

WINNING THAT MUST-WIN MOMENT

WHEN MARKETING & SALES COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY

When resources are tight, the marketing strategy must focus on delivering the essential few items that will make the biggest improvement to sales. In this collaborative consulting assignment, Marketing and Sales worked closely together.



There were two critical steps in the success of this project. The first was to re-position the solution as a service rather than a product. The second was to identify the key step in a complex buying process and create the missing communications pieces. The result is an effective sales process that reflects company values and delivers long-term value for customers through partnership.

THE BRIEF

After several consecutive years of double-digit annual growth in the North American market, Randy Hopkins, director of the OEM Custom Sensors division of HBK, felt the time was right to expand geographically. Positive responses to early conversations with prospects in Italy and Germany made Europe an obvious choice. Asia Pacific also offered huge potential.

The big challenge was how to get the message out and win business in new markets. Success in North America had been achieved by doing an excellent job, one client at a time. Word spread throughout the USA that for the design and manufacture of custom components based on strain-gauge sensors, HBK was the firm to partner with for high-quality components.

However, all work for clients had been done under Non-Disclosure Agreements. So, while

there were plenty of strong, informal anecdotes for use in sales situations, no formal case studies were available to introduce the manufacturer to completely new audiences, in new markets.

At the same time, the experienced marketer who had successfully assisted in the growth of the division in North America for the past five years had recently opted for a new role elsewhere in the company. The division director, Randy Hopkins and sales director Bob Chevalier spoke with the Dodo Husmann, who was global marketing manager at that time. Dodo invited Ansaco to join the project on a collaborative consulting basis.

The brief from Bob Chevalier was to **“design and build a ‘Kit of Marketing Parts’ that the sales team can use to generate new business, in new markets”**.

THE CONTEXT

Right from the start, marketing resources were limited. This had two significant and beneficial impacts:

1. Focus

The budget allowed for just one day a week on the project, so the first issue was focus. The question was not “what *can* we do?” but “what *must* we do?” Not “how *much* can we do?” but “what are the *critical few* items that are essential to sales success?”

2. Time

The second issue was how to structure the available time to identify and achieve those deliverables. In practice, we set up a one-hour weekly online meeting with the global Sales director and the Europe Sales manager, Dario Masato to move project items forward. There was also a monthly online meeting for one hour, during which we would update the division director, validate direction, report on progress, and summarise the next steps.

For Ansaco, this was the start of another step – and exciting – learning curve. Initially, there was zero knowledge of the components that the division manufactured, nor how the customers in multiple market segments used them. But as our conversations dug ever deeper into products, applications, customers and buying journeys, the facts quickly became clear.

THE SOLUTION

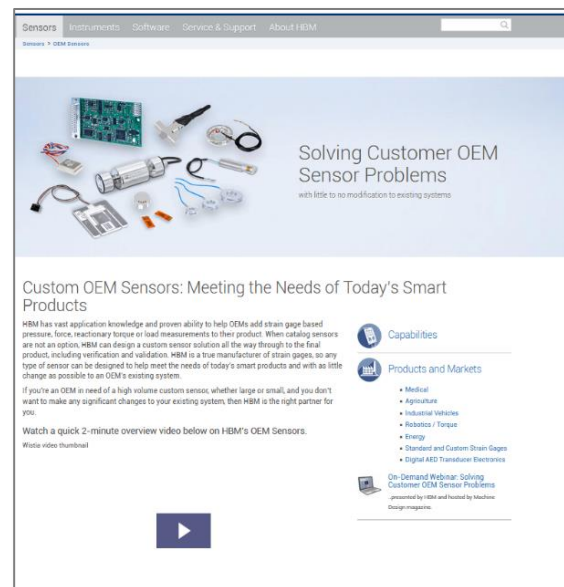
The key to creating an effective ‘Kit of Parts’ to win sales in new geographies was intensive collaboration with Sales. The foundation layer was to validate the existing Go-to-Market approach. This included:

- the segments and how to prioritise them
- the choice of communications channels to reach those prospects
- the positioning and messaging for addressing prospects
- development of the components that would form the communications campaigns.

To round the project off, we included a six-week hand-over period, to brief a new full-time marketer about the practices and processes that we were about to define.

