

## Highlights

# The 2006/2007 Sales Training Vendor Guide

A Comprehensive Report  
and Evaluation of  
15 Leading Sales Training Companies  
and Their Programs

**Title:** 2006/2007 Sales Training Vendor  
Guide

**A Comprehensive Report and Evaluation of the  
Leading Sales Training Companies and Programs**

**Date:** July 10, 2006

This comprehensive *ESR/InDepth* Report provides an analytic and comparative review of the leading sales training providers as well as an assessment of many of the issues facing end user companies who would engage with those providers. It serves as a vital instrument to help match most sales organizations' sales training and performance needs with the right sales training provider(s) to meet those needs.

ESR's research shows that 90% of all sales training programs result in a 90-120-day increase in sales productivity. Our research also shows that this is a temporary productivity blip, and fewer than 20% of companies show a sustainable productivity gain that lasts a year or more. Our research further shows that the most important factor in sustainable sales improvement is a sales training program carefully matched to and directly supporting the use of your sales methodology and sales force profile.

The single biggest challenge for companies investing in sales performance improvement today is the adoption of, and compliance with, a well-founded, relevant sales methodology across the organization. Many companies are unable to direct, entice, or motivate their sales people to comply with a methodology simply because they don't have one. They mistakenly believe sales training or technology (as represented by CRM, for example), are universal elixirs, capable of solving any and all sales problems they might have. So they spend money fixing the symptoms, not the cause.

Other companies have invested in a methodology but it does not match the buying patterns of their customers. Still others are unaware of the degree of business and behavioral change required to achieve a higher degree of sales performance and, as a result, experience failure.

This report, coupled with our March 31, 2006 *ESR/InDepth* Report *Understanding, Defining and Meeting Your Sales Methodology and Training Requirements* will provide much of what you and your company will need to understand your requirements and take corrective action. These two reports will be the foundation for you to begin the work required to assess your needs and to find and engage with a provider that will contribute to your company consistently achieving or exceeding your sales goals and objectives.

**Sales Training**

**Core Issue of this  
ESR/InDepth Report**

**Who are the sales  
training/consulting  
providers that deliver  
effective offerings for  
sales organizations?**

In the US alone, enterprises spend over \$4 billion per year training sales professionals, half of that investment with third-party training firms. However, less than ten percent of that total is spent with the largest of providers, leaving corporations to make training decisions from an extremely fragmented, and often incompatible pool of suppliers.

Very limited, if any, objective information is available publicly about the sales training providers. And since few companies have the experience and a process to find, select, and manage a provider, many companies either do no training or embark upon a path that leads to failure.

This report is intended to provide an objective and comprehensive view of the sales training provider landscape as well as recommendations on how to evaluate and select the right provider.

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## 1 Executive Summary

Enterprises in the U.S. spend between \$4 billion and \$7 billion per year training their sales professionals. A significant portion of that investment is spent with third-party training firms. Our objectives, with this report are:

- Provide a summary of evaluation guidelines for selecting external sales training;
- Identify the leading sales training providers in the market;
- Categorize them in a manner that makes it easier to identify those training companies that most closely meet your needs;
- Rank these companies by various areas of expertise and specialty;
- Reduce your risk and enable you to maximize the impact of your sales training spend.

Another tangential objective of this report is to determine the relative effectiveness of external sales training providers versus training provided exclusively by internal trainers/facilitators. While it is very difficult to establish a control group, due to the lack of available data—especially by companies that do internal training only—the key conclusion, which we will explore in more detail, is that externally provided sales training yields a higher training effectiveness than internal-only sales training solutions.

### 1.1 Who Will Benefit from this Report?

This report is written primarily for sales leaders. More broadly the audience is the sales organization and the managers responsible for defining sales training requirements, developing sales training programs, and selecting sales training vendors. Specifically the report is targeted at the chief sales officer, the chief learning officer, sales managers responsible for selecting and deploying sales training for their teams, and staff groups including human resources and sales operations organizations.

