

Key account excellence case study:

Building long-term customer commitment and market share



SANOFI

Sanofi UK

Sanofi's Primary Care Business Unit (PCBU) is one of the largest business units in the company's UK operation. Faced with the challenge of engaging with key customers more effectively, Sanofi asked Rubica to help shift mind-sets and ways of working to a more customer-centric approach.

The challenge: transforming engagement with key customers

The relationship between pharma companies and their key customers in the NHS is undergoing rapid change. Customers are experiencing rising demand for medicines and increasing cost pressures, while needing to deliver better value and improved outcomes for patients.

Sanofi asked Rubica to help it meet this challenge by transforming the way the division engaged with its most important NHS customers.

"We were in the middle of a period of huge change," says Tunde Falode, DCV General Manager. "Continuing with business as usual was not an option. The only way to tackle the challenges we faced was to create a new operational model that would help us deal with change and perform more effectively. Key Account Excellence was critical to solving this challenge."

"With Key Account Excellence, an organisation shifts its front-line sales focus from short-term results to longer-term negotiations based on customer insight," explains Paul Frith, the consultant who led the project for Rubica. "By building customer relationships that have greater influence and longevity, it establishes itself as a trusted partner in the customer's eyes. In the long-term, this approach can build more profitable relationships for Sanofi and help the NHS to improve patients' health and wellbeing."

The solution: driving Key Account Excellence

Sanofi brought Rubica on board due to our expertise in Key Account Excellence.

"Sanofi recognised that it was vital to change mind-sets, processes and teams right the way across the organisation," says Paul Frith. "Our strategy involved encouraging people to make small, pragmatic changes that would have a big impact on the business over time."

The Rubica approach looked to:

- Address the organisational set-up, people and processes. We investigated their current state and how they needed to change to make Key Account Excellence work.
- Pinpoint what 'good' meant and highlight existing pockets of excellence that we could amplify or replicate elsewhere in the business.
- Work at an account team level to understand how to enhance their relationships with customers and make Key Account Excellence a reality.
- Work with managers to define how they could better support account teams to bring Key Account Excellence to life.

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- Work with leaders to understand which organisation-wide changes were necessary to enable Key Account Excellence, and their roles as leaders.

The project kicked off with a high-level engagement with the DCV leadership team to define what Key Account Excellence meant for them.

“Taking our definition of KAE, the next step for us was involving everyone in making sense of it and bringing it to life. It was critical that this wasn’t a top down directive, but a process where everyone was involved” says Iain MacFadyen, Head of Commercial North. “Part of this process was to assess and pinpoint the areas where confidence and capability needed developing in relation to Rubica’s KAE benchmark. We also asked every individual where they felt they needed help and support. This gave us a comprehensive picture of what was needed to bring KAE to fruition” says Iain.

Taking these insights, we then developed a comprehensive programme, which included a mentoring workshop and toolkit designed to support people in the field and bring the changes to life. The workshop and toolkit were rolled out across the UK diabetes and cardiovascular account team – involving 120 people in total.

In the workshops, participants used a workbook developed by Rubica to prioritise key accounts, understand their customers’ priorities and patient health journeys, identify synergistic goals with benefits for both the customer and Sanofi, and recognise and engage with key customers.

The Rubica Key Account Excellence workbook



The workbook gave key account executives a step-by-step process to follow.

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“The Rubica team gave us a clear road map that took us through the Key Account Excellence process step by step,” says Paul O’Nions, Head of Business Operations & Support, Sanofi UK & Ireland. “They shared methodologies with us that enabled us to expand our own thinking internally.”

“From here we asked Sanofi DCV to think much more holistically and deeply about their customers,” adds Paul Frith. “The workshops helped people to better understand the pressures that their customers in the NHS were facing, how their customers were supporting patients to achieve optimal healthcare, and how Sanofi could help customers achieve mutual objectives. This approach ensured that the customer, rather than sales, was at the heart of their thinking.”

Highlighting bright spots and sharing best practice

Just four months on from these initial interventions, ‘bright spots’ of progress associated to Key Account Excellence were already shining through. These were shared and celebrated across the business at the company conference, and included:

- A clear understanding and validation of key accounts and why they are important.
- Clarity on the priorities of key accounts and their patient health journeys.
- An understanding of common goals that Sanofi DCV could support its customers in achieving
- An ability to recognise and understand key customers.
- How to connect and engage with key customers more effectively.

The notable success of the programme at the company conference led to a broader roll-out, which encouraged cross-functional working. This helped support the Key Account Excellence vision across the business.

