

The Company: Autodesk

Engineering and entertainment software—pumping up productivity by redefining what’s possible in designing, manufacturing, or building. It is generating the same spectacularly realistic effects that animate movies and video games. And it has made Autodesk a world leader in 2D and 3D design, engineering and entertainment software—the fifth-largest software company in the world.

But, despite Autodesk’s history of rapid growth and its enviable market position, the company saw tough challenges ahead—particularly in strengthening its sales force. To build on its success, Autodesk’s top management decided that a profound shift in its sales approach was needed. It called on BTS to guide the transformation.

The Challenge: A New Way of Selling

Selling Autodesk’s high-tech, feature-rich products is a job for experts: 1,900 Value-Added Resellers (VARs) who are responsible for 90 percent of the company’s \$1.6 billion in sales—but are not company employees. At home in a world of complex programs and specialized users, VARs were accustomed to selling Autodesk applications based on their features and benefits.

Autodesk executives knew that the company needed to replace this traditional brand of pitching with a more customer-oriented sales technique for the future. “The objective was to transform our sales channel by having them define the value of Autodesk through business results rather than feature sets,” says Tom Kopinski, Director of Competitive & Technical Marketing for Manufacturing at Autodesk. This meant nothing less than rewiring an experienced, skilled sales force’s most basic instincts: Instead of focusing on product performance, VARs would focus on the customer’s needs—imagining themselves in the customer’s shoes, and then walking a mile in those shoes.

The Transformation: A Quiet Revolution

To accomplish this 180-degree shift, Autodesk’s deep commitment was key. “We certainly haven’t seen many companies willing to invest in training outside traditional employee channels,” BTS executive vice president Dan Parisi points out. But Autodesk knew that only truly transformational measures would produce the kind of change the company desired. With this strong management mandate, BTS developed an intense simulation that immersed VARs in running a customer company. “We wanted participants to increase their confidence, competence, and mindset by creating an easy-to-use model to expand ‘the sale,’” says Kopinski. And because most of Autodesk’s clients have unique business models, BTS based the simulation on an exemplar that was both

broadly representative and highly demanding: an industrial machinery manufacturing company.

VARs worked for an industrial machinery company in a simulation that covered a three-year-long scenario. Participants dealt with major business challenges, trends and opportunities. After experiencing business from the customer's point of view, they switched roles, to create an account expansion strategy and make sales calls on the executives they had just played in simulation. Increased understanding of the client's strategic issues spurred dramatic improvements in the way they positioned Autodesk's software solutions for clients' needs—and equally dramatic improvements in sales outcomes. "It's practical learning," says Ken Bado, executive vice president of sales for Autodesk. "You're putting emotional energy into it—it's not just pure intellect." This customized approach to learning is now being extended to a construction-company simulation.

The Future of Autodesk: On Track

In today's global economy, change is a constant for every company. But for technology-based firms, it is especially difficult for leaders to stay out in front: The marketplace is on permanent fast-forward. Autodesk's work with BTS to implement simulation training is the kind of bold innovation that today's business environment demands. "Autodesk is at the leading edge, along with companies such as Humana and Symbiocity" says BTS's Parisi. "It's just as important for the sales channel to have an in-depth understanding of the challenges, key business drivers, and the capabilities required for success, as it is for Autodesk's own employees."