



# GROW

BY CAPTURING THE HEARTS AND MINDS  
OF YOUR INDIRECT SALES FORCE



The 10 key elements for a successful indirect  
sales force development solution

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# Introduction



Sales and e-learning have always been natural bedfellows, but as we all know, a sales force needs a consistent understanding of an organisation's products and selling processes to be highly successful.

Typically, a sales force is geographically distributed, hard to get together and the personalities within the network are usually predisposed to short and repetitive stints of learning.

Likewise, the ROI for sales force development is transparent, and the performance of the sales team is usually on the radar of someone with significant budget to spend. So therefore, e-learning and sales organisations, while often diametrically opposed culturally, make perfect partners in business.

These solutions are usually successful because the audience needs what is being delivered, product information is generally new to the audience and the sales manager can pull out the compliance stick to motivate the sales force to participate.

Where it becomes a little trickier is when you don't "own" the sales force, i.e. when you're relying on an indirect sales force, especially when this sales force is also selling competing products.

The additional challenges in developing an indirect sales force over a direct sales force are numerous, but the fundamental difference is that with an indirect sales force, you are always competing for market share.

Whilst your indirect sales force needs to sell product to be successful, the collective sales force does not have to sell your product to be successful. Quite simply, they can just sell lots of your competitors' product.

The most fundamental – and fatal - mistake some companies succumb to is that they assume their product is enough, and that their product's features and benefits will be enough. They also assume that your indirect sales force will be engaged by your training, confident in your brand and compelled to give precedence to your product over others.

However, this doesn't just happen automatically, and when indirect sales forces are disengaged, the consequences to the business can be incredibly damaging.

# THE VERY REAL IMPACT OF DISENGAGED SALES STAFF

The disengagement of sales channels is a very real global epidemic. In the UK, brand agency Maverick reported that retail and sales employees were some of the most disengaged in the country, and that the sector was losing £628 million per year by failing to engage its employees. Its research also revealed that, by investing just 10percent more in staff engagement, UK businesses could add £2700 per employee per year in profits.

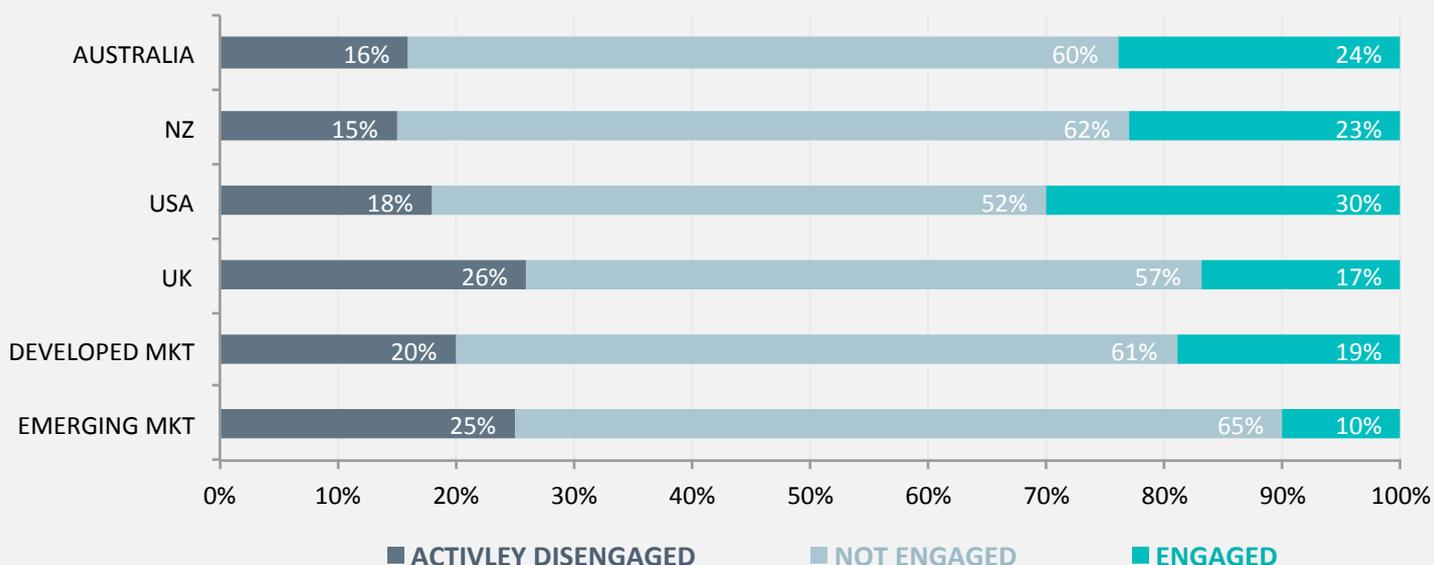
Locally, a recent study by EY – EY Australian Productivity Pulse™ – revealed that Australia was potentially losing \$305 billion in unrealised productivity, and that some of the main obstacles to improvement related to engagement, reward and recognition.

