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15 PAGES OF RESEARCH-BASED INSIGHT, INCLUDING: GROWING A CUSTOMER-LED CULTURE… ENTHUSIASM, ENERGY AND MOTIVATION… WHAT MOTIVATES ACCOUNT MANAGERS + SALES RESEARCH ROUND-UP

AROUND THE WORLD

Sales motivators – what drives your team?

Andrew Dugdale

The data analysis provided here offers insight into what motivates "account managers".

Motivators are the extrinsic factors that determine whether your salespeople really get up in the morning "ready to rock and roll"' – or not! The global data in the following charts provide insight into what motivates people from different regions. It will help sales leaders decide whether in general they are applying the most relevant motivators for their account managers.

Let's start by taking a brief look at the role definition of "account manager" in the context of this research.

Account manager role definition

The definition of the account manager role as used in this data analysis is: "The role of an account manager is to engage at C suite level to proactively retain and develop existing client relationships and income from a portfolio of significant clients, and also to develop and grow new client relationships. An account manager is expected to manage a client portfolio in order to maximize the long-term mutual value of the relationship for both parties."*

What are sales motivators?

Research carried out over 16 years by SalesAssessment.com has shown that there are eight primary motivators across salespeople worldwide. The higher a candidate scores for a particular motivator, the more the correct alignment of rewards is likely to motivate them to perform. Note: sales managers and sales leaders have different motivator groups. This article is specific to the motivators for account managers.

The eight motivators

Money – measures how important money, salary, commissions, and bonuses are as a motivator. Those who score high on this factor can be demotivated if there is no connection between salary and effort or if the monetary rewards are too low. They generally work better when they feel that the job pays well and rewards are linked to effort and success. Low scores indicate a lesser need for a strong link between material rewards and the job, and increased pay is less likely to increase motivation.

Competition – measures the level of motivation created by competing with others or situations where performance can be directly compared with others. High scorers feel spurred when there is competition and comparison between peers, and can be exhilarated by being the best and coming out ahead. Low scorers generally don't find competitive situations motivating, and may not invest additional energy to win in a competitive sales situation.

Achievement – measures the extent to which tough goals and individual performance is important. Candidates who are highly motivated by achievement value being "stretched" and having their abilities challenged. When there is nothing to achieve they typically don't invest additional energy. Low scorers are not motivated when faced with difficult or "stretch" targets. They may prefer not having specific targets, and may find targets to be demotivating.

Pace – measures the level of motivation obtained from managing lots of activity and having a busy schedule. Those motivated by a fast pace have a need to be constantly on the go, are driven by pressure, and like to accomplish large volumes of work. Low scorers are generally more motivated when they can take their time completing tasks and allow events to proceed at their own pace. Enormous volumes of work and work pressure can decrease motivation for low scorers.

Social contact – measures the extent that having contact with others is a motivator. High scorers are motivated to work in an environment that offers the opportunity to meet many people and to collaborate with peers. Low scorers feel neutral about the prospect of working with others, and some are even demotivated by collaboration.

Recognition – measures the motivation generated from praise and the recognition for good work. High scorers are motivated by congratulations and recognition for work well done. Lack of praise or no recognition for good work generally reduces their motivation. Low scorers are generally not motivated by recognition.

Growth – measures the motivation from individual development opportunities and the development of new skills. High scorers are motivated by opportunities to acquire new skills and by individual development. They feel less motivated when these opportunities are not available. Low scorers are not overly motivated by opportunities for acquiring new skills and by individual development.

Autonomy – measures how less structured and flexible environments motivate people. High scorers have a need for work without strong supervision. They are driven by their own initiative and prefer the flexibility of organizing their work as they see best. Imposed constraints will generally reduce their motivation. Low scorers feel indifferent about the degree to which they are supervised. The lack of supervision might even reduce their motivation.

How do motivators work?

Motivators are a measure of how much an individual prefers one type of reward compared with another (these rewards relating directly to the eight factors described previously). The more closely an employer can match the rewards they offer to each individual's "preferred motivators", the more motivated to perform an individual will be. Highly motivated salespeople (that is, those where the employer rewards best match their individual preferred motivators) work harder; will be more inclined to "go the extra mile"; will be more inclined to deploy their skills, experience and knowledge to optimal effect in the customer and the workplace; will be more motivated to learn and develop new skills or knowledge; and are much more likely to relish new opportunities and challenges.

Salespeople, in instances where their preferred motivators are not well mapped to the rewards offered, will not be motivated. This creates a parlous state for the firm involved, usually accompanied by low levels of interest in the job, high staff turnover, and low work-rates.

Why should I care?

Clearly, salespeople need the right skills and behaviours to do their job – this topic has been the subject of a number of previous Databank articles by the author and will continue to be a primary topic for the future; however, having the right skills and behaviours, without the application of the right motivators, is still not a "silver bullet" for sales success.

Ultimate sales revenue performance can only become a reality when salespeople are well trained, behaviourally suited to the role they are being asked to perform, and are highly motivated. Take away any one of these factors and sales performance drops off dramatically.

We are talking about significant differences here between when a firm gets this magic formula right, and when the organisation gets it wrong. Back in 2000, in its "*War for Talent*" series of articles, McKinsey found that the difference between an average sales performer and a high performer was that high performers deliver 67% more revenue each year compared with their average-performing counterparts. Our research indicates that this figure is conservative!

Further, consider the revenue impact for your business if you fail to correctly motivate your sales staff and, as a result, they perform below average. You are very likely to be talking at least a 100% difference in performance each and every year.

Note, however, that while this article aims to provide data that will enable readers to more accurately target the rewards they deploy for their sales staff, this pre-supposes that the salespeople are already well trained in the specific skills required for their job role, and are also behaviourally suited to those roles. Note also that motivators work best when the correct specific motivators are targeted at individuals; this level of data granularity can only be obtained from detailed, multifaceted assessments such as from our own role-specific Sales Talent Assessment.

