

THE INTERNATIONAL

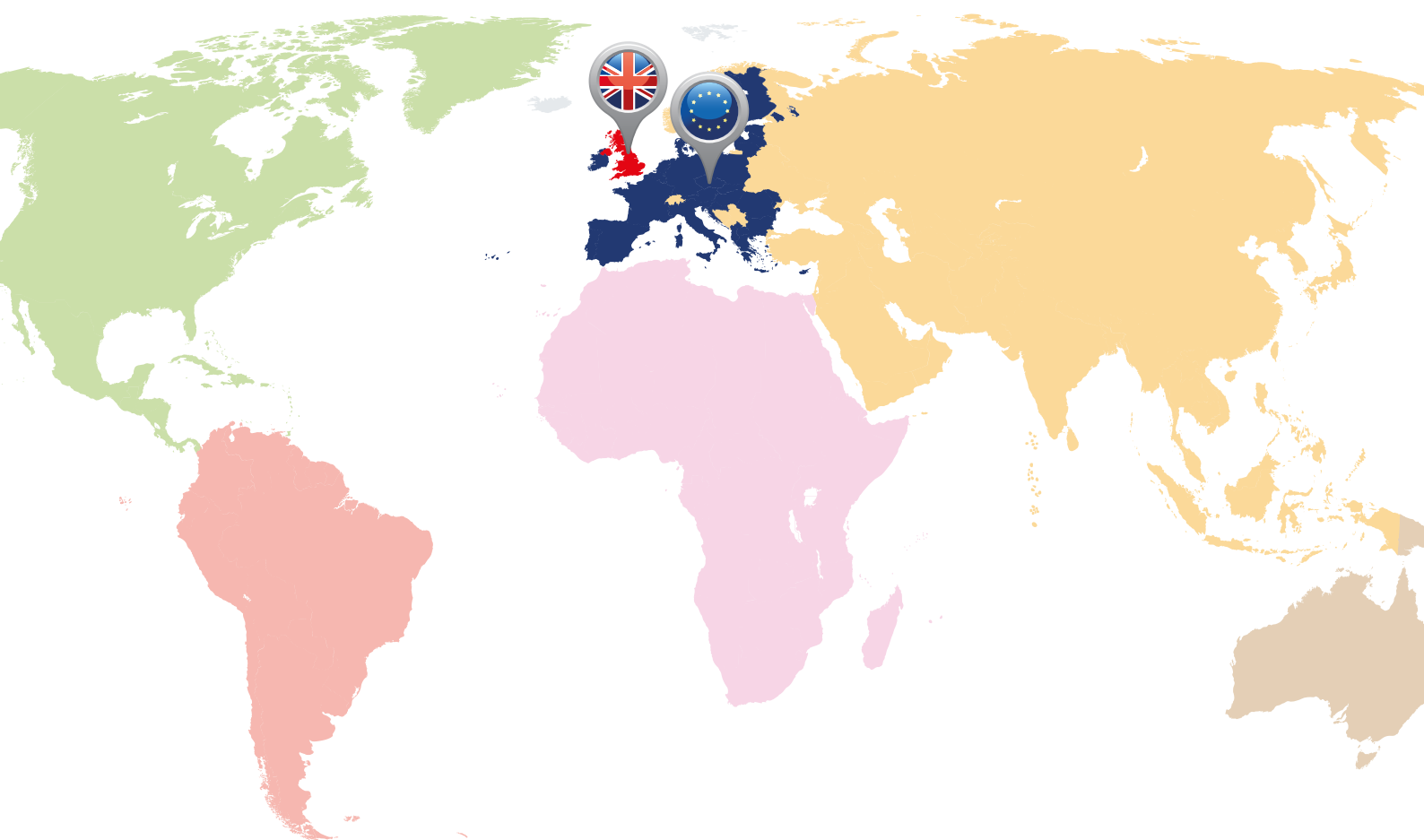
Journal of Sales Transformation

28 PAGES OF RESEARCH-BASED INSIGHT, INCLUDING: SAP SALES LEADER ON COACHING... THE ANATOMY OF A BANKING PRODUCTIVITY PROGRAMME... RESHARPENING CUSTOMER FOCUS + SALES RESEARCH ROUND-UP

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The Art of Discovery

Whitton & Roy



Dr Roy Whitten and Scott Roy discuss what to do before the pitch and how to do it.

The biggest problem my salespeople have is that they just don't listen well enough!" The speaker was vice-president and director of sales for a division of one of the world's largest telecoms companies.

