

JANEK PERFORMANCE GROUP

CASE STUDY

Case Profile

Company Name:

Pearl Izumi

Industry:

Sports Apparel Manufacturer
(soft consumer goods)

Size of Company:

500 employees

Key Challenges:

- Inside sales team needed to transition from being a reactive department to a proactive one
- Needed a way to strengthen relationships with clients, therefore creating loyalty and improving retention
- Wanted to be viewed as true, trusted category advisors by their clients

Who was Interviewed:

- Meaghan O'Brien – Former Inside Sales Rep; Current Inside Sales Manager
- Melissa Stenger – Former Inside Sales Manager



Challenge

Two things were high back in mid-2008: gas prices and sales at Pearl Izumi. Although there was no proven correlation between those two certainties, Pearl Izumi surmised that more expensive gas meant more people were riding bikes and, therefore, more cycling apparel was being purchased. But once 2009 and its unprecedentedly low gas prices came, those sales saw a dip. Now it was time to get introspective and figure out what could be improved internally regardless of external factors.

Previously, outside sales reps would engage with clients (retail stores and dealers) to set up initial presentations, show the new line, and establish the relationship. Once the sales channel had been opened, the retail contact was turned over to Pearl's inside sales reps. It was the job of the inside sales rep to foster and grow these relationships to consistently increase upsells and fill-ins while driving sell-through.

When the demand slowed in 2009, Pearl took a closer look at its inside sales department and made a few observations:

1. Due to the once inherit incoming merchandise orders, the sales team had essentially become complacent with being order takers – most transactions were reactive versus proactive.
2. A byproduct of number one, most interactions were purely transactional in nature - no real relationships were being formed with clients.
3. Also related, it appeared that no one on the inside sales team was being perceived as a category advisor.

In adjusting to the new marketplace, the inside sales team would need to develop a different approach that would improve upon each of these areas. They would need to proactively engage with every client and put in the time to better understand each market. They needed to become trusted category advisors – the go-to people when clients had questions or concerns about their products.

Bottom Line:

Pearl needed to regain its market share. It would take a major fundamental shift, and one that would resonate throughout the inside sales department. Buy-in from sales management would be a large piece of the puzzle and critical to the success of any new processes.

Solution

Pearl Izumi needed to revamp its approach to inside sales. It would require a new sales methodology that would not only lay the groundwork for client relationship building but also establish a way to maintain and grow those relationships long term. The ultimate goal would be for Pearl's inside sales reps to become trusted, category advisors to each of their clients.

In the retail sales world – especially with a specific niche like high-end running, cycling and triathlon apparel – sales reps at retail often don't have the background to know the best way to sell every item in their stores. Thus, when certain products stop selling, many times it's due to a lack of product knowledge and specific selling strategies. This is a key opportunity for consumer goods companies, like Pearl, to step in and offer their support and insight.

Being aware of this common retail challenge, the inside sales manager took it upon herself to assess the situation. She surveyed clients and the outside sales force and quickly came to the realization that this kind of personalized service and proactive approach was not being provided by her team.

Seeking guidance of her own, she reached out to Janek Performance Group. After an initial conversation with Janek managing partner, Justin Zappulla, the inside sales manager felt the need-based approach that Janek could offer would be a "fit" for her team, allowing them to really focus on the inside sales process and drive more sales.

"It didn't take long for Justin to realize that we are not a shirt and tie kind of company," Stenger recalls. "He acclimated to our culture and not only adopted our lingo but really found a way to connect with my reps on their level."

All 12 of Pearl's inside reps went through Janek's **Critical TeleSelling™ Skills** workshop, held onsite at their headquarters in Louisville, CO. Prior to the session, one-on-one assessment time was built in with each rep.

Janek stressed how critical it is to constantly be creating an awareness of client needs. Each phone conversation – with both new and existing clients – had to lead with a need-based value proposition. Not only the tweaks in lingo, but the shift in fundamental thinking would be necessary to advance these client relationships past the formalities and into trusted advisor territory.

A second part of this solution was Pearl Izumi's decision to enlist ongoing coaching services with Janek. Why? The inside sales manager realized that, like with any skill, reinforcement would be the key to creating a habit. In order to hold reps accountable for using the new skills they had learned, monthly sessions were put in place for Janek to review and assess recorded calls with Pearl Izumi's team.

Bottom Line:

Janek's onsite program delivery, using Pearl's language and industry nuances, set the tone for a trusted, ongoing sales coaching relationship. Immediate reinforcement of skills via monthly sales call critiques would keep the new telesales techniques top of mind. Coaching tools were also provided to the sales management team in order to keep reinforcement going between monthly sessions. Additionally, strengthening of market knowledge was introduced to help reps make an impact with each of their clients.

Results

Today, more than four years later, Janek's relationship with Pearl is stronger than ever. The reinforcement calls still take place each and every month. And two years ago when Shimano bought out Pearl Izumi, sales management at Shimano wasted no time in implementing Janek's teachings for their inside sales reps.

Stenger also commented on the ongoing monthly sales calls, "People really had to think about the fact that they were being recorded. They started stepping up and some of my reps really surprised me."

"It was good to hear what I sounded like on the phone, what my calls were missing," said O'Brien, then inside sales rep. "The review calls with Janek kept me on track – I believe they brought about better results and definitely made my calls more structured and effective."

Pearl's outside sales reps also reported positive feedback due to the way business was being conducted with the inside sales team. It was easy to see that more in-depth conversations were taking place and clients were better able to sell the products at retail.

Another proof point of the program's success is that Pearl and Shimano continue to send all new sales hires to Janek's public **Critical TeleSelling™ Skills** workshops which are held year-round in 18 cities across the U.S. This way, all new hires get up to speed with the methodology and then can easily jump into the monthly reinforcement sessions.

The best feedback Stenger received was when one of her former reps told her how much the formal sales training had changed his approach, not only to his profession, but that many of the skills had given him a deeper understanding of his personal relationships.

Stenger adds, "For me, that was validation of what we were able to accomplish – not just for the company but on a personal level."

Bottom Line:

The inside sales team at Pearl achieved the fundamental shift they had been after – their approach changed from reactive to proactive, and today their reps enjoy more substantial relationships with their clients. Perhaps the best proof is the fact that Pearl's ongoing coaching was instantly adopted by new parent company, Shimano. And with consistent access to public workshops, both companies plan to continue making it a part of their sales onboarding process for the foreseeable future.

"After the first 90 days (following initial training), we started to see the benefit. The number and length of outbound calls improved and we saw a 10% jump in sales."

Melissa Stenger
Former Inside Sales Manager

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