

Boosting the health of customer service delivery at **Medtronic**





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Amanda Burnett, business and customer service director, Medtronic



For more than 60 years Medtronic has been a global leader in pushing the boundaries of medical technology in changing the way the world tackles chronic disease, providing treatments and therapies for such problems as nervous disorders, cranial and spinal conditions and diabetes. However, Medtronic had come under increased pressure as new competitors entered the market and hospitals came under closer scrutiny to ensure best return on any medical investment.

The company responded with its 'One Medtronic' initiative, designed to make sure that customers and prospects across global markets get a consistent high quality response at every touch point. In reappraising how it managed customer relationships, Medtronic recognised the need to drive behaviour change throughout the business and selected Huthwaite International for its flexible research-based methodology, which puts sales at the heart of the organisation.

Huthwaite became preferred supplier to the Medtronic Sales and Marketing Academy and, five years on, continues to play a central role in developing tailored improvement programmes designed to meet the needs of different parts of the business.

Consistent customer service

Huthwaite's delivery of successful skills improvement programmes has enabled Medtronic to achieve greater consistency companywide between sales and service teams. Across markets, Huthwaite has provided common programmes in local languages, working with management to adapt the training where necessary to reflect individual markets and their challenges.

As part of the 'One Medtronic' philosophy, customers would benefit from a seamless high-quality customer experience through closer alignment between the sales team making the initial deal and service functions that subsequently

manage the ongoing relationship.

Huthwaite business development consultant, Claire Cologne comments: *"Consistency between sales and customer service within each country and between different departments, some of whom deal with end-users as well as hospitals and medical staff, was important in helping to achieve Medtronic's goal. Within customer service itself, it was also crucial to ensure a common approach between business unit staff and the specialist product support team."*

In addition to dealing directly with customers, much of the service team's work involved dealing with queries on behalf of their sales colleagues.

The key issue here was not just about speaking the same language as sales, but also in aligning their behavioural skills. This would enable the service team to have conversations with a wide variety of internal and external customers, resulting in better outcomes for Medtronic and its customers.

“Our behaviour-based methodology has met this challenge in providing flexible programmes which can be adapted to improve internal and external interactions in both B2B and B2C environments,” confirms Cologne. *“Within Medtronic, this has proved highly effective in building on a customer service environment in a business dedicated to saving and prolonging lives.”*

A closer look

In the area of customer service, a bespoke company-wide solution was developed, which was capable of further adaptation to meet local customer needs. Initially, Huthwaite benchmarked existing performance levels by analysing customer service calls. This was followed by a consultation with customer service managers across Europe to help determine their needs and to design customised

materials, including roleplays which accurately mirrored the daily challenges facing their local teams.

The programmes, backed up by ongoing coaching, have since been rolled out across Europe on a phased basis, timed to fit within each country’s broader development programme.

The UK offers a typical example of how this is driving demonstrable improvement in service quality. A series of two-day courses were implemented across the UK and Ireland customer service and product support teams, in which advisors recorded themselves in scenario calls, provided feedback to each other using a dedicated best practice framework and then re-recorded the calls using newly-learned skills.

This adopted Huthwaite’s proven CARE (Control, Approachability, Responsiveness, Excellence) model, using behaviours proven to help advisors deliver an excellent customer experience. In order to reflect the day-to-day environment of the Medtronic service team, one of the key elements worked on during the programme has centred on how people in different roles react when things go wrong. *“In looking at how to deal with customers*

in such conversations, advisors often face the challenge of not being able to provide a satisfactory or immediate solution in a high-pressure situation,” confirms Cologne. *“The CARE approach has helped here by exploring how to avoid responding negatively and encouraging participants to look more proactively at what they can do to achieve a positive outcome.”*

“Staff feedback to the training has been extremely positive, giving them the confidence to have structured conversations with customers,” says Amanda Burnett, business and customer service director at Medtronic. *“It provides an enjoyable delivery format with a good mix of listening, writing and roleplays and encourages everyone to give positive and stretching feedback.”*

“Most importantly, it helps demonstrate the relevant and important role customer service plays within current and future buying decisions. It is exactly what we need to support our team in delivering an exceptional customer experience.”



Coaching and performance measurement

One of the keys to the success of the training initiative has been the inclusion of follow-up coaching support. *“Simply sending people on a one-off training course does not deliver the long-lasting performance improvement we are looking for,”* confirms Burnett.

Post-course coaching has formed an integral part of the improvement programme from day one and coaches are now targeted to achieve a minimum

number of sessions with each advisor every quarter.

Huthwaite has worked closely with Medtronic to construct and deliver a coaching course for team leaders which incorporated a behavioural framework specifically designed to enable coaches to measure performance and give feedback. This common performance measure helps to achieve consistency and a ‘One Medtronic’ approach.

Huthwaite’s own analysis already points to significant

improvements in those behaviours recognised as key to achieving good customer service outcomes. Using the behavioural framework post-training, nearly 60 per cent of ‘explaining the process’ behaviours were identified as good or outstanding compared to less than 40 per cent pre-training. Similarly, the number of behaviours assessed as good in ‘delivering solutions’ increased from 24 per cent to almost 80 per cent.

The German experience

The latest roll-out to Medtronic's customer care team in Germany provides an excellent example of how the flexibility of the Huthwaite approach has enabled the programmes to be adapted to the particular requirements of the local market.

"In up-skilling our customer service staff, we had two key objectives," says Sandra Hildebrandt, director customer care & supply chain. "First, with many of our treatments, we have direct contact with end-patients and it is especially important that our front-line staff have the right skills to manage what are frequently highly stressful situations".

"At the same time, we are working with health service professionals under pressure to cut budgets and improve efficiencies. This means our service staff have to understand the increased importance of creating 'magic moments' and their greater role in the sales process by helping to identify customer needs and passing this on to their sales colleagues."

The success of the training and follow-up reinforcement and coaching is already delivering positive results. *"The new behavioural skills are taking*

much of the stress out of patient calls," confirms Hildebrandt.

"Improved questioning techniques are also helping us understand the needs of practitioners and patients better and so adding value to all our customer relationships."

The department undertakes an annual internal customer survey in which the sales team reports on how well customer service staff are performing. *"I have no doubt that, thanks to these tailored Huthwaite programmes, we will see a measurable improvement in the quality of our service delivery."*

Best practice solution

Burnett has been impressed with the level of support provided by Huthwaite throughout the process. *"The team took time to understand our very particular requirements and has continued to work closely with us in refining and adapting each programme as our understanding of what works best has evolved."*

Development doesn't stop there. Within the Medtronic Sales and Marketing Academy, customer-facing teams can also access a follow-on programme, Customer Service: Medtronic Selling Skills Awareness, which provides an ideal next step in increasing understanding and involvement

in identifying and progressing sales opportunities.

Burnett has been impressed with the results to date and plans to extend the training. *"In helping us move to a 'One Medtronic' environment, I believe that we now have a best practice training methodology which is easily adapted to work equally well for all customer-facing teams, in the UK and across the rest of Medtronic's international network,"* she believes.



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Sandra Hildebrandt.



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