### 1.2 The Scope of this Report

Of all the excellent sales training vendors out there, only a few are a fit for your organization. This *ESR/InDepth™* Report is designed to help your organization increase the value of your sales training investment. In this report, we examine the leading training and consulting vendors, their strengths and weaknesses, and the specific sales skill problems that they address. While there are many sales training vendors, there are likely only a few that match your sales training needs and criteria.

- 1.2.1 Learn which providers should be on your short list based upon your industry, size, geographic reach, and the complexity of your sales cycle.
- 1.2.2 Save weeks of time researching potential providers.
- 1.2.3 Benefit from the advice and recommendations of ESR's top analysts and sales experts.

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1.2.4 See how the providers compare in key areas, such as:

- Technology support;
- Educational design;
- Customer satisfaction;
- Breadth of solutions;
- Compliance among sales people;
- Return on investment.

### 1.3 Which Sales Training Providers Are Featured in this Report?

We have examined 15 leading companies for this report. There are other industry leading providers that are not covered. ESR will continue to evaluate those and other providers through our weekly *ESR/Insight* brief series on sales training companies.

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Acclivus                  | 9. Richardson                             |
| 2. CustomerCentric Systems   | 10. Sales Performance International (SPI) |
| 3. Holden International      | 11. Sandler Sales Institute               |
| 4. Huthwaite                 | 12. The TAS Group (formerly OnTarget)     |
| 5. Knowledge Advantage       | 13. The Complex Sale                      |
| 6. Miller Heiman             | 14. ValueVision                           |
| 7. Performance Methods, Inc. | 15. Wilson Learning                       |
| 8. Prime Resource Group      |   |

### 1.4 What Makes a Company a Leader?

Clearly, size is a factor. Larger firms command attention in the market. But so also do firms that have been “historically important.” Historically important firms typically did innovative, ground breaking research and development that significantly influenced other programs. Innovation is a factor. A firm can be a leader because of innovative solutions, processes, or intellectual property. Name recognition is a factor. Also, there are several companies covered here that are not as well known as others, however ESR decided to include them because of their growth and customer value trajectory, which could potentially propel them into a leading position in a relatively short time.

These five factors, size, historical importance, innovation, name recognition, and growth/customer value combine in our decision making process to determine which firms would be included in our debut Sales Training Vendor Guide. There are several well-known providers we chose not to include in this report for a number of reasons, including very narrow focus (American Management Association for sales skills, for example), and a broad company offering (AchieveGlobal’s customer service and generic management leadership in addition to their more traditional sales training and methodology offering, as another example). ESR will be covering these and other providers through our weekly *ESR/Insight* briefs going forward.

The reader should understand that during our extensive research and interview cycle with vendor-provided and our own sources, we found that even the best companies have at least a few negative references. And companies that did not score well in some areas had references who applauded them loudly. ESR is determined to filter out this noise and provide you with what we believe to be an objective, accurate, and comprehensive report.

### 1.5 How Did ESR Evaluate these Companies?

First, let us say that when looking at leaders in an industry, it would be rare, in any industry, to find “bad” or “ineffective” companies (although it does happen). Such companies do not rise to a position of leadership.

However there are “good” and “bad” matches between companies, their solutions, and their clients and prospects. Our objective is to categorize companies, identify their strengths, and identify the specific problems for which each company provides a solution. Out of this list of 15 companies, there are probably two to four that should make your short list. The rest, regardless of how good their solutions may be for someone, are probably not optimal for your needs.

Section 2 describes our assessment criteria in more detail. But in general terms, we examine companies on Solution Effectiveness and Breadth of Solution. We then categorize them in terms of deployment of learning-related technologies, rigor of selling methodology supported, and classes of training solutions provided.

Each of these assessment criteria relate directly to the determination of the optimal solution for our client.

Through our proven research methodology, ESR has tapped into publicly-available information, multiple in-depth interviews with vendor CEOs and other senior executives, as well as numerous interviews with vendor-provided and other sales training users and buyers who have engaged with multiple vendors. (See Figure 1-1 and our research process in Section 7.)

You can read more about our research methodology in section 7 of this report or on our website.

## 1.6 What are Some Questions That Need to be Answered when Selecting a Training Program?

There are a lot of excellent sales training programs on the market. However, implementation of a successful sales performance approach depends partially upon the right match of training need with training solution. One company’s excellent training program can be another’s sales training disaster. Why?