FROM PRODUCT TO SERVICE

Author Steven Covey observed: “*significant break-throughs are the result of breaking with old patterns of thought and practice*”. And so it was on this project.

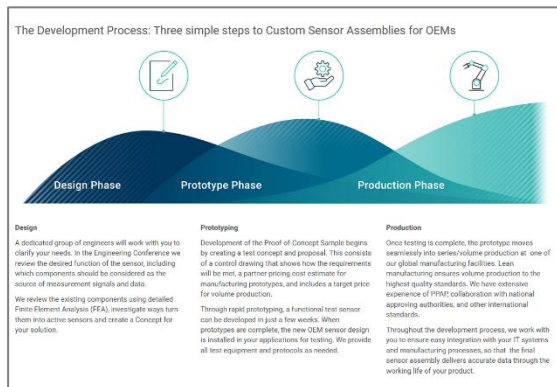


The 2019 OEM Custom Sensors webpage emphasised products. (source: The WayBack Machine)

The approach Sales had used so far, was to sell ‘custom component assemblies based on strain gauges’. The emphasis was on the physical characteristics of the product: the custom specification and the quality of manufacture. But, as we discussed the ‘features, functions and benefits’ of the products, we discovered a new way to look at the offer and an alternative way to position it.

In practice, the product was *what we delivered*, rather than *what we were selling*. Yes, we delivered to the customer an agreed volume of physical components that were manufactured to match a custom design specification. But that came *after* the contract was signed. We realised that to *win* that contract, we had to

present abstract ideas – HBK’s expertise and experience as a manufacturing company. What we were really selling was a service.



The Concept Diagram: Three simple steps to Custom Sensor Assemblies for OEMs

This shift in perspective about the positioning of the solution - from product to service - created enormous clarity. For example, talking about the technical characteristics of the finished component had previously always been as much a problem as an opportunity. If we went deep into the details of one application, we were ignoring others. Solutions for some applications and industries were measured in the centimetre scale and others in the millimetre scale.

By talking about service, rather than finished products, we could concentrate on tangible benefits that delivered value for customers across applications areas. The skills and abilities of our staff offered a strong source of material. We could now talk about ‘proven expertise in developing compact solutions’ without getting distracted by the size and shape of the sensor that we delivered, or the purpose of the finished product that contained the sensor.

This new ‘service’ approach meant that we had a single set of messages that were relevant across all applications and industries, rather than having to develop separate messages for each. Previously, we had cited an individual sensor as a solution to a specific customer problem.

NEW IDEAS

Now we could summarise the value of our technology in broad yet effective brush strokes: *‘these assemblies gather the data that drives feedback loops’*. We could position the value of our service: *‘embed intelligent behaviour into products’*. And we could identify higher level customer gains such as: *‘bring smart products to market’*.

To evaluate the proposed Go-to-Market strategy for our ‘solution’, we used a variety of models. We examined the strategy from different angles and put the results into a presentation we called the ‘Short & Sweet PowerPoint’ because it had just five slides:

1. Core Offering (Pains and Gains)
2. Value Positioning (service-problem ‘fit’)
3. Vision Statement (Sinek Golden Circle)
4. Three Phases (concept graphic)
5. the Value Messages (differentiation)

We jointly developed the language and the descriptions of Pains and Gains, Features, Functions and Benefits. All five elements worked effectively together and mutually reinforced each other. Whilst this presentation was developed with customer communication firmly in mind, it also provided a fast way to brief management and colleagues in other divisions, or to on-board new team members.

PUTTING THE IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

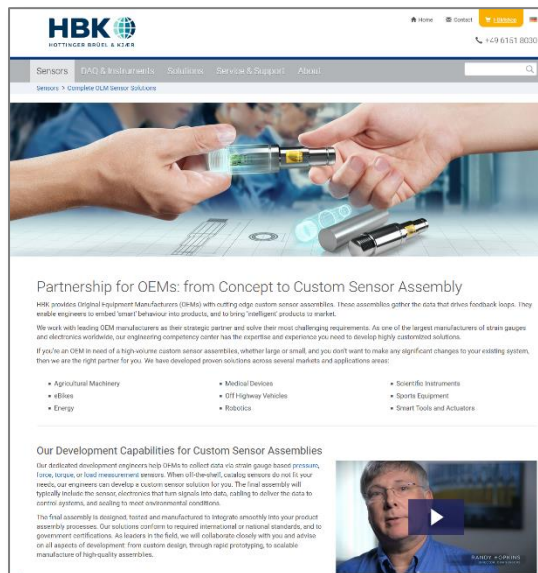
Having set the foundations right with the Go-to-Market strategy, the next step was to review the existing webpages and marketing comms materials. We then set out to apply the new positioning and resolve any inconsistencies with prior messaging.