Analysis

Hence, when analysing the findings, it is important to consider that each salesperson individually represents a considerable ongoing investment for the employing organisation, and each salesperson needs to be understood individually. The data presented here in summary form represents the results of more than 4,000 individual assessments taken over the past two years, and is presented grouped by role and by region. So whilst this data provides food for thought, it is not the answer to enhancing performance for individual salespeople – instead, it is more a general indicator of regional differences.

The findings of this research are presented in a tabular form by region (below) and also as graphics showing the relative importance of each motivator by region. Where a motivator is highlighted in green, this indicates that it is a strong motivator for that region. Motivators highlighted in yellow are weak motivators for that region (effectively these are irrelevant to that group). Motivators not highlighted are moderate motivators; while these should be addressed, priority focus should be given to strong motivators, where available. You will notice, however, that there are two regions without any strong motivators. In this case, it is more important to consider a spread of rewards across the top three or four motivators to achieve the desired results.

Chart 1: Account manager motivators by role by region

SOUTH AMERICA	AUSTRALIA & NZ	EUROPE (EXCL UK)	ASIA PAC (INCL CHINA)	MEA (INCL INDIA)	NORTH AMERICA	UK
Money	Money	Money	Money	Money	Money	Money
Growth	Growth	Growth	Recognition	Recognition	Recognition	Recognition
Achievement	Achievement	Recognition	Growth	Growth	Growth	Growth
Social contact	Recognition	Pace	Achievement	Competition	Competition	Competition
Competition	Competition	Competition	Competition	Pace	Social contact	Social contact
Recognition	Autonomy	Achievement	Pace	Achievement	Autonomy	Achievement
Autonomy	Social contact	Social contact	Social contact	Social contact	Achievement	Pace
Pace	Pace	Autonomy	Autonomy	Autonomy	Pace	Autonomy

Data included from the following countries by region – South America: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico; Australia and NZ; Europe (excluding UK): Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland; Asia Pacific: China, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand; Middle-East and Africa: India; Kenya; Saudi Arabia; South Africa; North America: USA; Canada; UK data is shown separately.

Chart 2: Account managers – individual motivators

The following data is taken from the past two years of assessing the two roles on a global basis.
Key to markers:

1. Money:

2. Competition:

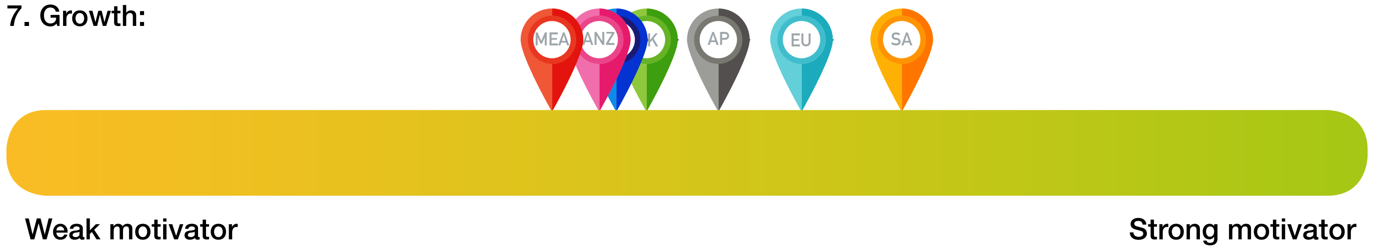
3. Achievement:

4. Pace:

5. Social contact:

6. Recognition:

7. Growth:



8. Autonomy:

What conclusions can we draw?

The most interesting findings from this research for an organisation trying to better understand their account manager population around the world are:

Money: This is the top motivator in all regions, but is highest in UK, North America, and Europe. Surprisingly it is only moderately motivating in Australia and New Zealand, and in Middle East and Africa.

Competition: Although a well-used motivational tool in sales environments, competitions very surprisingly turn out to be only moderately motivating at best; in fact they are close to being not-motivating in Australia and New Zealand, and the MEA region. So have all those "team challenges" been in vain? The figures suggest that to be the case – for the Account Manager population at least!

Achievement: Here is a real shocker, with North America and the MEA region indicating achievement to be at best a weak motivator. In contrast, for South America this is one of the highest motivators, coming in just behind money, and it is a moderate motivator for all other regions.

Pace: Perhaps not surprisingly for such a senior group as account managers, pace is a weak-to-moderate motivator. This is to be expected from a group of salespeople working at senior level where thinking and planning are higher priorities than lots of cold calling.

Social contact: Here is another surprising factor. It would be reasonable to assume that senior people who operate in the informal political networks both within the customer and their own firm would be motivated by interacting with other people, but this has been shown not to be the case. Indeed, in MEA, Asia Pacific, and Australia and New Zealand, this is a very weak motivator, with only South America showing it as a motivator (albeit only as a moderately high motivator).

Recognition: Despite assumptions, recognition is highly motivating only in North America, with the UK close behind; it is at best a moderate motivator for all other regions. Bang go those "Presidents Club" trips and "attaboys" as motivators for your account managers throughout most of the world. This is one area where the cultural differences between the US and the UK on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other are very clearly highlighted.

Growth: As may be expected, this factor is generally a motivator across the board for this senior group of account managers. The highest level of motivation from growth is in South America and the lowest in MEA, albeit that it is still an average motivator even there.

Autonomy: Again, this throws up interesting results. Given the senior nature of this group of account managers, it would be reasonable to assume they would be motivated by being able to set their own work agenda. However, the results show it to be an average motivator at best.

* If you would like a more detailed description of the role discussed, please email the author via adugdale@salesassessment.com.