

Case study for Chapter 7

Bristol Myers Squibb

Bristol Myers Squibb is one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in the United States. The company is well known for its commitment to staff training and to developing people's skills: as one sales manager put it, "What's kept me here for fifteen years is the BMS culture. It's a culture that's directed towards its people. BMS wants to take care of those who are willing to work hard and do the right things."

This commitment to the staff is indicated in the company's mission statement, which contains the following statement:

"We pledge personal respect, fair compensation and honest and equitable treatment. To all who qualify for advancement, we will make every effort to provide opportunity. We affirm our commitment to foster a globally [diverse](#) workforce and a company-wide culture that encourages excellence, leadership, innovation and a balance between our personal and professional lives. We acknowledge our obligation to provide able and humane leadership and a clean and safe work environment."

While most companies have similar wording in their mission statements, most do not live up to the ringing phrases: Bristol Myers Squibb invest substantial sums in supporting and training sales people and other staff on the organisation.

Pharmaceutical selling is dominated by missionary selling. The sales force are rarely in front of a buyer: usually they talk to doctors, hospitals, and even State organisations which have influence over the decisions made. Pharmaceutical selling can almost be seen as a public-relations exercise, except that the results (in terms of sales) are much more tangible. The pharmaceutical industry is also characterised by a continuous training need as new, ever more complex products arrive on the market.

During the summer of 2002 BMS revamped its entire hardware and software support systems for its sales force. This included the M-Power automation system, including the field force automation system CallMex. This system enabled BMS to manage sample distribution, capture doctors' signatures electronically, record and analyse data on prescribers, prepare reports, and use pen-tablet systems to communicate with Head Office. The new software also complied with new legislation (the Prescription Drug Marketing Act).

These changes were revolutionary for a sales force used to a paper-based system, so the entire sales force (almost 4,000 people in all) had to be trained to use the new equipment and software.

The BMS sales force is widely-scattered geographically. They are divided into 350 districts across five time zones, so bringing them together for a training programme would have been impossible. The company therefore opted for a web-based training programme, enabling the sales force to learn in spare time and at their own pace.

The e-learning system was set up by Dendrite Inc., a specialist firm in e-learning. Dendrite's WebSession Manager is an integrated software and service product designed for distance learning. It enables software application sharing, user training and coaching, and document-preparation collaboration. Web sessions are led by moderators who direct the class, and co-moderators who field questions and generally play a behind-the-scenes role. The participants log on via a standard modem at specific times for classes, and are able to interact with the instructors on-line in real time.

The system was piloted with 300 representatives and managers during the week of May 6th 2002. This was sufficient to train these participants successfully, so the system was rolled out to the entire salesforce: as a result of the pilot, the class times were adjusted and the submission

process for on-line assessments was streamlined. Dendrite had to ship 40,000 individual pieces of hardware to participants in advance of starting the training programme, including a videotape from BMS's senior management stressing the importance for corporate strategy of adopting the system. Another video provided the participants with instruction on using the tablet PC.

The scale of the programme was vast. Dendrite used over 100 instructors, who had themselves to be trained beforehand: the company used 20 virtual training studios at its headquarters, and provided more than 50,000 hours of virtual training. Students submitted 280,000 assessment questions, and over 20,000 pieces of training material were distributed.

Participants worked through six self-paced pre-recorded sessions before joining a live session, and during each week of the training programme the participants only needed to commit two days out of the field. This minimised the disruption to BMS's sales programme. In follow-up participant evaluation studies, 90% of participants said that the programme had met or exceeded their expectations, 97% said that moderators and co-moderators enhanced the virtual learning experience, and 89% said that they could use CallMex successfully in their sales territory activities.

For BMS, the programme was a resounding success. It saved approximately 5,500 field sales days as well as an estimated \$10m in travel expenses, but the most important aspect of its success was the way in which it succeeded in motivating the sales force to learn, and use, the new systems.

Case Study Questions

1. To what extent do you think this training system would work for other types of selling, for example technical salespeople? *The system should work equally well for technical salespeople or missionaries. The training system has the flexibility to allow for different working patterns and different learning styles, and has the advantage of being geographically dispersed.*
2. What problems might arise from surveying participants afterwards? *Surveying the participants afterwards may not give accurate results because the participants are employees, and may feel that they have to sound positive about the programme even if they have misgivings.*
3. Why might salespeople not participate in a programme such as this? *Salespeople, in common with other people, are often suspicious of change. Also, many salespeople might feel that they are perfectly capable of working out how to use the new system, without outside help or training.*
4. What problems arise from the 11% of BMS salespeople who say that they are unable to use CallMex successfully? *The 11% of salespeople who cannot use the system represent a failure of the training programme, but they also represent a problem for the company in that the new system has to be used in order to comply with the legislation. The salespeople who are unable to use the system will need to receive further training, and may still be unable to learn. If that is the case, the company may have the painful decision of either firing the salespeople or finding them other jobs in the organisation.*
5. How might BMS build on this scheme for further salesforce training? *BMS could set the system up as a semi-permanent feature, for training new salespeople and updating existing salespeople. The main problem will be maintaining the interest in regular studying: working on the programme was probably interesting when it was novel, but once the novelty wears off salespeople will need to be motivated to retrain as necessary.*