### First, different sales training vendors and programs address different selling environments:

- Do you sell big ticket items in small quantities or low priced products in large quantities?
- Do you make one sale per customer or many? Is your product complex or simple to explain?
- Do you have many competitors or only a few?
- Do you sell on price or value?

### Second, different vendors address different salesperson profiles:

- Are your sales people experienced or inexperienced?
- Do you have high or low turnover within your sales team?
- Do they function as inside sales or outside sales resources?
- Do you have individual reps, account teams, or both?

### Third, different vendors address different learning goals:

- Do you need to improve basic or advanced selling skills?

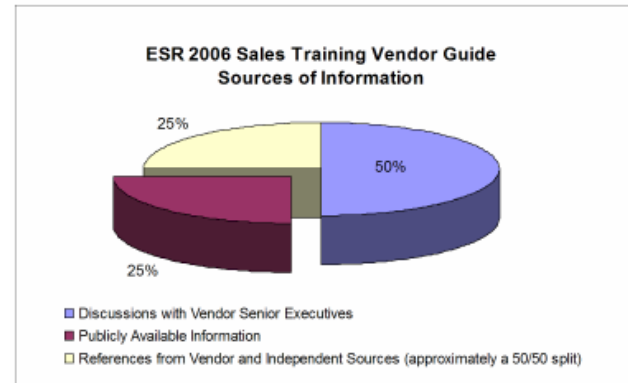


Figure 1-1 – Sources of Information

## 5.7 Performance Methods, Inc.

### Summary

Performance Methods (PMI) focuses on developing customized sales training programs based upon PMI's core training components. Their methodology is very contemporary, and based on a broad range of experiences with competitive techniques.

### Commentary

PMI differs from virtually every other sales training company that ES Research Group has evaluated. Rather than offer a commercial, off-the-shelf program, PMI focuses exclusively on custom-tailored sales training programs. These programs are tailored and assembled from the core intellectual property developed by PMI, based upon a pre-training assessment conducted by PMI for the client.

While sales training vendors vary widely in how they manage course customization (from a not-at-all to a casual approach to a highly rigorous and formalized tailoring methodology), none, except PMI, requires a formal customization process.

With respect to ESR's Five Categories of Sales Training Programs, PMI's offerings address the following:

Basic Selling Skills	Minimal
Advanced Selling Skills	Robust
Opportunity Management Education	Robust
Account Management Education	Robust
Sales Management Education	Moderate

### Strengths

PMI has a strong, methodology-rich approach to improving sales performance, which should appeal to organizations that lack a standardized selling process.

The methodology is quite contemporary, having been developed during an era when prospect use of the Internet and advanced procurement technologies has been deployed (as opposed to methodologies developed 20 years ago and revised). The newer approach, and the significant emphasis on customization also means that users of the PMI methodology are less likely to be competing against organizations that have received identical training, using an identical methodology (See our *ESR/Insight™* brief *Three 21st Century Sales Training Dilemmas: Guns versus Butter, The Googling of Markets & The Clone Wars*).

A distinct strength of PMI is the experience of the team. As one of the younger leaders, the PMI team has the benefit of a level and breadth of experience using other sales methodologies. PMI clients benefit from this broad range of experience with the successes and failures of competitive approaches.

It is also evident that the PMI approach to pre-assessment, customization and deployment is coupled with effective change-management consulting services. ESR believes this a critical component for the successful implementation of a sales methodology.

