

## Re-Thinking the National Sales Meeting

by Jennifer Singleton | May 30, 2016

The national sales meeting is so ingrained in sales culture that its ROI is rarely questioned. Maybe it's because it energizes the team to get everyone together for a few days, because it builds camaraderie for geographically dispersed teams, or even because it's a great way to recognize outstanding performers. But do these events provide enough value to justify their high cost? The national sales meeting isn't going away—and we're certainly not suggesting it should. However, it's time to think about how we can execute these meetings to maximize their value.

Before we dive into our approach, let's examine the cost of getting the whole team together for a few days. Verizon presents some telling information in their white paper, *Meetings in America*. According to their research, a day-long meeting involving five participants—four of whom must travel to the meeting—costs approximately \$5,000. Assuming your sales meeting includes 200 people for five days, your meeting could conceivably cost more than \$1,000,000—not including the opportunity cost of having your entire team occupied for a week. In a time when we look so carefully at ROI on much smaller investments, it's rather shocking we don't look more closely at the economic return on this significant cost.

Knowing what a substantial investment the national sales meeting is for your company should be cause to step back and evaluate the effectiveness of the methods you employ at these meetings. After all, paying for all that training isn't a good investment if your sales reps are going to lose much of what they learned soon after the meeting. Plenty of research—including this Xerox Corporation study—reveals that in-class training with little or no follow-up coaching is not effective for information retention. In fact, according to the study, 87 percent of what sales reps learn in a setting like this is likely to be forgotten unless there is ongoing follow-up and on-the-job training. These findings are magnified in an environment like the national sales meeting, where attendees are cooped up for days on end, wishing they were out enjoying the destination city, while instead being drowned in a constant fire hose of information.

Here are some thoughts on how to rework the national sales meeting to ensure you get a higher return on your investment while still maintaining the positive aspects of team-building and performance recognition:

- Prior to the meeting, hold a sales pitch competition for the best presentation on a product or service. Encourage reps to submit the presentations via video and vote for the best online. Rather than using the sales meeting to give the presentations, use it to simply recognize the winners. Not only do you save valuable time, but best of all, the presentations are now online and accessible to the team as needed.
- The national sales meeting is still a great opportunity to introduce new products and features that can energize the team. But be sure to capture the presentations on video and break them into small, searchable chunks so reps can easily refresh themselves on these topics as they need them. This just-in-time approach to learning ensures reps have access to the content they need at the time they need it most.
- Distribute relevant content to your team over a matter of months or weeks, both leading up to and following your meeting. This approach helps your sales reps absorb the information over time and also allows you to potentially shorten the meeting by a day—thereby saving a significant amount of money while still achieving much higher productivity.
- What if you were able to eliminate the drawn-out and dreaded—but often required—compliance segment of the meeting? Instead, you could reward sales reps who watch a pre-recorded compliance video with extra free time to enjoy the destination city. Quizzes or required actions can be incorporated to ensure the content was actually absorbed, making it easy to reward those who did their homework.

The “before, during, and after” nature of a sales learning platform allows reps to stay up to date—you guessed it—before, during, and after your national sales meeting, so they can retain (and apply) more information. Which is ultimately the whole point of training. If your reps aren’t able to retain and apply what they’ve learned at your meeting, it’s hard to get a return on this costly investment. Rather than eliminating this important part of sales culture—use modern technology and best practices to extract the most value from it. Your reps will benefit greatly from wider access to the information they need—and will surely appreciate a little more free time in whatever city you choose for your next national sales meeting.

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