The ‘national productivity average’ revealed that in industries where there were high levels of motivation and training, higher levels in quality of work were produced. The most productive industries were Healthcare & Social Assistance, while worryingly, amongst the least productive industries were Retail & Wholesale, who themselves believed they could be 25% more productive and engaged.

In its extensive 2013 report ‘State Of The Global Workplace’, research agency Gallup studied 142 countries and discovered that only 24% of Australians are “engaged” with their work, while 60% are not “engaged”, and a further 16% are actively “disengaged”.

## EMPLOYEES ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

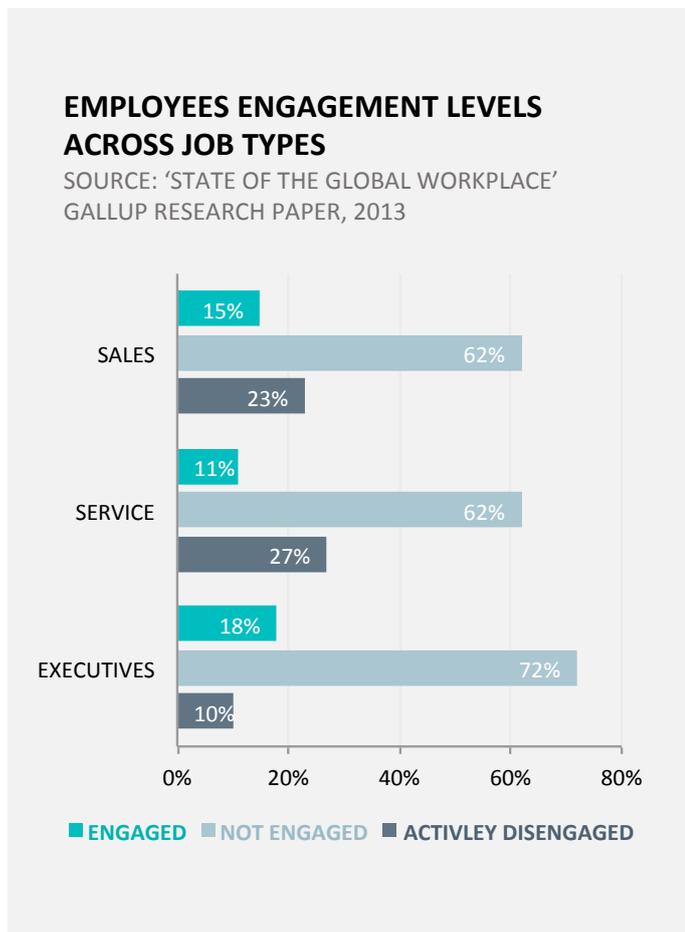
SOURCE: ‘STATE OF THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE’ GALLUP RESEARCH PAPER, 2013



Overall, this high rate of disengagement amongst Australians is costing the economy about \$54.8 billion a year.

The study also revealed that only 19% of Australian employees in leadership positions are engaged in their jobs. Low engagement among managers is problematic, and not a positive sign for businesses, as managers play the most significant role in influencing engagement among workers who report to them.

**Alarming, however, employees in the Sales sector are only 17% “engaged,” while a staggering 66% were “not engaged”, and a further 17% were “actively disengaged”.**



With such a high proportion of the sales force disengaged and not emotionally committed and connected to their work, their training, their customers, and more importantly, your products, the impact on your business can be highly detrimental. It also means that by engaging just a portion of these sales people you can reap huge returns.

A disengaged sales force can be a serious liability, especially if your industry relies on the genuine take-home satisfaction of your customers. So, ask yourself, do you want your indirect sales force to be apathetic, insincere and uninvested? Or one where your sales force is highly motivated, educated, and engaged?

If you answered the latter, you do have the potential to empower your indirect sales force to capitalise on sales opportunities and directly increase revenue simply by creating consistent, successful indirect sales solutions.

By following these ten critical steps, you can defy the statistics and truly engage your indirect sales force.

# 10

## ESSENTIAL STEPS TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS AND ENSURE YOUR INDIRECT SALES FORCE IS ENGAGED

1

Capture hearts  
and minds.