### Challenges

PMI has already crossed the prior hurdle of having their methodology layered on top of Salesforce.com for use by a major client. With that in mind, we are now in an era of emerging *Prospect Relationship Management* (PRM). We see both a challenge and an opportunity for PMI to leverage technology to the next level, increasing their already high end-user compliance rate. For

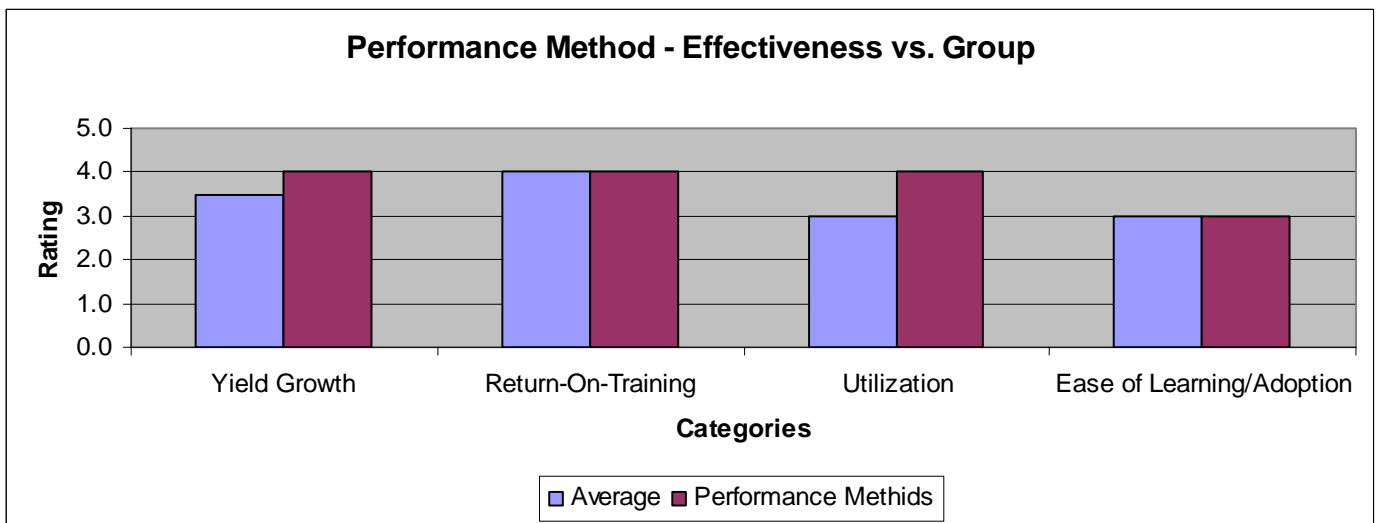
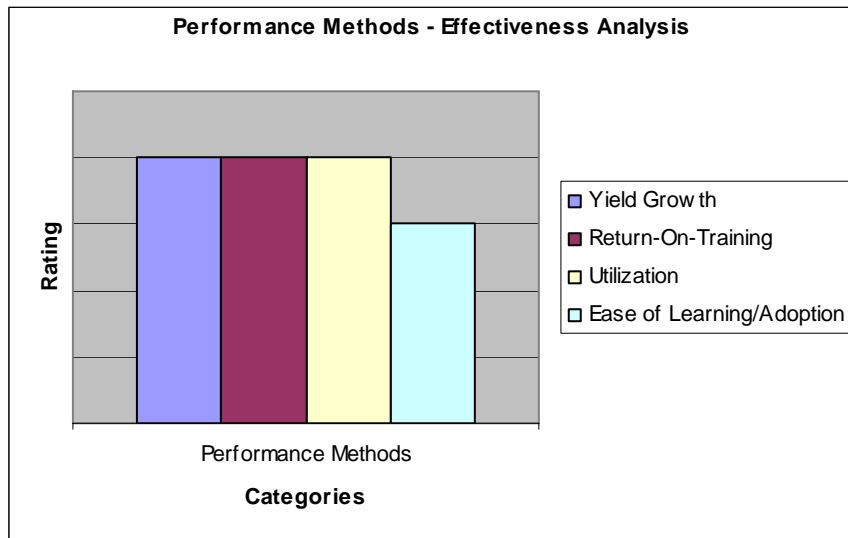
more on new technology trends affecting compliance with sales methodologies see our *ESR/Insight* brief *Evaluating Sales Force Automation and Sales Training: A Hand and Glove Solution*.

Because PMI's programs are individually tailored, there are also no public course offerings, which means there is no way to preview the courses or to provide one-off training to new hires.

