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DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMMERCIAL SEO LITERACY MODEL TO ENHANCE SALES EFFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY OF 7,000+ PROFESSIONALS AT SOLOCAL

Franck Cyrill Gordi

Founder & CEO, SPFG Web Expertise LLC
Cyberjaya, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the development and implementation of a Commercial SEO Literacy Model in the media holding Solocal as a response to the gap between the complexity of the SEO product and the cognitive limitations of large-scale commercial teams. The relevance of the study is determined by the intensifying information asymmetry in the digital services market and the strategic necessity of systematically translating technical SEO metrics into business indicators for large-scale B2B sales. The work aims to analyse the architecture, processes, and outcomes of building a blended learning model, to diagnose four key competency gaps, and to use mediating tools (the SEO Diagnostic Grid and the Keyword Value Calculator) as boundary objects between technical and commercial stakeholders. The scientific contribution lies in conceptualising commercial SEO literacy as a hybrid competence at the intersection of IT and consultative selling, and in empirically substantiating its direct causal link to economic outcomes among more than 7,000 participants. It is demonstrated that targeted enhancement of sellers' product expertise ensures a 46% increase in conversion, a 31% reduction in the sales cycle, and growth in upsell and customer retention, transforming training from an auxiliary HR function into a central mechanism of Sales Enablement and digital transformation. The article will be of interest to sales and training leaders, product and revenue owners, and researchers of B2B marketing for complex technological services.

KEYWORDS: SEO literacy, sales effectiveness, knowledge management, digital transformation, Solocal, staff training.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary digital economy is characterised by the rapid complication of marketing technologies (MarTech) (Becker & Schmid, 2020). Search engine optimisation (SEO), previously a narrow technical discipline, has evolved into a fundamental element of business strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Kahveci, 2025). However, the dominant sales paradigm for these

services lags behind technological progress. For extensive media holdings and digital agencies such as Solocal (the historical successor of the Yellow Pages in France), this gap poses a critical challenge: the need to mass-adapt thousands of professionals whose competencies were formed in the era of transactional sales of static advertising products to the realities of algorithmic marketing.

Because of information asymmetry in the digital service market, where customers lack the knowledge to evaluate the quality of SEO services before purchase, the role of the salesperson becomes crucial (Tang et al., 2023; Lewandowski & Schultheiß, 2022). In other cases, the salesperson may oversimplify, overpromise, or decide not to sell more esoteric products when they do not understand search engines well enough, resulting in lost revenue, damage to the company's reputation, and/or churn (Roberts et al., 2022). Consequently, the issue of increasing the technical literacy of commercial staff extends beyond HR tasks and becomes a strategic imperative for corporate survival.

The central problem addressed in this work lies in the contradiction between the technical complexity of the product (SEO) and the cognitive constraints of commercial teams in its commercialisation. Traditional corporate learning models frequently focus either on sales scripts (soft skills) that neglect product depth or on excessive technical detail that is inapplicable in negotiations (Lamri & Lubart, 2023). In the Solocal case, this manifested in systemic knowledge gaps among 7,000+ employees, which impeded the growth of sales of high-margin SEO services and undermined customer trust. The absence of a validated methodology for translating technical metrics (crawling, indexing) into business-value terms (revenue, leads) hindered efficiency.

The purpose of the work is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the development, implementation, and effectiveness of the Commercial SEO Literacy Model applied at Solocal. The study seeks to verify the hypothesis that structured enhancement of product expertise through specialised didactic tools has a direct causal relationship with the organisation’s economic performance.
To achieve this aim, the following tasks are addressed:

1. To conduct a diagnosis of the initial competence level of commercial personnel and to identify key cognitive gaps.
2. To describe the methodological architecture of the training model, including its didactic principles and tools.
3. To perform a quantitative analysis of the model’s impact on commercial KPIs (conversion, average order value, sales cycle) and qualitative indicators (customer satisfaction, retention).
4. To analyse processes of resistance to change and to formulate recommendations for scaling similar models in large, distributed structures.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in conceptualising Commercial SEO Literacy as a hybrid competence situated at the intersection of information technology and commercial communication.

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Unlike existing works that treat sales training in isolation, this study, based on a unique empirical dataset (7000+ respondents), demonstrates the mechanism by which technical knowledge is translated into economic outcomes. The application of mediator tools (for example, the Keyword Value Calculator) is described in detail as a means of overcoming cognitive dissonance among salespeople and clients in the context of SEO.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is grounded in the case study method with elements of action research. The need conditions the selection of this approach for an in-depth study of a complex social phenomenon (knowledge transformation within a corporation) in its real context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not always evident. The author of the methodology acted not as an external observer but as an active participant in the process, which enabled access to unique internal data that would otherwise remain inaccessible to an external audit.

The study is based on the principles of mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance the validity of the conclusions.

The qualitative stage included content analysis of internal documentation, sales scripts, and training materials. Twelve observed client meetings (shadowing) were analysed to identify communication patterns and argumentation errors. Methods of participant observation were also used during training sessions to assess staff reactions to new methods.

The quantitative stage relied on statistical analysis of data from CRM systems and learning platforms (LMS). Methods of comparative analysis were applied (A/B testing of approaches, comparison of before and after periods), analysis of distributions of certification scores, and correlational analysis between test results and sales indicators.

The empirical base of the study consisted of primary data from Solocal provided by the methodology author. To substantiate the results theoretically and integrate them into the academic discourse, external sources from the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases were used. The use of up-to-date sources (published within the last 5–10 years) ensures the theoretical validity of interpretations. The research process was organised in a strict chronological sequence corresponding to the stages of project implementation. First, a diagnostic phase was conducted, during which preliminary test results were analysed, and a qualitative audit of meetings was conducted. At the subsequent design phase, the didactic structure of the model and the developed instruments (frameworks) was evaluated.