Spearhead Accounts and Step Ahead pioneers

In November 2018, we boosted the mobilisation of the whole of DCV around Key Account Excellence by recommending the introduction of Spearhead Accounts. These high-calibre project teams would focus on taking a Key Account Excellence approach with a small number of important customers.

At the same time, we launched a Step Ahead group of pioneers. This cross-functional team was already role-modelling key behaviours to support the change and was well equipped to highlight areas for improvement.

“I’m particularly proud of the pioneer programme. Whilst we as a leadership team, offered them direction and support, we also gave them the autonomy to run with things, which they have wholeheartedly embraced. They have been pivotal in supporting, driving and embedding KAE” says Iain MacFadyen, Head of Commercial North.

The results: a solid business impact and a cultural shift

Using a Key Account Excellence approach, Sanofi is now working more closely with its key accounts to discover solutions that benefit both parties. As a result, it is delivering higher levels of quality to its most important customers.

“I’m proud to have seen a cultural shift in the way our field teams have embraced this new way of working,” says Tunde Falode, DCV General Manager. “We don’t focus on coverage and frequency

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any more. Instead, our teams are empowered to focus on their key accounts and get the best results for our key brands.”

“It’s gratifying to see people becoming more confident about sharing best practice and taking responsibility for building their own business plans. This project represents a quantum leap in terms of ownership and empowerment for our account executives.”

Iain MacFadyen, Head of Commercial North goes on to say: “You can visibly see, hear and feel the results within our key accounts as a result of building strategic account plans from the bottom up and effectively working cross-functionally.

The most significant of these results is an increase in customer uptake of our solutions. This has enabled more patients to get better access to our medicines, and that is life changing. This brings us one step closer to fulfilling our mission: “We Help Our Customers, Help Their Patients Enjoy a Better Life”.

Quantitative results

Across the business, there was a £6m increase in DCV Business Operating Income in 2018 compared with 2017.

Over six months, Sanofi has seen volume growths of 23.1%, 25.4% and 18.6% respectively in key geographies for its diabetes drug. Moreover, feedback from primary market research in December 2018 showed that 62% of its customers noticed a positive difference in how Sanofi interacted with them compared to 2017.

Over six months, Sanofi’s medication for high cholesterol experienced volume growth of 47.4% and 130.1% respectively in key geographies. Meanwhile, in primary market research feedback, 50% of customers noticed a positive difference in how Sanofi interacted with them compared to 2017. One respondent commented:

“It’s brought awareness and has increased uptake. Uptake would have been slower without the rep. Their constant reminder of referral pathways, data, prescribing, patient identification has all contributed to more use of the drug in our hospital.”

To assess the impact of this change on the business and its people, Sanofi asked the London Business School to measure the success of DCV’s strategy over nine months of activity. Results showed that it was one of the top performing organisations in terms of efficiently executing their strategy when compared to other organisations in the study.

Qualitative results

The project has encouraged a one-team approach across Sanofi DCV. Different areas of the business are now co-operating transversally, including sales, MSLs and market access.

Within DCV, sales executives are using a more focused sales approach, both in terms of who they target and how they work with customers. Key Account Excellence techniques offer them the opportunity of having entirely different conversations with customers and, as a result, they are now deriving maximum impact from each of their interactions with key customers. As one sales executive said:

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“The questions we ask are vastly different now - the focus is on the customer, not the sell.”

Working with the Rubica team

“Rubica are passionate about their work. It feels as though they have skin in the game; they’ve been partners, not just agency providers. I’ve enjoyed experiencing their input and contribution. Throughout, they’ve been committed to helping us succeed with this project.”

Tunde Falode, General Manager, DCV

“The Rubica team were very open and up front, and constantly offered advice. They were extremely supportive, without directing or controlling us. They made it clear that effecting real change is not a one-hit wonder - it takes time and investment in people and resources.”

Paul O’Nions, Head of Business Operations & Support

“As a result of our Key Account Excellence journey with Rubica, our organisation is more focused and has a new confidence and ability to make informed, comfortable decisions around how we approach our accounts and best focus our energy, resources and time to deliver a win: win for us and our customers...”

...Throughout the journey Rubica have felt like part of our team. They have taken the time to really understand what we were aiming to achieve, and through their knowledge of what good Key Account Excellence looks like, have challenged and worked tirelessly to help get us there.

The whole Rubica team have added a huge amount of value and have been instrumental in accelerating the journey at Sanofi.”

Karen Stoddart, Head of CV Franchise

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