**ESR/Profile**

**Effectiveness Analysis**

In the figure below, we see that PMI is consistently an effective provider:



**Figures 5-23 and 5-24: PMI Effectiveness Analysis**

The ability to customize and the insistence on a pre-training analysis naturally yields positive, and measurable results. The lower Ease of Learning/Adoption is a function of the methodology-rich nature

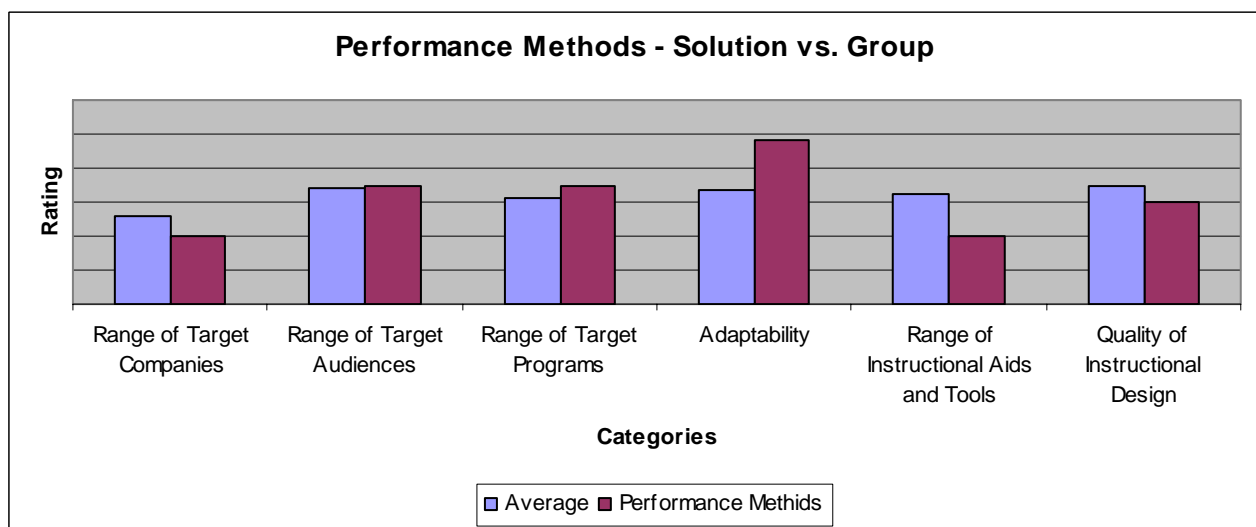
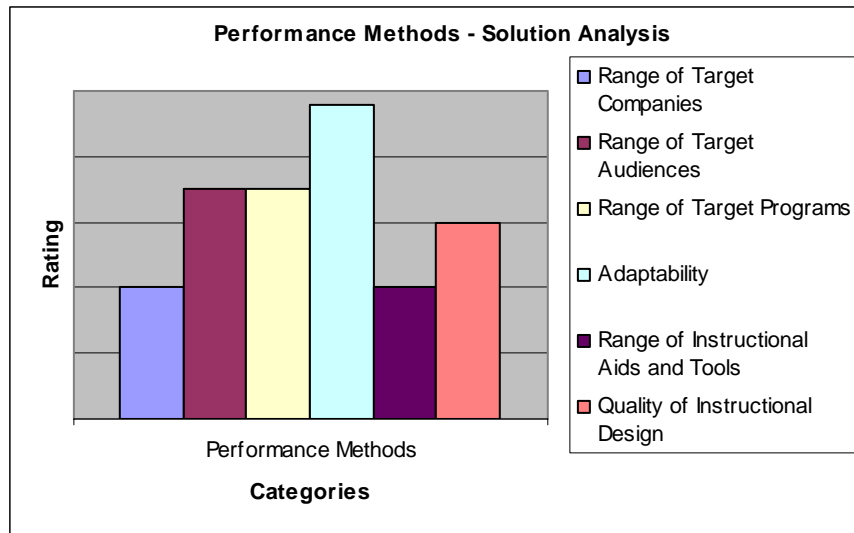
of the program. While basic and advanced skills training require minimal organizational change, implementing a standardized methodology requires more effort.

