

Accelerating a Sales Force Transformation at Autodesk



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Engineering and entertainment software increases productivity by redefining what's possible in designing, manufacturing and building. It also generates the same spectacularly realistic effects that animate movies and video games. And its widespread application has made Autodesk, a world leader in 2D and 3D design, engineering and entertainment software, the fifth-largest software company in the world.

Despite Autodesk's history of rapid growth and its current enviable market position, the company perceived tough challenges ahead, particularly in strengthening its sales force. To build on its success, Autodesk's top management recognized that a profound shift in its sales approach was necessary. The company partnered with [BTS](#) to accelerate the [sales transformation](#).

The Challenge: A New Way of Selling

Selling Autodesk's high-tech, feature-rich products are a job for experts. 1,900 Value-Added Resellers (VARs) are responsible for 90 percent of the company's \$1.6 billion in sales, but they are not company employees. At home in a world of complex programs and specialized users, VARs had historically sold Autodesk applications based on their product features and benefits.

Going forward, Autodesk's executives understood that the company needed to replace this traditional brand of pitching with a more customer-oriented sales technique for the future. "The objective was to transform our sales channel by having them define the value of Autodesk through business results rather than feature sets," says Tom Kopinski, Director of Competitive and Technical Marketing for Manufacturing at Autodesk. This strategic change demanded a significant shift in the experienced, skilled sales force's most basic instincts. Instead of focusing on product performance, VARs would instead focus on the customer's needs—imagining themselves in the customer's shoes and then walking a mile in those shoes.

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Executive Vice
President of
Sales, Autodesk

The Transformation: A Quiet Revolution

To accomplish this shift, Autodesk's deep commitment was key. "We certainly haven't seen many companies willing to invest in training outside traditional employee channels," reflected BTS Executive Vice President Dan Parisi. But Autodesk understood that only truly transformational measures would produce the kind of change the company desired. With this strong management mandate, BTS developed an intense, customized business simulation that immersed VARs in the customer's business. "We wanted participants to increase their confidence, competence, and mindset by creating an easy-to-use model to expand 'the sale,'" says Kopinski.

In the high-impact experience, VARs assumed the role of the senior management at an industrial machinery manufacturing company, running the business over three simulated years. Participants were challenged to deal with major business challenges, recognize trends and identify opportunities. After experiencing the business from the customer's point of view, they switched roles, created an account expansion strategy, and made sales calls on the executives they had just played in the simulation. As a result of their increased understanding of the client's strategic issues, participants dramatically improved the way they positioned Autodesk's software solutions, leading to equally dramatic improvements in sales outcomes. "It's practical learning," says Ken Bado, Executive Vice President of Sales for Autodesk. "You're putting emotional energy into it—it's not just pure intellect." The customized approach to learning is now being extended to simulate another typical client's business, a construction company.

The Future of Autodesk: On Track

In today's global economy, change is a constant for every company, but for technology-based firms, it is especially difficult for leaders to stay in front. The marketplace is on permanent fast-forward. Autodesk's work with BTS is the kind of bold innovation that today's business environment demands. "Autodesk is at the leading edge, along with companies such as Humana and Symbiocity" says BTS's Parisi. "It's just as important for the sales channel to have an in-depth understanding of the challenges, key business drivers, and capabilities required for success, as it is for Autodesk's own employees."

About BTS

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we've been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It's strategy made personal.

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