Welcome to the Accenture Management Consulting podcast series. I'm Bill Moller, and my guests are in Accenture's Sales & Customer Services practice, that’s part of CRM, and they are Yusuf Tayob, managing director of Selling Excellence, and Bryan Berumen, the senior manager.

And we're going to be talking about Accenture's analysis of the 2013 Sales Performance Optimization study, that was co-sponsored with CSO Insights for the past eight years—specifically what sales executives need to do in this rapidly-changing marketplace to improve sales effectiveness initiatives.

Yusuf, first to you. Why don’t you start with the big picture – and it really seems it’s hard these days to be a CSO. Talk about some of the challenges they’re facing.

Thanks, Bill. Customer expectations are changing rapidly—and that’s putting pressure on CSOs and their peers in marketing and customer service. To achieve enterprise growth, it’s about more than making a sales number. It’s about providing a differentiated experience across sales, marketing and service—and interacting consistently with customers across all channels and routes to market. Accenture recommends an agile selling approach to address these challenges and separate the high performers from the rest.

Well, how do the findings from the CSO Insights research support this idea?

The data gives us a unique view into the minds of CSOs. For instance, we know there’s a renewed optimism out there with 75 percent of CSOs targeting greater than five percent revenue growth this year. But only 12 percent are completely confident they will achieve this growth. This is just one of many indicators that there's still plenty of room for improvement.

In fact, for enterprises with more than $1 billion in revenues, we identified five areas of focus for improving sales effectiveness initiatives—two that are geared toward cross-functional improvements and three that are specific to the sales organization.

Let me ask about that term cross-functional, I assume you mean across marketing, sales and service?

Yes that's right, and here’s the exciting part. For the first time since Accenture began analyzing the survey, CSOs report that they are proactively investing in: 1) integrating marketing, sales and service departments, and 2) in improving customer loyalty metrics. This tells me the idea of agile selling is starting to take root, but the data also suggests the efforts to-date are not enough. CSOs report that much of what they are doing now isn’t producing expected results and that the entire front office needs to coordinate the customer experience.

As for the other three areas specific to the sales organization, CSOs continue to tell us they need to get better at improving immature sales methods and processes; attracting, retaining and growing sales talent; and driving tangible business outcomes from their sales technology investments.

Bryan, let’s turn to you for a moment. Why don’t you give us a few examples of the data points that Yusuf just described?

Yes, I’d be happy to, Bill, and in fact I encourage everyone that’s listening to download from Accenture.com our newly-published point of view which is titled the “Top-Five Focus Areas for Improving Sales Effectiveness Initiatives; it’s got a lot of great visuals of these findings.

For the first cross-functional finding, which is enhancing integration of marketing, sales and service, we found that 82 percent of CSO’s are not currently training and leveraging customer service representatives to cross-sell or up-sell. This definitely shows us that there's more to be done here.

For the second, which is about improving the customer experience to drive loyalty, we found that although CSOs say they are more confident in their ability to create customer loyalty, the data actually tells us that 41 percent are struggling to renew business with their existing customers, and only 25 percent of leads come from existing customers. The latter data point may suggest that the vast majority of customers are not satisfied enough to make a personal referral.

And lastly, mobile capabilities and tablets continue to be important: the majority of CSOs, about 76 percent, perceive that mobile CRM improves the performance of the sales team. However, less than one half of companies are currently providing access to critical sales and customer information on mobile devices. So, there is still significant room for improvement.

Bryan, thank you, and I know there’s one more finding from the area of sales talent acquisition, development and retention. I wondered if you could share that with us?
Absolutely Bill. Given the more positive economic environment, more than one-half of CSOs now plan to increase the size of their sales force. At the same time, nearly one-third believe they need to improve their ability to hire successful sales representatives, and more than 40 percent do not use competency testing to hire the right talent. These practices and more contribute to sub-optimized sales force effectiveness.

Well, clearly there is plenty that CSOs and sales executives can improve to meet their business objectives, and let me remind our listeners that the point of view also covers two other key areas: improving sales methodologies and processes, as well as sales technology and enablement.

So let’s wrap up, Yusuf, I think you might have a final word of wisdom for CSOs?

Thanks, Bill. My final thought is that, at Accenture, we believe that agile selling requires companies to operate at much faster execution speeds and much closer levels of collaboration. CSOs can be most effective by taking a holistic approach to sales effectiveness—from strategy, processes and incentives, to talent enablement and operations. In our accompanying point of view, we’ve also shared some specific actions CSOs can take to improve across the five areas we’ve highlighted today.

Well Yusuf and Bryan, let me thank you both very much for talking about the CSO Insights findings and analysis, and thanks to you for listening. If you would like more information related to what we’ve been talking about in this podcast, or to learn how Accenture can help you achieve high performance, you can visit us on the web; we’re at accenture.com/managementconsulting and you can email us at consultingpodcasts@accenture.com. I’m Bill Moller, thank you.

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