengère Dio and Allan Mitchell from ABB's Electrification Academy to discuss the innovative steps they've taken to revolutionize their sales employees' performance and their choice of Mercuri International as a training partner.

100 MARKETS – 1 CHALLENGE

With such a large, diverse company, operating across numerous industries, the primary challenge was as follows: how to deploy a training program that was globally coherent and comprehensive while respecting the differences in each region and specific industry segment?

“Each country had the opportunity to customize the VBS workshop with the support of Mercuri’s local consultant who would select, for example, appropriate use cases relevant to the daily work of their sales people.”

- Bérengère Dio, Global Training Manager

To meet this challenge ABB founded EL Academy, centralizing training protocols into a single unit that could then oversee programs worldwide. Aware of evolving trends in sales training in particular, the decision was made to move from a product-centric approach to a customer-centric one, leveraging ABB's industry expertise while acknowledging the need to actively *listen* to the customer, assessing their needs and creating bespoke solutions, rather than relying solely upon technical superiority.

“Before partnering with Mercuri we didn’t have a standardized approach - our sales people were focusing their negotiations on the quality and technical specifics of our offering - we wanted to open our minds and base negotiations on broader aspects...”

- Bérengère Dio, Global Training Manager

Prior to the academy's foundation each division of the company had been making its own training choices, often choosing local providers with little coordination or global corporate consistency. If ABB was to have a sales approach that continued to match the quality of its products and services then this needed to change.

Allan Mitchell, head of the academy, explains the thinking as follows:

“EL decided to completely restructure the sales force, pulling the sales teams out of the four or five business lines and putting them into an integrated Global Marketing and Sales Team under a single head.”

- Allan Mitchell, Global Head

ELECTRICITY – IT’S ALL ABOUT RESISTANCE

Training, of any kind, is a balancing act. ABB's sales teams were experienced, hugely knowledgeable product experts - with that experience comes a degree of resistance to change. For the training academy to be successful it needed to introduce new ideas in a format that the sales engineers found engaging and useful, delivered by trainers with credibility and understanding of their industry.

The existing sales approach was fairly traditional and linear, focusing very much on technical aspects of the products, acquiring as many leads as possible and then pushing the portfolio. For Sales to evolve, teams needed to be trained to think from an entirely different perspective.

“We tended to see ourselves as the expert in the room, but actually customers also want us to demonstrate that we understand their world - that we can listen to their challenges.”

- Allan Mitchell, Global Head

A UNIFIED PHILOSOPHY

When deciding upon a single, unified sales training program, the academy looked for one which matched the customer-centric philosophy. Value Based Selling (VBS) was a perfect match. The idea behind VBS is relatively simple - the value of a product or service to the customer is determined not by its price, but by the extra value that it brings to a company's operations. The formula is straightforward - BENEFIT minus PRICE = VALUE. In other words, a comparatively expensive product, if it can be proven to produce benefits for the customer - tangible or intangible - is better value than a less expensive one, if those benefits are greater.

VBS is all about understanding the customer's needs and then offering a solution that provides them with the maximum benefit. It requires more than just understanding the benefits of a product or service - it means understanding the benefits to the individual customer. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach - it demands that sales teams are trained to properly and in detail analyze the potential customer's specific situation. Only then do they bring their product portfolio expertise to bear, selling the customer what they *need* - not just the item that the sales teams wish to sell.

“VBS doesn't just address the core sales activity - it's really in everything we do. We've tried to make sales teams much more customer and solution focused.”

- Allan Mitchell, Global Head

When ABB initially began their search for a VBS training partner 3 years ago, they needed to find a company that matched their requirements. Searching for a balance between global messaging and regional understanding, Mercuri International was the logical choice. With consultants operating in over fifty countries, Mercuri had the scale to roll out training programs in all the target regions (as EL had ramped the deployment up considerably since 2018), with experts on the ground who could apply their local and industry expertise.

**BENEFIT minus PRICE
= VALUE**

Crucial in this process were the trainers themselves – with extensive B2B sales experience, Mercuri's trainers had the professional credibility to engage with ABB's sales teams, understanding their daily workload and challenges. The mutual respect between trainer and trainee was a major factor in overcoming resistance to changing years of traditional sales habits.



MODULAR, FLEXIBLE – AND RELEVANT

Mercuri proposed a seven-month certification course for ABB's sales specialists, a program carefully designed to work around the sales teams' workload, taking care to minimize the amount of time that they'd be taken away from their primary purpose - that of engaging with customers.

The program emphasized modular e-learning, with the bulk of the training consisting of either webinars (with a maximum time of around an hour) or digital training modules of roughly 20 minutes. By breaking the training up into shorter, bite-sized chunks, the sales teams could learn without interruption to their jobs - crucial if it were to be an ongoing process.

The training content was specifically developed for ABB, with real-world, industry-specific scenarios and content. Three days of face-to-face roleplaying leveraged all of the knowledge that ABB's sales teams acquired, allowing them to demonstrate that they'd absorbed the information and were able to deploy it in the real world.

"It's not about pushing product, it's about really taking the VBS thinking and asking critical questions, bringing in knowledge from similar situations and really listening to the customers. And that is something that VBS hits square on. So it's been really perfect."

- Allan Mitchell, Global Head

In addition, ongoing monitoring and coaching were critical in ensuring that the sales teams were taking these new skills on board. They were encouraged to write mini case studies, where they could demonstrate how they'd used VBS techniques to close a sale, increase market share, or increase customer satisfaction. The program was dynamic, evolving to meet individual needs and ensure that everyone could progress at a pace and in a manner that suited them. A further strength of the program was that it was not just for sales specialists - it also involved the sales managers, coaching them in the most effective ways to apply VBS methodology.



£1m

“Did £1m in Q1 2018
- My best ever...”

£350k

“Secured 3 major
projects of £350k...”

95%

“Got 95% of their
business...”

£150k

“Achieved full specification
for £150k of business...”

AND THE RESULT?

For a training program to be successful it has to be engaging - it has to inspire trainees with practical skills that keep them coming back, eager to learn. By providing content that was exactly aligned with the recipients' real-world roles, Mercuri helped ABB to generate a genuine sense of progress and accomplishment - sales teams could actively see and feel the benefit of the new skills they were acquiring.

“One of the biggest strengths of Mercuri is their flexibility and their ability to adapt - that's something that not all training providers possess.”

- Bérengère Dio, Global Training Manager

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants in the program registering an average NPS score of 65. Word of mouth approval has helped overcome any initial resistance from experienced sales engineers to 'being retrained', with sales teams noticing tangible, demonstrable benefits in terms of conversion, market share, and size of deal.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

Indeed, the VBS training that ABB has initiated for sales and marketing teams has proved so popular and successful that there are plans to roll out the program to other areas of the company, with sales support staff the next to benefit. ABB's Allan Mitchell has noticed that the program has had a much more profound impact than he'd initially anticipated:

“The journey with Mercuri has complemented our whole organizational thinking, as we move from being a product expert to fulfilling our Solutions strategy.”

- Allan Mitchell, Global Head

And the experience of partnering with Mercuri International?:



“Mercuri always brings the guaranteed B2B sales credibility and challenge ABB requires to help raise our solution and Value Based Selling skills to world-class, be it in Bangalore or Beijing, Coventry or Cairo.” - Allan Mitchell, Global Head

If you'd like to learn more about Mercuri International's VBS training, why not visit mercuri.net