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Advantage Sales and Marketing Finds Success with Lean Tools

When clients need store resets of their top-selling brands at a moment's notice, Advantage Sales and Marketing (ASM) is there—with a lean attitude to get the work done as quickly and efficiently as possible. Such lean means, or methods of maximizing optimal productivity helped the company reduce the use of third-party labor by 88 percent.

“That’s huge,” comments Amy Miller, ASM’s vice president of organizational effectiveness, and responsible for ASM’s lean transformation during the past two years. “The ultimate benefit for our clients and customers result in a higher quality of product execution in the store because we have more direct control over the labor force with the efficiencies of a well-trained staff, familiar with our client’s brands.”

And, this is just one example of the many success stories of ASM’s recent headlines touting the benefits of delivering optimal productivity for its hundreds of clients and customers with a more efficient way of thinking and acting—to maximize its internal business processes through the concept of lean management.

Founded in 1987, Advantage

Sales and Marketing has grown into the largest sales and marketing agency (SMA) in North America, with more than 20,000 associates, 66 offices in the United States and Canada, a portfolio of blue-chip clients and customers and revenues approaching \$1 billion.

“As ASM grew, it was clear we needed to find ways to standardize our operational processes without losing our entrepreneurial focus of being fast and flexible enough to customize services for our clients,” explains Miller. “Adopting a system of optimal internal efficiencies and productivity was paramount.”

In March 2007, ASM began working with Simpler Consulting, www.simplerconsulting.com, to partner and pursue ASM’s lean transformation. Simpler Consulting’s expertise is in the Toyota Production System, developed in Japan to provide best quality, lowest cost and shortest lead time by eliminating waste.

ASM’s mission is to create outstanding value for clients and customers through superior sales execution, operational excellence and innovative marketing services. The partnership with Simpler Consulting has helped the sales and marketing

agency leader act on these words daily by using technologies to consistently give the ASM client the market differentiation and competitive advantage it needs to drive its business—by acting on the lean way of doing business—building a true business partnership.

“When we started working with ASM a few years ago our job was to find ways to minimize non-value added activities that ASM associates were performing daily,” says Tim Whitmore, vice president, consulting services, Simpler North America. “One of the most efficient ways to do that was to develop and expand a virtual workspace.”

Adjusting internal processes for ASM proved to be challenging. Simpler’s solution was to adopt lean management in several critical areas including the order processing and customer service functions of ASM’s business.

By initiating a series of rapid improvement events to assist associates from multiple office locations and divisions to work more efficiently, the “silo effect” or work redundancies disappeared. Also, the team developed a scorecard to track

processes, aimed at driving continual improvement, while creating a virtual workspace to monitor progress.

Adds Whitmore, “The end result for ASM associates was more time and resources allocated to their customers and clients—a key to the company’s continued success.”

Miller agrees. “ASM’s Simpler solutions allow our associates more time with our customers and clients—and at ASM it’s always about our relationships and partnerships to meet their changing needs.”