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# 3M Reflects Huge Saving in Sales Process

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3M™ is a \$16 billion diversified technology company with leading positions in consumer and office; display and graphics; electronics and telecommunications; health care; industrial; safety, security and protection services; transportation and other businesses. The company has operations in more than 60 countries and serves customers in nearly 200 countries. 3M Canada Company, established in 1951, was the first international subsidiary opened by 3M and is now the sixth largest.

Throughout its 100-year history 3M's culture has fostered creativity and given employees the freedom to take risks and try new ideas. The result has been the introduction of tens of thousands of innovative products and services that respond to customer needs.

For the past two years, 3M has been using Six Sigma methodology to pursue continuous quality improvement. Six Sigma is clearly focused on customer driven expectations and requires a thorough understanding of products and processes. In 3M's case this also includes the selling process, as we are one of the first companies using Six Sigma to generate sales growth.

As a 3M Canada Six Sigma Black Belt, my first project was focused on reducing the cycle time of our Scotchlite™ Reflective Materials selling process. This involved shortening the time between the initial sales visit and the completion of a written, customer-approved specification incorporating Scotchlite reflective material in the customer's safety garments.



## At a Glance

### Problem:

We were looking at a sales cycle that is approximately 8 months long. The growth goal was to reduce the sales cycle by approximately 40%. We were all wondering how to emulate changes in the real world when we had been challenged to close the project in less than six months.

### Solution:

We built a process model that represented the real world sales operation. We then made systematic improvements and tested the outcome on the computer.

### Results:

As a result of the model we have been able to meet and surpass the goal of cutting the sales cycle considerably.



Scotchlite reflective materials are widely used on garments to enhance visibility and safety in the workplace. 3M works closely with customers to develop product specifications, but the selling process also involves garment manufacturers. As a result, it was frequently taking as long as eight months to complete the sales cycle, which included writing the specifications, prototyping garments and conducting field trials.

The goal of our Six Sigma project team was to reduce that sales cycle to five months by developing procedures and tools that would accelerate the specification writing process and allow us to write more of them. This would have a significant impact on our sales. The sales team knew shortening the sales cycle was a high priority for the division and they were fully engaged in providing us with the data we needed.

After mapping out the sales process, the project team identified six key areas where improvement was needed in order to reduce cycle time.

We needed to run a Design of Experiments on the process but we had one challenge, our deadline was in six months and the current sales process was taking eight months. With ProcessModel we were able to run the Design of Experiments on the computer model and test our solution without disrupting the cur-

rent system and without any direct costs. We were able to test possible solutions in just minutes and see how changes or a combination of changes would affect the process. Simulation gave us the ability to change various parameters in the sales cycle to enable us accomplish our goal.

We used ProcessModel to simulate our existing process, which starts with our sales representative, but

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also involves our technical representatives and channel partners. The simulation helped us to identify where delays were encountered in



the process and to quickly and safely see the results of changing various parameters. As a result, our team developed a number of recommendations to eliminate those delays.

ProcessModel has helped 3M to reach the goal of the project by reducing the sales cycle from almost eight months to less than five months. At this time, we are often exceeding our initial goals by completing the cycle in a matter of weeks.

Simulation gave us the ability to complete the project in the allotted time and identify the best solution for improving the process. By applying this technology to the Design of Experiments portion of the project, we were able implement the best solution. There is no question that the data generated from ProcessModel gave us the confidence to move ahead with our planned recommendations to reach our goal and I will certainly consider using the software to do Design of Experiments on future projects.

## FIND OUT MORE

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