6

Certificates &  
Certification.

2

Don't just product  
push, invest in your  
indirect sales force.

7

Create  
Local Champions.

3

Create Temporal  
Development Pathways.

8

Use your frontline  
managers, keep  
it human.

4

Incentivise them.

9

Plan, measure, realign,  
plan, measure, realign.

5

Use your community  
to motivate each other.

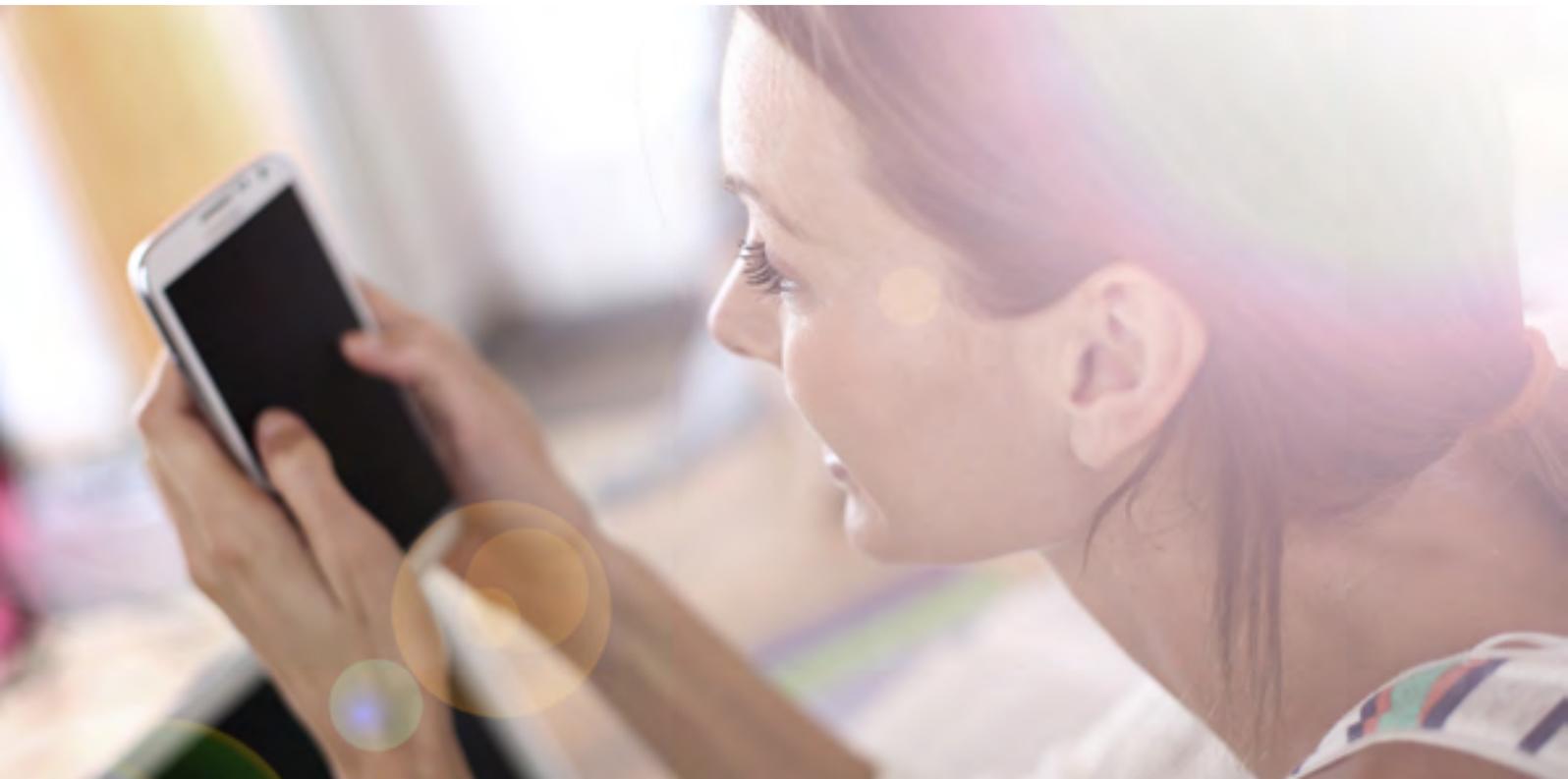
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Use business  
intelligence intelligently.

# Step 1: Capture hearts and minds

The most foundational element of any indirect sales force development solution must be to create brand loyalty, and have your brand top of their minds when they are recommending products to their customers. Evidently, they will also need excellent product knowledge, and usually specific sales skills to be able to sell your product. However, if you don't have their hearts and minds, you don't have a chance.