He continued: "Or, if they do listen, they only listen long enough to hear what they want to hear, and then they stop listening and start talking. How do I get them to behave differently in those initial conversations with clients, when so much is on the line in terms of building trust and discovering needs?"

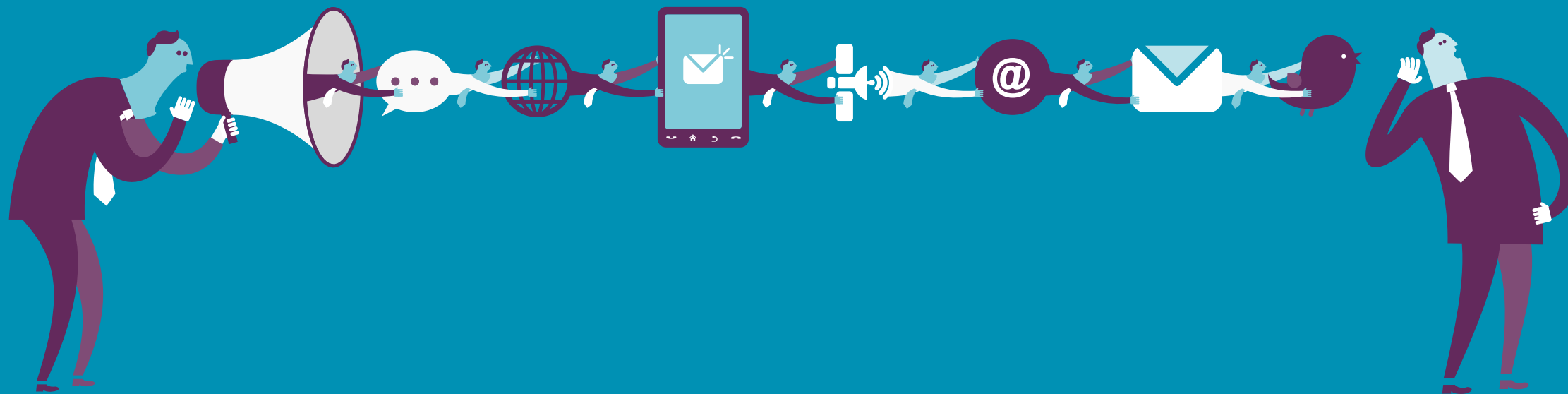
This man – Mark is his first name, who became a client and then a colleague and friend – was asking the right questions. He instinctively knew there were limitations to the way his team was selling: developing and then pitching value propositions to customers.

We helped him build upon his instincts by teaching his people the "art of discovery", arguably the single most critical component of the selling process. We addressed three key questions with his sales team:

1. **What** are you trying to discover?
2. **Who** needs to do the discovering? and
3. **How** do you actually do it?

What are you trying to discover?

In practice, your answer to this question will depend on the purpose of your sales conversation. Usually, the purpose is to convince the customer to buy. Salespeople sometimes camouflage this purpose with talk about "discovering needs and pain points". Yet, when push comes to shove, their behaviour ➤



demonstrates their true motivation: to make the sale. That's when discovery stops and pitching begins.

We suggest a different purpose for the sales conversation: *raising your customer's* "DQ": their "decision quotient" or "decision intelligence". When people practice what we call DQ Sales, their full focus is on helping the customer make the best-possible decision for their business.

When *this* becomes the purpose of the sales conversation, it becomes clear that there are fundamentally two things the salesperson needs to lead the customer to discover:

1. What is the problem you're really trying to solve?
2. What is the solution I am offering that will fix that problem?

Pitching is part of answering the second question. The art of discovery addresses the *first* question. It's problem first, and solution second. (That is why starting with value propositions and pitching is such a poor way to sell. Customers resist it, and they don't trust it, because instinctively they know it's an uninformed way for them to buy!)

Who needs to do the discovering?

Again, this depends on the purpose of the sales conversation. In a normal sales conversation, it's the *salesperson* who's doing the discovering. He or she is looking for felt needs, pain points, objects of interest, and/or motivations to purchase.

DQ sellers have another purpose and they exhibit different behaviour. They accept the fact that they will figure out the problem to be solved before the customer does. And they recognize that their job is to lead the *customer* to understand the problem. They appreciate that this process requires a particular kind of listening, and they get very good at it.

How do you actually do it?

