



MERCURI INTERNATIONAL

Celemi and Mercuri International

Improving Value Based Selling

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– Bernie Macht, a Regional Sales Director for ACL

Talk business finance with financial professionals

When you sell data audit analytic solutions to financial professionals at some of the world’s leading organizations, you better have a handle on basic business finance.

Such is the case at ACL Services, Ltd., the leading global provider of audit analytic technology, which has an impressive list of clients: 70 percent of Fortune 500 companies, 75 percent of the Global 500, all of the Big Four public accounting firms, as well as hundreds of local, state and national governments. Although they sell directly to financial executives, compliance professionals and auditors, members of ACL’s global sales force do not always have a financial background.

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We mainly spoke to Ms. Darnbrough, Learning and Development Manager for ACL to discuss how the innovative Celemi Apples & Oranges hands on experience, has challenged teams of participants to improve the financial position of a simulated company by carrying out a variety of financial and strategic assignments.

“The overall feedback from the session,” she says, “was that Apples & Oranges not only helped the Sales Teams in their job but also helped them gain a better understanding of ‘finance-speak’. The ACL Sales Team is a tough group to impress, as they normally don’t like any training, but Apples & Oranges introduced them to the joy in learning and helped them see training differently.”

– Ms. Darnbrough, Learning and Development Manager





According to Ms. Darnbrough, Learning and Development Manager for ACL, there were some prevailing financial misconceptions among the sales force in general. “Sales professionals sometimes see themselves as revenue generators only, not as overhead. Therefore, many of them are quick to discount products and services. So, it was important to make my team aware of the difference between price-based selling and value-selling – the latter giving our clients more reasons to purchase our products.”

“I knew they wanted to change the mindset of the sales force, and that’s a difficult task,” says Mr. Edmondson. “ACL needed a way to make a lasting impression so everyone would clearly understand the difference between price-based selling and value-based selling. The best way to change a mindset is through personal experience, and Celemi Apples & Oranges was the best way to do that.”

– Mr Edmondson, JTe Management, Inc

The proposed solution and the action plan

To remedy the situation, Ms. Darnbrough investigated a variety of financial training options, but wanted to steer clear of the traditional classroom-style, PowerPoint-based solutions “This is a difficult group to engage,” she says. “In the past, trainers have remarked that our sales people were always taking calls during training sessions and would frequently leave early for pre-arranged client meetings.”

The solution ACL ultimately hit upon was introduced to them by training consultant John Edmondson of JTe Management, Inc. He provided a demonstration of Celemi Apples & Oranges, a hands on experience that challenges teams of participants to improve the financial position of a simulated company by carrying out a variety of financial and strategic assignments.

Ms. Darnbrough invited 28 of the company's experienced sales reps to participate in the business simulation at the conclusion of a three-day global training event. "It was a way to ensure an upbeat ending to the Sales Kick Off and the start of "new" training initiatives at ACL she recalls.

"You're fired!"

On that final morning, the ACL sales reps were assigned to one of six different teams, and grouped with colleagues from around the world. Working together over a Celemi WorkMat™ — a poster size game board that visually illustrates the flow of cash through a company — they took on the challenge: maximize productivity and increase profitability in just three simulated periods or "years."

The participants quickly learned to assess different business opportunities, carry out strategic actions and then complete a P&L statement, pay taxes, balance the books and track new equity over the course of each simulated year.

Ms. Darnbrough recalls hearing about how one participant, who was so thoroughly engaged with the Apples & Oranges experience, shouted out, "You're fired! You haven't balanced the books again!" Says Ms. Darnbrough: "They were so caught up in the simulation, in this case managing their company, that they actually wanted to fire a person from their group."

One participant described Celemi Apples & Oranges as a "petri dish" for studying financial concepts. "This isn't a lecture. We had the opportunity to watch the impact of financial decisions happen before our very eyes," noted Bernie Macht, a Regional Sales Director for ACL. "The simulation showed us how a change in one part of the organization would have a trickle-down effect, or even an explosive effect, elsewhere in the organization."

Mr. Macht continues he and his sales team have picked up some of the language from the simulation and used it in conversations with clients. "They see a greater value in what we are offering when we describe our services in terms of helping them make a positive financial impact in their own organization."

"We've a win"

Ms. Darnbrough says that Celemi Apples & Oranges gave everyone a new appreciation for value-based selling and, at the same time, strengthened their financial acumen.

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What is Apples & Oranges? Celemi Apples & Oranges is one of the most popular business simulations in the world. It has been translated into 18 different languages and is used by all types of manufacturing, service, knowledge and distribution companies to help their employees understand the basics of business finance and how to create more value for their organization. It's a fun, fast-paced one-day experience during which participants make decisions to achieve maximum productivity and profitability for a simulated company. They monitor cash flow, fill out income sheets and balance statements and assess how resources will be best used – while facing pressure from suppliers, customers and competitors.

“Actually, I knew that we had a win when it was noted that the sales teams stayed through the entire session and not a call was taken” she remarks.

– Ms. Darnbrough, Learning and Development Manager for ACL

Looking back over the six months since ACL first ran Apples & Oranges, Ms. Darnbrough says that the experience opened the door for introducing other creative and interactive learning methods at the company. “It’s been a very exciting time at ACL for Learning and Development, and thanks to Apples & Oranges a beneficial experience” she concludes.





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