MindTickle

Checklist for Developing Product Readiness to Enable World-Class Sales Competence

In the best of times, developing world-class competence across your sales organization to assess pain, build requirements and offer solutions can be an extremely challenging task, especially for large product portfolios or rapidly-changing solutions. With remote teams, that task is even more daunting because one degree removed from headquarters or product experts, staying abreast of product changes and improvements, new features, and more importantly the value they are designed to provide, is both harder to maintain and more essential to working successfully with remote clients and prospects. More than ever before, customer-facing employees must demonstrate digital solutioning excellence underpinned by product (knowing, practicing and delivering value, demonstration, differentiation) in order to effectively drive value for customers and uncover new opportunities.

Product readiness—up to the minute technical or product knowledge and the ability to articulate and demonstrate solution value and impact—are foundational competencies for sales people and other customer-facing roles. Typical challenges that organizations face include:

- Difficulty in keeping the sales organization up to speed on ever-changing products and services designed to win and expand customers.
- Inability to assess reps' strengths and weaknesses on core technical and product competence, and identify areas for further development. This can lead to over or under-investing in baseline or remediation-focused product training.
- Lost new business or expansion opportunities due to inadequate product knowledge and the ability to articulate value.
- Inability to counter objections or misinformation spread by competitors.
- Financial or reputational harm from compliance breaches within regulated industries such as life sciences and financial services.

Beyond addressing these challenges, a solutions skills development program must inspire and motivate your workforce through personalized and supportive interactions that teach, model, practice, reinforce, assess and certify product knowledge and skills.

Product Readiness Program Structure

When building a product skills training program, there are three primary events where product training is typically the star of the show:

- New hire onboarding (developing a baseline understanding of product, pain chain and solutioning)
- Product launch, updates or campaigns (ability to communicate value and competitive differentiation of new features and enhancements)
- Product specialization training (ability to demonstrate in-depth product understanding for specialized interaction with functional or technical buyer)

Strategy

- [ ] Develop a product training program strategy that considers target outcomes and deliverables for the three programs outlined in the previous section and a corresponding definition of success for each including deliverables and NPS for teams producing, updating or delivering product training and support materials.
- [ ] Choose a platform that enables your team to support these and other product-anchored programs and provides insights, tracking and measurements for senior leadership and frontline managers essential to driving adoption and results from the program. Product skill isn't a one and done program, but typically requires an ongoing investment of time by the product, marketing and enablement teams, sales people, and managers. Therefore ensuring productivity, usability and re-use through integration with content repositories and other systems of engagement is critical.
- [ ] Build a core team of experts across the sales organization made up of individuals that can both source, produce content while acting as peer resources to the field. In addition to democratizing content, this will also reduce burden on product and product marketing teams while increasing credibility with field teams.
- [ ] Review and maximize remote principles for how product is delivered, consumed, practiced and demonstrated in the new virtual everywhere normal. With in-person product demonstrations or workshops unlikely to return for the near future, maximize online tools, pre-work, micro-learning and challenge/reward and gamification-based reinforcement for retention.

Key Tip:

Once you've developed a strategy of how often and to whom you publish product information, ensure buy-in from senior executives, managers and reps. Create a pool of field experts that are both resources and also credible champions of the content and exercises sellers are required to certify on. Ensure and have managers undertake and certify on training alongside their people. If everyone understands how these skills development programs benefit their end goals, they'll be more inclined to participate. To further buy-in, give each level within the org hierarchy an opportunity to provide feedback on the program to not only ensure the content is useful and relevant, but to confirm you're delivering it in a way that most resonates with them.

New Hire Onboarding and Existing Team Reboarding

While effective onboarding of new hires is central to any sales readiness strategy, the shift to reboarding your entire sales team is more important ever. Address each rep's needs to be successful in an 'inside sales' environment. Establish ideal customer-facing profiles that define the behaviors needed for successful pre-sales, sales and post-sales personas and the corresponding competencies based on your expected customer buying pattern.

- [ ] Determine what skills must be developed or what applied learning must take place based on your customer-facing profiles. For example, customer success managers (CSMs; sometimes called account managers) need to be able to accurately explain the functional details of products to customers. In that case, these CSMs need to develop listening and communication skills, and know where to find relevant help articles or information to send to customers.

  - ✓ Typically, new hires can listen in on more tenured-reps' calls and ask questions on the fly. However, during these times where individuals may be working from home, it's important that virtual onboarding and reboarding try to replicate the intimacy and interactivity that in-person onboarding provides.

- [ ] Approach onboarding and reboarding as an ongoing journey, not a one-time event. Each has their own priority—onboarding introduces new team members and reboarding refamiliarizes your existing team to company culture and updates—but the dialogue doesn't end when the bootcamp ends.

  - ✓ Start with the end in mind and identify the outcomes you want to achieve with your onboarding efforts.
  - ✓ Structure your reboarding program around three pillars:

    Teach: Learn by reading, listening, watching and building knowledge

    Show: Model excellence and follow best practices templates

    Practice: Master skills before talking to customers using virtual role-plays and reinforcement

    - Reinforcement: Drive long-term knowledge retention and behavior change with coaching, ongoing content delivery and spaced learning (Q&A methodology delivered over intervals and repeated).

