

# Guidant - coaching the medium

## Innovation by a health technology leader

Guidant brilliantly demonstrates media neutral/Open Planning principles when it set about coaching its entire sales and marketing management team.

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**Centre for  
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Integrated Marketing is a holistic discipline that involves the whole organisation in developing congruent, sustainable and high-value brand experience for all stakeholders.

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Guidant is a world leader in technology systems for heart care. Its customer base is hospitals and the professionals within them, and business success depends on a series of high-value sales alongside ancillary and supportive technologies. The single most important communications medium that Guidant has is its sales force. Thus, in the same way that other companies might work on enhancing their communications through, for example, the medium of television or newsprint, it makes sense for Guidant's marketing to seriously attend to enhancing company communications through the medium of the sales force.

## Background

Guidant is a leader in heart care technology systems, especially pacemakers. Its core identity is based on 'exquisitely refined heart-rhythm micro-management'. It has an annual revenue of \$3.2 billion and operates globally, particularly in the developed world. The Guidant mission is to provide leading-edge technology for physicians and life-saving therapy for patients.

Success in this market depends not only on excellent product technology, but also on the quality of the customer interface during sales and service. Most particularly, sales involve a significant service component in the form of consultative advice by the sales person. An essential part of the strategic marketing mix, therefore, is the detailed management of the quality and effectiveness of these one-to-one consultative processes. The sales person becomes the single most important communications medium, fulfilling a number of roles

- Directly communicating and advertising the existence of new or enhanced products and services
- Managing relationships not only with key decision-makers but also with the members of the wider decision-making unit and influencer community
- Promoting and closing sales
- Providing continuing help and support services, both face-to-face and by telephone.
- Ongoing communication between customer and company concerning feedback and customer needs .

The Guidant sales person is an important professional, each one generating hundreds of thousands of pounds of income per annum. Small changes in their efficiency and



[Cardiac Resynchronization Therapy](#)

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[Coronary Guiding Catheters](#)

[Coronary Guide Wires](#)

[Coronary Stent Systems](#)

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[Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillators](#)

[Intravascular Radiotherapy](#)

[Pacing Systems](#)

[Peripheral Products](#)

effectiveness can make a significant difference to Guidant profits. It is because of this key role of the sales person that Guidant has turned to coaching as a means of leveraging the whole international sales and marketing function.

*'We have an extremely successful and powerful salesforce but we identified other competencies that are going to be crucial for our sales teams'*

*- Guidant Senior Executive*

This should not be seen as simply a conventionally professional HR initiative. By analogy, consider how a marketing director in an FMCG company relentlessly focuses on the company's advertising or media agency and on the quality of its performance. Consider how much time and money is spent on optimising the effectiveness of the media mix, and on decisions about media schedules or retail planning. Think about the huge attention devoted to perfecting packaging. In the highly leveraged business-to-business world of Guidant, enhancing the efficiency of the sales force is an exact equivalent of other companies' efforts to enhance their 'traditional' media communications, and coaching is a highly effective way of achieving this.

## **Coaching for communication**

Guidant made the decision to teach coaching skills to all of their sales and marketing managers around the world. This represents a significant commitment, requiring every single manager from the Vice President down to attend a workshop course totalling five full days.

*'We took a step back and said why don't we develop a personal development plan for each rep?'*

*- Guidant Senior Executive*

Guidant selected a leading trainer of coaches, Gordon Collins of Canadian firm, The Coaching Network, to develop their coaching competence. For Collins, coaching goes beyond a set of 'improvement' techniques and pervades deeply into one's approach to work and life. It is fundamentally about mastering individual self-empowerment and self-development.

*'We've heard that several times – I'm not developing, that's why I'm leaving'*

The purpose of learning coaching at Guidant is to help sales and marketing managers become more successful at enabling their teams to perform more effectively, and thereby improve Guidant communications. With each sale contract generating significant revenue, coaching could make a dramatic difference to both individual and corporate performance. The Guidant plan is therefore to develop a culture of coaching, within

which all managers from senior to junior are either coaching or being coached, and within which the declared aim is to become a more fully functioning, effective and empowered professional person.

That this works is demonstrated by the fact that during our participation in a training workshop, a solution to at least one opportunity worth £250,000 was identified. In our interviews of senior participants and management, it was clear that coaching contributed not only to direct bottom-line .....but to more intangible but nevertheless important integrated researching benefits, such as employee morale and customer satisfaction.

## Congruence between culture and brand

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Collins language of breakdowns, resolving blockages and moving on to a more empowered life figuratively mirrors much of what Guidant is about. Guidant's purpose is to help patients with heart disease 'to return to active and productive lives'. Their trademarked strap-line is 'it's a great time to be alive', and they promote what they do as 'Pioneering lifesaving technology to give patients another day. Another year. Another lifetime'.

Just as all of the company's communications media should communicate the value that it truly delivers to the market, so should its organisational culture and technical competences likewise truly embody that same message. A company that sells life-promoting products and yet ignores the life-promotion of its own employees is hardly convincing. In empowering the actively healthy and productive life of its own sales force, Guidant is not only looking after the heart of its own interests, it is communicating loudly and demonstrably, both internally and externally, that it cares deeply that all people might be optimally and productively alive.

*It's very important how we differentiate ourselves from our competition – it's through education'*

*- Guidant Senior Executive*

Collins' coaching aims to empower the individual, and Guidant sees this as a far more effective tool for further developing the successful professional manager than, for example, yet more sales and time management training.

At the heart of the coaching process there is what Collins describes as the breakdown. This is the point at which the individual can identify a mental gap or obstruction that is blocking superior performance. During the coaching training, participants rigorously learn and practise overcoming breakdowns. For example, they learn to identify a specific breakdown and then to work through its respective blockage into a way of recognising that which can generate a zone of new success.

Collins believes that everyone is capable of achieving more than they routinely do, and the identification of blockages is part of a powerful process for realising more of that potential.

# Integrated Marketing learning

Guidant illustrates an important principle for marketers in the age of Integrated Marketing and Open Planning. Open Planning, which is the methodology for successful media neutral planning ([www.OpenPlanning.org](http://www.OpenPlanning.org)), indicates that every single contact point with customers constitutes a potentially important medium. Guidant illustrates this perfectly. To recognise coaching as a “media development tool” is a highly innovative act.

Optimising the communications mix means just that, not just optimising some of the communications. It is an example that applies not only to many B2B but also to many consumer service companies.

Guidant also demonstrates commitment and insight by the inclusion of all of its sales and marketing managers. The coaching workshops include a mix of sales and marketing people from around the world, which in itself enhances networking and a sense of belonging, building bonds and shared purpose. And the coaching processes themselves intrinsically reinforce the core ‘heart’ purpose of Guidant, which is to enable people to be actively and productively alive.