

Building Inside Sales From the Ground Up at Salsa Labs

Introduction:

Like many startups, Salsa Labs, a software company for nonprofits and political campaigns, relied primarily on word-of-mouth, organic marketing to grow its business after its launch in 2004. Yet when a round of venture capital came through seven years later, in 2011, Salsa needed to scale up quickly with a more strategic, efficient approach — especially as it related to inside sales. Not wanting to outsource sales completely, and not yet ready to build an inside sales team in-house, it turned to memoryBlue for help. Together, memoryBlue and Salsa Labs crafted a customized solution that led to a significant increase in Salsa's revenue — and better use of its core team's talent and time.

About Salsa Labs:

Founded in 2004, Salsa Labs (Salsa) helps nonprofits and political campaigns inspire others to take action and fuel positive changes worldwide by growing and engaging a base of support online. With Salsa, nonprofits and groups of all sizes can organize their supporters and chapters, fundraise, advocate, communicate through email and social media, host events, and measure results. In addition to technology, Salsa offers strategic best practices, training, and highly rated support so its clients can focus their energy on their mission. The company currently works with more than 2,000 organizations and more than 75 million donors, members, activists, and fans around the globe.

Business Challenge:

Salsa built a strong customer base after its 2004 launch without any sales or marketing teams. After an infusion of capital in 2011, Salsa was ready to grow more quickly. To fuel this growth, they assembled a small but savvy sales team to drive all sides of sales — from generating leads, cold calling, and emailing, to meeting face-to-face with potential clients and closing deals. The need to ramp up the sales model for a more cost-efficient, effective approach became obvious.

The company had experts in nonprofits and political campaigns but not the time they knew it would take to recruit, train, and manage a new inside sales team.

"As a startup, we hadn't perfected our end-to-end sales process," explained Christine Schaefer, vice president of

community and marketing for Salsa. "When we found ourselves in a period of rapid growth, we knew we needed to free up our sales team so they could spend less time qualifying leads and more time closing deals."

Salsa needed an innovative solution that involved some degree of outsourcing and training support. The company had experts in nonprofits and political campaigns but not the time they knew it would take to recruit, train, and manage a new inside sales team. So they needed a partner who understood inside sales from top to bottom — and could pull together the right team quickly.

Yet the right team would not come easily, given Salsa's need not just for sales-minded employees but also people who had an understanding (or at least an interest) in nonprofits and technology. "We're in the nonprofit tech industry, which can be hard to staff," said Schaefer. "We needed help recruiting and even training the right people, which was no small task."



Solution:

The memoryBlue solution was a perfect fit for Salsa. Three memoryBlue employees — all with some degree of experience in nonprofits and technology — were selected to work with Salsa.

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– Christine Schaefer, vice president of marketing at Salsa Labs

The memoryBlue intensive training program covers all parts of the inside sales process, from phone training and emailing to compiling comprehensive reports on leads. For the memoryBlue/Salsa team, training took place at both offices, with trainees spending substantial time on-site at Salsa, where they worked closely with employees and immersed themselves in the company’s culture, business approach, and the Salsa Platform.

“memoryBlue’s training exercises and drills really engrained the inside sales process in their DNA,” explained Schaefer.

“They made the whole thing second nature, so much so that pitching and cold calling started to come from habit and muscle memory,” instead of a step-by-step script.

Once up and running, Salsa’s new inside sales team worked from memoryBlue’s headquarters but attended meetings regularly at Salsa. Their initial workload involved researching and qualifying 1,500 leads per quarter.

“memoryBlue was so extremely flexible and patient that the whole arrangement felt very different from outsourcing.”

– Christine Schaefer, vice president of marketing at Salsa Labs

The arrangement came with another real perk for Salsa: At any time, Salsa could hire any members of the new sales team, a practice that is standard policy for any memoryBlue client. “Since we never wanted to outsource in the first place, we liked that memoryBlue let us hire the people they trained,” Schaefer said.

“memoryBlue was so extremely flexible and patient that the whole arrangement felt very different from outsourcing.”

Results:

With memoryBlue’s professionally trained inside sales team up and running, Salsa was able to free up their existing sales reps to close deals. In fact, bookings per rep increased significantly, showing a 48 percent increase year over year.

“As a start-up, we have so many things to build. In this case, we found a partner to take over the basic onboarding and training of our inside sales staff and make it successful.”

– Christine Schaefer, vice president of marketing at Salsa Labs

Eventually, Salsa liked the progress it was seeing so much that it decided to hire one of memoryBlue’s trained sales professionals, Christian Mory, to join their team full time. He adjusted quickly into his new closing role and closed his first deal much sooner than new reps in the past. His ramp-time to closing was half that of previous new hires.

“We’re incredibly pleased with our relationship with memoryBlue and the results we’re getting,” Schaefer said. “As an outsider, memoryBlue sees things we just can’t see from the inside. Having someone we can trust on the outside looking in is extremely helpful. They have our best interest in mind, and it comes across in everything they do and say.”

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The Future:

To prepare for its next growth phase, Salsa considered the best way to ramp up its full-time in-house sales staff with inside sales professionals who are both highly trained in sales and have experience or appreciation for nonprofits and high-tech. While still unsure of its exact path forward, Salsa knows that the sales knowledge and training in candidates is every bit as important as nonprofit high-tech experience, so they approached memoryBlue for help with a solution. Together the companies strategized a unique possibility that would represent a new model for memoryBlue, but address the specific needs of Salsa.

“When we first approached memoryBlue about creating a new model ... they were incredibly receptive and flexible about trying something different.”

– Christine Schaefer, vice president of marketing at Salsa Labs

When Salsa decides to move forward, memoryBlue will recruit new inside sales rep prospects for Salsa with the express purpose of training them to be Salsa employees. In fact, they would be Salsa staff right from the start, so that each client would be screened not only for their potential in sales, but also for nonprofit tech experience. Each new hire would then go through all of memoryBlue’s intensive training “so they get that DNA,” Schaefer said. When the new hires reach a certain level of comfort and quality, they would leave the memoryBlue training program and start working on-site at Salsa Labs as full-time staff.

“When we first approached memoryBlue about creating a new model and whether it would work on their end, they were incredibly receptive and flexible about trying something different,” Schaefer said. “Through this whole process, they’ve been much more like true partners than outside consultants.”

“Salsa has been fantastic. It’s rare to have a client approach you and propose innovative engagement models. To have them suggest ideas that are both well thought out and get both parties excited is the quintessential win-win.”

– Marc Gonyea, cofounder and managing partner at memoryBlue

About memoryBlue:

memoryBlue is an inside sales consulting firm based outside of Washington, D.C. The company helps high-tech companies grow faster and more profitably by maximizing the effectiveness of inside sales, while at the same time advancing the careers of inside sales professionals. The company has worked with over 400 high-tech companies to provide outsourced inside sales teams, inside sales recruiting solutions, and inside sales management services.

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