We re-built the main webpage “Partnership for OEMs: from Concept to Custom Sensor Assembly” on the hbm.com website by editing existing texts and re-organising the sequence of existing materials. This webpage is where we presented the new positioning.

This webpage also introduced the ‘Three-Phases’ diagram and icons, as well as short summary descriptions of each phase.

We wrote a new cornerstone article to communicate one of the new value propositions: "Custom Sensors Bring 'intelligent' Products to Market Faster" (<https://www.hbm.com/en/7861/how-to-bring-intelligent-products-to-market-faster/>). It also included an explanatory sidebar about the three phases, which corrected an earlier article that had described 'four steps to custom sensors'.

While we were rolling out these pages on the hbm.com website, we were presenting these ideas internally within the company to gain recognition for the new positioning. Our objective was to get what we viewed as the correct space within the new hbkworld.com website.

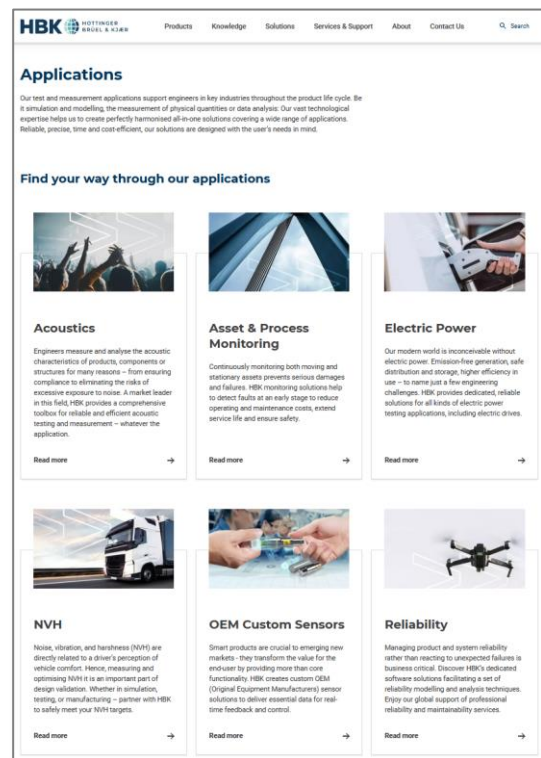


The new OEM Custom Sensors webpage, 2021 (www.hbm.com)

Discussions at director level led to "OEM Custom Sensors" appearing in the new corporate Navigation as one of ten Applications within the Solution rubric (rather than under 'Products', as originally suggested).

Detailed webpages that discussed solutions for specific industries (e.g. medical, agricultural) had already been published under hbm.com. We re-defined a new and consistent structure for webpage content ('The Opportunity' described challenges in each field; 'The

Response' showed how technology could be used to deliver solutions).



The new HBM website: OEM Custom Sensors are positioned as an applications area within Solutions, rather than as a product.

We updated the content to reflect the new positioning, and expanded each industry webpage with new material. These were then re-published on the hbkworld.com website to reach a wider audience.

