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Custom Exam Helps Strengthen Retail Sales Force in Competitive, Fast-Paced Industry

Tesco Stores Ltd. is the United Kingdom's largest retailer. In late 2011, the retailer decided to measure and improve the technology and customer service skills of Tesco Tech Support, the customer service advisors within the electronics departments of nearly 250 of their stores. Off-the-shelf certifications were either too limited in scope or too detailed in focus. Tesco executives turned to Exemplify, a subsidiary of CompTIA, for their custom exam development expertise.

In the U.K.'s highly competitive electronics market, the Tesco Tech Support Certified Specialist program is building consumer confidence in the Tesco Tech Support brand while commending team members for their knowledge and skill, reports John Wallbank, Tesco Tech Support's Operations Manager.

"We knew that a certification program could support Tesco Tech Support's future learning requirements, but Tesco needed a custom-made solution."

Tesco chose to develop its own certification using CompTIA's proven exam development process. This project was the genesis of the custom exam services business that is now Exemplify, CompTIA's for-profit subsidiary.

"I wanted to inspire the Tech Support team by creating a real sense of pride, and training is at the heart of this," explained Tesco's John Wallbank.



"The exam has inspired our teams, made them feel proud to work for Tesco and increased their knowledge—all of which will help us give better service to our customers."

TESCO

John Wallbank
Operations Manager
Tesco Tech Support

Business Challenge:

Establish a performance benchmark for Customer Service advisors and managers in consumer electronics departments of 250 Tesco stores in the United Kingdom.

CompTIA/Exemplify Solution:

Develop a custom certification exam and badge program that validates and promotes an employee's knowledge of product features and benefits, the company's sales process and value-added customer service.

Result:

Improved staff morale, quantitative feedback on training performance and needs, and a differentiation from competitors.

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The Exam Build: Detailed, But Rewarding

Beginning in May 2011, the Exemplify exam services staff worked with Tesco Tech Support Technical Training Managers to develop the exam. Exemplify instructed the Tesco executives on the steps and standards needed to develop a strong certification.

Exemplify worked with Tesco to conduct a job task analysis of the Tesco Tech Support Specialist role, establish exam objectives, develop exam questions and create a better understanding of the science behind exam development and scoring.

"We were probably naïve about the actual work required, given the exam's wide breadth," said Mike Barrow, Tesco Technical Support Training Manager. *"Through regular conference calls with the Exemplify team, we reviewed every objective we wanted to achieve, including the questions and the grading."*

Tesco customized the exam to validate an employee's knowledge of a wide range of electronics products, and also of the Tesco customer service process, its sales approach for payment plans, protection plans and installation; along with Tesco's standards for department operations and electronics returns.

"By writing our own exam, we were able to tailor it exactly the way we wanted it," Barrow said.

In August 2011, a beta exam was given to Tesco Tech Support Team Leaders and regional managers, who found it challenging. The beta flagged questions that needed revision because they were too easy, too hard or poorly worded. Tesco first administered the finished exam to Tesco Tech Support advisors in phases, starting in October.

As of early 2013, approximately 60 percent of Tesco's 1,100 Tesco Tech Support advisors had passed the exam, and Tesco had required that its management team take the test. *"The exam is quite difficult,"* said Training Manager Geoff Williams. *"Passing the exam enhanced our staff's reputation in management's eyes."*

Aggregated exam results have illuminated areas in which Tesco Tech Support staff needs additional training. *"You can't rely on your perceptions of how well your team performs,"* says Williams. *"The exam gives you real-world information, puts the information out there in black and white."*

The U.K. electronics retail market is *"extremely tough,"* said Wallbank. *"Hence the importance of strong training structures such as the CompTIA/Exemplify exam."*

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Project Major Milestones



Employees Passed Exam