**Create Brand Loyalty  
with excellent  
product knowledge &  
specific sales skills**



## Step 2: Don't just product push, invest in your indirect sales force

If you want their hearts and minds, you must create a solution that values their jobs and their success. This means structuring any development program around their success rather than yours. What do they need to be successful in their jobs? This will more often than not involve:

- **Aligned Product Learning:** Your product training needs to be more than just an interactive version of your brochure with a quiz at the end. It should align to the needs and motivation of your learner and equip them with the skills and key messages they need to sell your product. Less is more when it comes to product information, so focus on the differentiators and speak to them like professionals, not the end consumer.
- **Customer Scenarios:** Presenting your product information using interactive customer scenarios is a great way to engage the sales person as well as to develop skills in selling your product. After all, the product knowledge is a means to an end, and that end is to sell product. So why not develop that product knowledge through sales scenarios that both build a base understanding of your product as well as develop their ability to sell that product to customers.
- **Skills Development:** Investing in the sales person's broader skills development is a great way to ensure they have the skills they need to sell your product and to show that you value them as sales professionals. It is important that at least some of your skills development learning is free from your products if you want to win the hearts and minds of your indirect sales force. Every industry is different, but this can include sales skills, technical knowledge or broader professional skills.
- **Make it an Engaging Experience:** When your audience isn't compelled to complete your learning, there is a much higher threshold of quality you must surpass if you want to engage, develop and win their hearts and minds. Use techniques like gamification, stories, scenarios and high-end graphical design to ensure you maximise engagement. Remember the investment you make in your learning reflects on your products and how seriously you take the development of your indirect sales force. The hardest part about engaging your indirect sales force is getting their eyeballs on your content, don't risk losing them forever in the first few minutes but giving them an ordinary experience.

## Step 3: Create Temporal Development Pathways

While keeping the content up to date, fresh and dynamic, people need to know how it all connects, a pathway through the learning and a clear destination. To keep people motivated you need to engage them in short, medium and long-term pathways through your program. This is no different to the way formal education programs work.

**Now:** what information or help do I need right now to answer a customer question?

**Short term:** what do I need to do today and what will I achieve at the end of this session?

**Medium term:** what do I need to do over the next month or so and what will I achieve at the end?

**Long term:** where is this heading, what are the steps along the way and what will I have at the end?



## Step 4: Incentivise them

Let's be clear, no incentives, fewer people cometh to your solution. Build it without incentives, and less people will come.

Learning, while beneficial still requires effort, and most people consider it work not pleasure! **Remember, you don't employ these people so your best motivational weapon is the carrot.** Beating them with a stick and "requiring" them to participate is hardly the way to win hearts and minds.

Incentives can take many forms, including direct rewards and competitions based on participation and learning results. The exact nature of your incentives scheme will depend on what drives your audience and what your competitors are doing.

**You should skew your incentives towards what matters most to you and least to them.** Reward them for completing the learning that will drive the strongest results for you, this is usually your product or specific sales process learning.



## Step 5: Use your community to motivate each other

Incentives aren't your only motivational lever. They are critical in creating a sustainable mass of people, but once you have your online community, you can then motivate them by openly recognising a person's success in front of their peers and using team games or rewards to generate peer pressure to participate.

On some occasions, in complex sales environments, it may even be appropriate to provide avenues for online collaboration so they can share lessons learnt and create their own body of knowledge to enable the whole community's success.

## Step 6: Certificates & Certification

A simple thing like a certificate of completion cost you almost nothing but shows the value you place in your learning and your indirect sales force. You may even be lucky enough that some or part of the training that you provide can be recognised by a professional organisation as certified professional development. Regardless, people love a certificate with their name on it!

## Step 7: Create Local Champions

In most indirect sales networks you will be trying to engage multiple sales people at each physical location. Some will be more engaged than others. **These engaged people are your secret weapon in winning hearts and minds.** They are real (i.e. human not virtual), usually personable, available and there when their colleagues need to know what product to recommend.

Best of all, they are one of them, not one of you. If you can't be there, the next best thing is to have someone in the room doing your bidding for you.

Every indirect sales solution should identify, develop and continually invest in these people. They have a multiplying effect, they engage and advise those people that to your eyes are unengaged. **Create champions and love them.**

Oh, and they are not always who you expect them to be. The data from your learning program will help you identify and foster your quiet achievers.