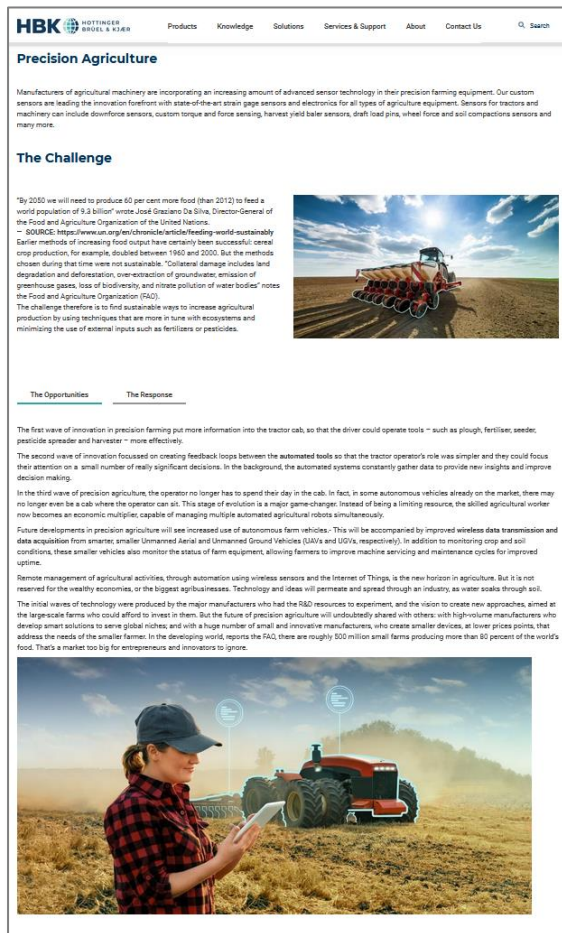
Marketing drew up a Content Plan for addressing other industry and applications segments (Robotics, Off-Highway, eBikes) and Sales prioritised the sequence for delivering these.

PROCESS FOR SUCCESS

Deep conversations between Marketing and Sales identified the critical, must-win moment in the Sales Cycle / Buyer's Journey – and the materials we needed to create for success.

Experience showed that once our engineers got together with customer engineers,

meetings that began as a simple exploratory conversations frequently went deep into customer-specific issues and discussions of ways to solve them. These in turn often led to an agreement to set up a formal business meeting with a project-focused agenda.



Opportunities and Responses: setting technical issues in the context of global economic challenges.

The conversion rate from exploratory discussion to project was high. And yet, this moment in the Buyers Journey hadn't been specifically addressed by any of the Sales processes or Marketing materials developed to date.

So we made that our primary objective: get engineers at prospect organisations to request an online meeting to explore the possibility of a first project.

The key step for marketing and sales was to convince the prospect of our expertise and experience as a manufacturing company.

These insights enabled us to define the essential, missing marketing pieces. We had to communicate the value of past experience and depth of expertise so that engineers could see the advantages of investing a small amount of time in an exploratory meeting.

TWO KEY DELIVERABLES

Collaboration between marketing and sales focussed on creating two key deliverables that would accompany the new Prospect on their Buying Journey from Awareness to Decision.

The first was to be a 90-second "Explainer Video" that summarised the problem and outlined a solution. This would be followed by a "Brochure" which described the solution in greater detail, provided proof and included a Call-to-Action.

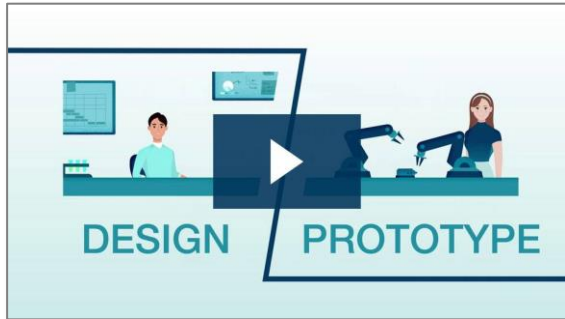
This is the approach used in the Challenger Sale method. Focus first on the customer's problem and identify their pains and needs. This leads into a discussion of the size and shape of an 'ideal' solution. The supplier is then well-placed to round out the discussion with a relevant product or service offer.

THE EXPLAINER VIDEO DESCRIBES THE PROBLEM

In a series of detailed meetings, sales and marketing got down to the details of actual conversations with prospects about their needs. We looked at key issues that prospects faced in various industries and in specific applications areas. We reviewed how the division provided a solution in each case. We compared examples of problem/solution and took a step back to identify common themes.

By repeating this approach iteratively, we arrived at the single most important qualifying issue that identified serious buying potential regardless of industry or applications area. This exploration process not only identified the

key issue, it also revealed the tone and style of language that we would need to use when providing the next step of the answer.



Click the link to see the video:
[OEM Sensor Solutions | Engineering - HBK](#)

We developed a video script that spoke directly to engineers and presented custom sensors as the key component of innovative products. This qualifier enables prospects to home in on the key issue quickly, understand the value proposition and self-select as appropriate.