  - ✓ Identify and coordinate your enablement program with sales milestones, established benchmarks, and incentive-driven initiatives.

    - With changes in the business environment, this would be an ideal time to revisit and revise metrics that measure the business impact of your program.

Product Updates

Sales teams are often bombarded with information, making it hard to consume knowledge and recall later. Product updates typically go to the heart of the value and benefits of your organization so the end-user experience must be conducive to knowledge sharing and retention.

- [ ] Deliver easily consumable information. Allow sales reps to learn in bite-sized segments, with defined learning objectives and onboarding/reboarding materials that are readily available and updated with the latest competitive, corporate and product information.

- [ ] Focus on the product knowledge and skills that align with strategic initiatives for the organization. Connect the dots for reps so there's no room for misinterpretation.
- [ ] Enable subject matter experts (SMEs) from Product or Marketing teams to easily collaborate with Sales Enablement or develop quality content on their own.
    - ✓ Use a simple planning process and content template so SMEs focus on key information and messaging is consistent and delivered on time.
        - In some sales readiness platforms, you as the administrator are able to develop a voice-over presentation in the platform and assign SMEs slides to add or record over in the same presentation.
    - ✓ Sales enablement should act as gatekeeper to control the quality and frequency of information.
    - ✓ If product training is delivered via informal presentations, record the SME on video first. Then you can break the video into two- to four-minute segments and include questions, resources or other interactive activities, which can be used for reinforcement, reference, or broader distribution of training.
- [ ] Using a sales readiness platform such as MindTickle, you can publish the recordings and information, rather than emailing reps directly, for consistency and improved quality, interactivity, tracking, and analytics. You'll get a better understanding of who's consuming and understanding the content when you have a way to measure engagement.
- [ ] Incorporate knowledge checks or formal assessments to validate whether the content has been mastered and to identify knowledge and skill gaps.
    - ✓ For businesses following regulatory compliance, it is crucial to ensure reps fully read and understand the information being sent to them. MindTickle clients have followed up compliance training with clear Yes/No questions that reps must respond to in order to record everyone is abiding by the required mandates.
- [ ] Incorporate opportunities to practice and apply learnings via role plays, coaching observation/tracking form, or scenario-based questions.
- [ ] Implement a reinforcement program to drive long-term retention and behavior change.
    - ✓ Administer spaced learning and quizzes over time to reinforce and improve retention of key information. Delivering short bursts of information over time keeps key messaging top of mind.
    - ✓ Provide access to reference materials in one central, searchable location so reps know where to go to learn more or refresh on past learnings.
- [ ] Leverage assessments and certifications when training on more significant information, such as major product releases.
    - ✓ Include questions with explanations to reinforce key information and provide knowledge checks. The interactivity also helps keep reps engaged.
    - ✓ For example, in MindTickle, you can include an assessment to formally certify each rep's completion of the program. In addition, Missions (virtual role-plays) are effective for reviewing, coaching, or certifying on capabilities in a practice environment.

Key Tip:

Only include the most crucial content in a format that is easy to consume. Be creative and flexible by including voice-over PowerPoints, images, videos, rich-text documents, and quizzes to reinforce key messages and make the content more engaging whenever possible.

In-Depth Product Review

Continuous knowledge development is crucial to the ongoing success of an organization, not only for the business as a whole, but also for the personal and professional benefit of the people who work there. Centralize product information to encourage reference or just-in-time learning.

- [ ] Only include foundational and advanced information that the sales organization needs to know (i.e., competencies such as knowledge, skills, process/tools) that support their selling activities.
- [ ] Make information accessible and easily searchable.
- [ ] If your sales readiness platform integrates with your CRM, automatically suggest content, such as products commonly sold together, competitive intel, or product deep-dives, when specific fields are populated in your CRM so reps receive relevant training in their flow of work.

Complete the Loop

Periodic learning, self-prescribed practice and occasional observation by managers are all important tenets of great technical and solution selling behavior in the field, in-person or virtual. However, without the real time feedback and identification of gaps and remediation even the best product training programs will invariably fall short of ‘ready’ sellers. Using conversational intelligence and similar platforms fully integrated with knowledge, skill and coaching application ensures a seamless feedback loop that sellers, managers and product and product marketing teams can maximize their effectiveness with. Whether through conversational heatmaps, transcript keyword analysis or question/answer pattern review, calls ranging from initial discovery to demo presentations can be cataloged and used for reassigning learning or for learning libraries.

Key Tip:

Post the recorded communication and accompanying materials in your readiness library for people to revisit as needed. Push these bite-sized pieces of information (e.g., messaging, value proposition, competitive updates) to sellers’ mobile devices to reinforce key learnings.

About Us

MindTickle offers the industry’s most comprehensive sales readiness solution for closing the knowledge and skill gaps found in customer-facing teams. Organizations across a wide range of industries use MindTickle’s award-winning platform to train, coach, and align their teams to make end-users and their managers more effective.

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