## Step 8: Use your frontline managers, keep it human

Your frontline area sales managers are your most important asset in engaging your indirect sales force. They are the human face to your organisation, so **while engaging people through technology is great, being engaged by a human is so much better.** Equipping them to have meaningful relationships that deliver results and keep your indirect sales force focused is an essential piece of the puzzle.

There maybe ten points in this list, but this one has seven parts, each deserving recognition in their own right:

- **Develop your area managers.** They need to know more than the indirect sales force they are servicing. Ensure you have a formal program to develop and maintain their knowledge.
- **Prepare them, just in time.** As they visit each location in the channel ensure they have at the top of mind the information and knowledge most relevant to enable success for that location. They should know what products are most successful in that location and why.
- **Give them data, just in time.** Give them the key things they need to know about the people they are about to visit in the field. Which sales person is the champion of that location? Who is engaged and who is letting the team down? Who is struggling to understand what products? This enables them to have meaningful discussions and invest their time where it will make a difference. This data should be at their fingertips, just in time for their visit and represented in an easy to digest way with clear calls to action.
- **Shoulder to shoulder, reinforced learning.** The reality is some people won't want to engage online, and even if they have engaged online, they may not have been fully immersed or remember the key messages. While your area manager is in the field, you should equip them to deliver casual shoulder to shoulder learning that reinforces the key messages. It's personal, effective and maximises your chances of capturing more hearts and minds by catering for more learning styles.
- **Personalised follow up.** Having engaged their indirect sales force in the field, it's crucial that your area managers possess tools that enable them to easily follow up the sales people they have visited with reinforcing messages. This may be as simple as a personalised email that touches on the points and actions covered, right through to recommending additional learning the salesperson should complete to help address gaps in their knowledge.
- **Sign 'em Up!** Signing up to online communities is one of the primary barriers to engagement. Provide the area manager the ability to sign up sales people on the spot to your indirect sales development program. Signing them up on the spot is infinitely more effective than handing out "how to register to our program business cards". Once the sales person is on your radar (in your data base), you have the chance to build a meaningful relationship with them.
- **Compare and reward your area managers.** Your area managers are employed by you so you can motivate them with both carrots and sticks. Make it clear to them what results you expect from them, and the sales people in their area. Measure their performance and openly compare them to each other. Work with those who are not meeting their performance measures and reward those who are exceeding your expectations.

## 9. Plan, measure, realign, plan, measure, realign

Every indirect sales development program needs a clear plan that identifies the outcomes you are trying to achieve, analyses the needs of the stakeholders in the value chain, identifies the knowledge and skills they need to develop and lays out a calendar of activity aligned to your sales strategy and markets needs. It needs to clearly identify how overall solution success will be evaluated and how each stakeholder will be measured. Having measured it, you need to be prepared to adapt your plan and solution to realign it to your desired outcomes. Constant vigilance is the price of success.

## 10. Use business intelligence intelligently

If you want to create a really successful and targeted solution, you need to be prepared to go a little further and use business intelligence from external sources to create a laser-like focus on the local drivers of success. For example, you can use customer demographics or sales data from specific locations to focus area managers, and their sales force, on products and skills that will drive sales in their local area. Streamline your process and remove any distractions.

**Ticking off these 10 points in creating your indirect sales development solution will be almost sure to make it a success.** The relative importance of each varies from industry to industry, but you will instinctively know which ones to focus on in each situation.

And, obviously, it would really help a lot if you made sure you had a product or two, priced reasonably, that people want to buy.

## Summary

In summary, the Sales and Retail sector is suffering from a distinct lack of enthusiasm, engagement and emotional connection. This sector is lagging behind other sectors on a global scale statistically, but in order to defy those statistics, you need to effectively capture the hearts and minds of your indirect sales force. It's critical that you structure their development around their own success, motivate and educate them with stimulating learning tools, reward and recognise their successes, and provide consistent, appropriate and evolving learning solutions.

With smart work comes great rewards, and as your indirect sales force becomes more engaged, invested and committed, you'll watch your business grow!

To watch your business grow, contact us to view examples and discuss how we can apply the 10 steps to your unique organisational requirements.

**View our  
Channel Sales Case Study**

# Sources

For more information about the concepts presented in this paper, we invite you to explore the following articles and links.

'Disengaged Retail Workforce Costs UK £628 Million A Year', 2013

<http://www.engageforsuccess.org/disengaged-retail-workforce-costs-uk-628-million-a-year/#.VeQMlbyqqko>

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'How Employee Engagement Drives Growth' Susan Sorenson, 2013

<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

'State Of The Global Workplace' Gallup Research Paper, 2013