**Solution Analysis**

The PMI solution appeals to organizations that need to implement a fundamental shift in their selling process. As we see in the figure below, the PMI solution is recommended to organizations with complex products, a need for consultative selling, and a need to standardize process. Hence, the range of companies and audiences for which this is targeted is focused.

While they do have quality instructional aids and tools, PMI does not have a proprietary software solution that reinforces the selling methodology, and this is becoming an increasingly important element of many sales training selection analyses.

PMI’s solution is highly adaptable by the very nature of their approach to customization.



**Figures 5-25 and 5-26: PMI Solution Analysis**

### **Considering PMI versus Alternatives**

PMI is a compelling solution for organizations with minimal process or who have a process that is not working effectively, especially organizations with complex, tailorable client solutions. PMI has evidenced strength in the software industry. We have interviewed satisfied PMI clients in other industries as well.

Consider PMI when:

- You need to implement a strong sales methodology.
- You have complex products.
- You have a sizeable, high value sales force.
- You need to improve Account Management and Opportunity Management strength.
- You are unclear about the next steps to take to improve sales productivity.

Consider alternatives (or additional services) when:

- You are looking for public courses as refreshers or to train new hires on demand.
- You are a small company with few sales resources.
- Your sales force is primarily focused on commodity products.

### **To the Point**

PMI is a younger company than those typically considered to be leaders. PMI's approach is more contemporary and considers recent developments and advances in procurement and communication between buyers and sellers. With a world-class delivery team, PMI is clearly the strongest vendor for organizations seeking a tailored solution.

For a visual comparison of all the providers, see the *ESR/Arena* figure 4-1.

## 7 About ESR's Research Process

Our proprietary and rigorous research process has as its goal to deliver research that reflects our research principles of timeliness, independence, integrity, accessibility, authoritativeness and quality. The following are some of the key elements of our research process:

### 7.1 Beginning with Public Domain Information

Our research begins with a thorough study and evaluation of information about the sales performance solutions market, best practices, and sales training/consulting providers and their product offerings. Such information is derived from provider web sites, product literature, and product materials as made available to us. We evaluate providers and their offerings with respect to a common framework that we enhance and refine as we evaluate additional providers.

### 7.2 Interviewing Sales Training/Consulting Providers

Every provider covered in this report has cooperated with ESR in providing us information about their products, services, customers, approach, and unique value to their customers. We conduct a series of interactions by phone and/or in person, sometimes initiated by us and other times initiated by providers when they wish to update us on their offerings. We ask a series of probing questions based on a methodical framework and our experience in the industry.

### 7.3 Canvassing, Surveying, and Interviewing

While we check references that providers offer to us, we make sure that we use reliable additional sources (sales leaders, training officers, sales executives, provider executives, and other sources) of primary knowledge of and experience with specific providers and sales performance solutions. Our rich network of sales executives, sales training managers, sales managers, sales vice presidents, sales leaders and sales training/consulting provider executives, and constant interactions with them provide us with excellent intelligence and perspectives. Over time, this provides our experienced analysts with a pattern and triangulated conclusions. In addition we periodically canvass our network of sales professionals with common framed questions so as to derive a pattern and conclusion.

### 7.4 Experience

Unlike market research firms, our research is not conducted by junior telemarketing surveyors, but rather by experienced and seasoned veterans of the sales training industry who draw upon their own experience and intimate knowledge of the industry to interpret information and position it as advice. Thus judgments and conclusions are based on intelligent qualitative interactions with sources of information and upon our own knowledge, rather than on mechanical scores.

### 7.5 Hypothesis/Validation/Refinement Cycle

With the above set of sources of information, assessment, and opinions, hypotheses or "tentative conclusions" are established. These "stakes in the ground" are then further tested both internally within ESR in group discussions for a sanity check as well as by trusted and expert sources in the industry. Each ESR publication is reviewed by a scrutinizing and challenging editorial process by veteran research-process experts. Thus a given conclusion or publication goes through multiple revisions until a high-confidence perspective and analytic piece is ready for publication.

### 7.6 Vendor Rebuttal Opportunity

When an *ESR/Insight* is about a sales training/consulting provider, in the interest of accuracy and fairness to all parties, we will send a draft publication to the vendor with an opportunity to comment

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