The obvious solution for the engineers need is “custom parts, designed to your specification, and manufactured to the highest standards”. This naturally leads the prospect to explore the alternative sources and their pros and cons. Which is, in turn, the right moment for the sales expert to deliver the division’s value proposition: “When you need a business partner with knowledge and experience of manufacturing custom sensors, you can choose HBK with confidence.”

THE “PROCESS BROCHURE” DESCRIBES THE SOLUTION

Right from the start we had a clear image of the video as an item that would be “open to all” via website or social media, whereas the second piece of the Kit of Parts would be a offered by the Sales professional as a pdf, in response to an enquiry.

The concept for our 12-page pdf ‘brochure’ was to communicate the value messages of

partnership’ and emphasise ‘easy-to-do-business with’. We would provide proof of the knowledge and experience by showing a generic project Roadmap. The core message is “we have provided custom solutions for so many companies that we can tell you in advance all the phases and major milestones in your project.”

Even more specifically, the brochure indicates graphically ‘you are here, right at the start of the sequence’ ... and these are the next steps. The implication is clearly stated: “HBK experts will guide you to success.”

The key graphic in the brochure is a series of overlapping phases: custom sensor design leads to rapid prototype development, followed by scalable manufacturing of quality components



Explaining the project process simply and clearly makes it easier for the Prospect to say ‘yes’.

THE IMPLEMENTATION SEQUENCE

The brochure design was conceived and implemented as two-page spreads that would be shown effectively on a 16:9 laptop screen via pdf.

The first spread introduced the concept of the three-phase journey. The second, third and fourth two-page spreads provided details of phases 1, 2 and 3; the last spread positions the company as an experienced global partner and leads into a Call-to-Action to contact one of the regional sales experts about setting up an exploratory meeting.

Because the two concepts – video and process brochure - interlocked and had to work seamlessly together, the final details of the follow-up piece had to be clearly fixed before execution of the video could begin. This is often the most effective approach with complex marketing processes. It is vital to identify the end result first; then plan the activities in the sequence that leads to the result; but implement the individual steps in reverse order.

Once the fine details of the three-phase diagram had been finalised with the graphic artists, Sales and Marketing could discuss and agree the appearance of the ‘simplified version’ that would be introduced in the video.

In much the same way, all the details of the three phases (such as: the descriptions, benefit statements, number and labelling of the milestones, etc.) had to be agreed and approved for the brochure, before summaries could be created for use in the video.

SHARED OWNERSHIP

For both these pieces, the most important criterion was quality. “I want the text compact, tight, succinct”, said Sales Director Bob Chevalier. “Make every word work.” It took time and effort from both Sales and Marketing to get the video script, sound and images right; to get brochure concept, text and graphics just-so.

Both Bob Chevalier and European sales manager Dario Masato provided deep insights into prospect issues, customer concerns, and qualifying questions. The big challenge for marketing was to get deeply involved in creating the detailed material - and then step back and review it as if hearing the messages for the first time.

On completion however, both teams felt that they owned these pieces and were proud to use them. Pleased too, that the concepts fitted snugly together; that the video led naturally into the brochure, that the brochure expanded and elaborated on the key themes highlighted by the video.

THE ROLL-OUT

Given that we were aiming at a series of clearly identifiable industrial niches with named organisations, LinkedIn was the obvious choice for the primary outbound communications channel, with Sales Navigator as the operational back-end.

This was a new approach for the sales team and one they were keen to try. Recognising that there was a lot to learn about style and tone, as well as online etiquette, we found excellent external support to bring us up to speed. This quickly proved to be a good move, resulting in a high volume of new contacts with the desired depth of interactions.

Our objective throughout was to deliver information and guidance that helped the prospect make a key step in a complex buying process. By focussing on customer-centric pains and gains we created an effective sales process that reflects company values about partnership, and generates long-term value for customers through partnership.

Says European Sales Manager, Dario Masato: “Andrew Sanderson, in addition to being a marketing professional is a great person. He helped me and my team to bridge the gap between marketing and sales. His skills and competencies together with positive attitude and innovative mindset helped us achieve our goals.”

FIND OUT MORE

Collaborative Consultant, Andrew Sanderson, provides hands-on, up-close and personal support for CMOs and their international marketing teams during standard CET Timezone hours. Please get in touch ... together, we'll get to the core of your marketing challenge.