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## business intelligence

### Revive Your Sales Training

When Laura Mayo, director of inside sales at Akamai Technologies, found her sales training program in need of a boost, she didn't fall back on old tried-it-already approaches. She looked instead to a new regimen designed by former Akamai employee, Jeffrey Hoffman, now the founder and CEO of Basho Strategies in Burlington, Mass.

"When I came in, the company was struggling a little bit about what it was doing from a [sales] lead-generation team perspective," Mayo says. "We really didn't have an overall, consistent approach." After interviewing the sales reps she supervised, Mayo concluded some professional selling skills were needed. The then-seven reps she worked with were fairly inexperienced, so the coaching would be especially beneficial, she surmised. "We wanted to see what we could do to improve the overall productivity of the team," Mayo explains.

Besides the ability to customize a sales program specifically for Akamai, a Cambridge, Mass.-based provider of on-demand computing platforms and services, Hoffman told Mayo that Basho would provide training with the particular goals she had in mind. There would be no generic, use-it-when/if-you-get-the-chance instruction. "I presented to him my long-term goal of what I wanted to do in the next 12 to 18 months with the team," she says, "which was to turn it from a lead-generation organization to a full-fledged inside sales organization."

To do this, Mayo had Hoffman deliver live training modules based on The Seven Basho Strategies ([www.bashostrategies.com/training/sales.asp](http://www.bashostrategies.com/training/sales.asp)), a methodology that drives the instruction his firm provides. In one module, to illustrate the importance of salespeople really understanding the prospects they're pursuing, Hoffman had reps log onto possible customers' Web sites and practice finding the kind of information that would help them craft successful pitches. He then practiced putting together propositions with them. "That was really exciting for my guys because it was a totally new approach, and it was customized," Mayo says, "but it also wasn't making them read off a script, which was something they had kind of gotten accustomed to."

Such modules, which Basho prices at \$11,000 each, took reps from that starting point of crafting the initial contact and pitch to making the sale-and all the pitfalls in between. "We started with the introduction of a call, and each time we did a new module, we went back to the previous sales cycle [step], so we were building on the end-to-end sales cycle," she says. "By the end of it, they had handled everything from how do you open up the call, how do you get to the right person and how do you present and position your product to how it's going to solve a business need, how do you handle the objection, and then, ultimately, how do you get the deal closed."