Selling in this way requires patience, self-discipline, objectivity, and above all the capacity to listen well, provide continuous feedback, and follow the customer's line of thought *before* taking over control of the conversation

We help salespeople do this by teaching a specific skill we call "precision Listening". We're happy to share it with you in a

moment – perhaps walking you through the process will enable you to pick it up and put it to work.

Use precision listening over and over again as you engage with customers. Before explaining the technique, we would like to remember that building a customer's DQ requires two fundamental discoveries:

1. Customers must discover the problem(s) they are trying to solve *before* you offer any solutions – this will save you a lot of time, energy, and looking like every other salesperson out there.
2. Customers must discover their *own* thinking before they hear *yours* – this develops their trust in you and helps you offer something that will genuinely meet their needs.

Is this easy to do? Not really. It requires practice, patience, and a growing ability on your part to stay in the present moment. Make use of our "split attention" instructional video.

Valuable benefits

Is it worth doing? Absolutely. Whether you have single sales conversations lasting 30 minutes or multiple conversations over months, getting better at the "art of discovery" will bring a number of valuable benefits:

- Your sales will get larger, because your customers will discover more of what they need and want.
- Your sales will go faster, because the higher your customers' DQ, the fewer objections they have when it comes time to make a decision to buy.
- Your closing percentage will go up, because the solutions you offer will better fit the problems your customers want to solve.
- You will have more follow-up sales, because your customers will trust you more, feel less manipulated, and bring you repeat business and/or referrals for further opportunities.

Note: DQ Sales® is a registered trademark and Precision Listening is the copyrighted material of W Roy Whitten, PhD and Scott A Roy.



About the authors

Founded in 2009, Whitten & Roy Partnership operates in 19 countries around the world. It helps leading global businesses and organisations in the developing world transform their sales results.

Dr Roy Whitten is the company's co-founder and director. A specialist in attitude and its role in human performance, he has personally coached and trained more than 100,000 people over 40 years. Co-founder and director Scott Roy is a specialist in the art of selling and sales management. He has built and run large sales organizations as well as cofounding a nationwide insurance company in the United States.

More information is available via www.wrpartnership.com

Case study: Altius

Altius is a software engineering business that specialises in data management solutions deployed in the cloud. The company provide two unique services for its clients: ensuring clients are able to surface and have access to the right information, to track the key areas of their business; and creating formats and systems for presenting this information within the client's business in a way that allows them to act upon the information in order to drive continuous improvement.

CEO Simon Goldsmith had experienced Whitten & Roy Partnership's training in his previous role as SVP for another company, and he approached the partnership with a clear idea of the sales programme he wanted for his staff. Since he had been trained in Whitten & Roy Partnership's model, he also knew that we had to start with the question: "What are the problems I am trying to solve?"

Goldsmith took responsibility for Altius as part of a new investment in the business in 2013 and needed to identify why the business hadn't been growing. Using precision listening – over several conversations spanning several weeks – we coached him to discover how these problems had developed, which revealed issues that we needed to address.

Once all the issues were identified, we were able to work collaboratively on the fundamental problem that drove many of the others: the organisation required our support to help the team to learn and master the complex sale.

This problem was giving rise to many of the issues, such as:

- Chasing whatever selling approach seemed to be succeeding in the moment.
- Defaulting to the standard selling behaviour of developing value propositions and pitching them to potential buyers.
- Defaulting to pitching in customer conversations because no other options seemed to exist.
- Settling for speaking only to technical people instead of other key stakeholders because they couldn't see how to gain access to the C-suite.
- Retreating to comfort-zone selling, where salespeople only do what they feel confident about.
- Repeating the same ineffectual behaviours, hoping for a different result.
- Expending significant managerial energy and time attempting to keep up with what salespeople were doing or not doing and trying to figure out how to help.

This discovery required several hours of discussion, but with it came a solution that really worked. Together, we developed a selling framework that every salesperson could use, according to their own personality. We made it fully customer-centric, so that the Altius selling process involved leading their customers through a buying process that resulted in the customers making the best possible decision for their business.

We trained their sales and service staff in the process, combining face-to-face experiential training with several months of real-time embedding. In 12 months, Altius had transformed the effectiveness of its sales force and nearly doubled their sales.

Altius mastered the new selling framework and is now recognized by clients as a trusted partner that doesn't seek to force a solution. The company is known for understanding its clients' problems and building a cost model before exploring the right implementation.

Sales director Bradley Malloy concludes: "At least two-thirds of the revenue we generate is a consequence of our ability to engage focusing on the problems of our clients and engaging with senior stakeholders."