This was followed by the implementation and monitoring phase, during which data on learning

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completion and participant certification were analysed, involving 7,012 individuals in total. The final evaluation phase comprised a comparison of commercial indicators in a sample of 120 client accounts and their juxtaposition with aggregated company-wide data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Diagnosis of Cognitive Gaps and Initial State

The first step of the study was an in-depth analysis of the reasons for the low effectiveness of SEO product sales at Solocal. The initial managerial hypothesis attributed the problem to insufficient persuasion (closing) skills. However, the author's diagnostic work refuted this, revealing that the problem was subject-matter incompetence.

From the answers to a 42-question knowledge test and during 12 customer shadowing visits, four significant competency gaps (The Four Major Gaps) were identified, that were perceived as being the barrier to sales.

Technical Gap (Understanding Gap). Consultants possessed fragmented knowledge of search engine mechanics. A critical deficit concerned the understanding of crawling and indexing processes. As a result, salespeople were unable to explain to clients the time lag between payment for the service and the website's appearance in search results, thereby creating fertile ground for future conflict.

Semantic Gap (Strategy Gap). The most acute problem was the lack of understanding of the keyword strategy. Salespeople, eager to please the client, would agree to promote highly competitive, high-volume queries (e.g., "hotel Paris"), ignoring the logic of long-tail keywords. This effectively doomed projects to failure, as SME budgets did not allow them to compete with aggregators on those keywords. Linguistic Gap (Communication Gap). The use of inaccurate terminology or, conversely, excessive technical jargon without explanation created a communication barrier. Clients would either feel incompetent or stop trusting the consultant’s professionalism.

Value Gap (Value Gap). There was a weak ability to connect technical actions (meta-tag optimisation, page speed improvements) with business KPIs (calls, orders, revenue). Sales conversations were anchored in processes (we will perform optimisation) rather than outcomes (you will gain traffic growth), which diminished the perceived value of the service.

These gaps indicate a systemic problem common to many commercial organisations: the absence of a translator between the technical and sales departments. In terms of knowledge management theory, employees could not externalise tacit knowledge: they intuitively understood that SEO was important but could not formalise this understanding into convincing arguments.

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3.2. Architecture of the Commercial SEO Literacy Model

The response to the identified deficits was the development of a comprehensive Commercial SEO Literacy Model. Its uniqueness lies in the refusal to turn salespeople into technical experts (SEO specialists). Instead, the model focuses on developing competence in commercial translation, the ability to interpret technical data for business decision-making.

The training programme was built on the principles of blended learning and comprised three sequential phases corresponding to Bloom's taxonomy: from remembering to understanding, and, finally, to application and analysis (Salas et al., 2024). Table 1 presents the stages of implementing the training model at Solocal.

Table 1. Stages of implementation of the training model in Solocal

Phase	Format & Duration	Key Learning Objectives	Tools & Methods
1. Intensive (Bootcamp)	3-day in-person workshop	Building a fundamental conceptual foundation. Demystifying Google's algorithms.	Metaphors (Google as a library), role plays, case studies.
2. Micro-learning	6 weeks, 15–20 minutes per module	Knowledge reinforcement (spaced repetition). Deepening into details without leaving work.	Video lessons, quizzes, scenario-based tasks, and expert chat support.
3. Certification (Application)	Practical exam	Testing the ability to apply knowledge in a real environment. Validation of competencies.	Diagnosis of 2 real clients, feedback from managers, and test score > 75%.

The micro-learning approach warrants particular attention. Given the scale (7,000 people) and the high cost of diverting salespeople from their core activities, breaking content into short modules enabled learning to be integrated into the work rhythm. This aligns with contemporary cognitive psychology evidence that fragmented delivery of information increases retention rates relative to large, monolithic lectures (Monib et al., 2024).

A key success factor of the model was the creation of proprietary tools that acted as scaffolding for salespeople during client dialogues. These tools functioned as boundary objects, enabling technical specialists, salespeople, and clients to converge on a shared understanding of value.

SEO Diagnostic Grid (SDG). A matrix of 12 criteria (technical condition, content, UX, mobile friendliness, etc.) structured the conversation and prevented salespeople from overlooking important

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details. Instead of an abstract discussion, the meeting turned into a joint checklist completion, which increased client engagement.

Keyword Value Calculator (KVC). A tool that transforms abstract data (keyword search volume) into financial forecasts. Its logic is as follows. The tool takes data on search volume (Search Volume), overlays a Click-Through Rate (CTR) curve for the top 3 positions, and multiplies by the website's average conversion rate and the average order value. As a result, the client sees not 1,000 searches but a revenue potential of €5,000. This fundamentally shifts the negotiation context from a cost-based (how much does it cost?) to an investment-based one (how much will I earn?).

Metaphorical frameworks also proved helpful. The Google as a library analogy (where the website is a book, the crawler is a librarian, and links are other authors' recommendations) reduced cognitive load for clients unfamiliar with technology. It made complex concepts (indexing, domain authority) intuitively accessible.

3.3. Empirical Analysis of Effectiveness

The model's implementation demonstrated high effectiveness across both knowledge acquisition and commercial metrics. The data are based on internal Solocal reporting.

The deployment scale encompassed 7,012 sales representatives. Training process indicators attested to high engagement: 84% of employees successfully passed certification (threshold: 75%); the average score between the pre-test and the final exam increased by 42%; and, according to an internal Quality Assurance evaluation, the accuracy of explaining SEO principles rose from 57% to 88%.

This confirms that the devised pedagogical model (3 days of theory plus practice) was effective for massive reskilling of an adult audience.

The most significant results were recorded in commercial indicators. Comparison of before and after periods revealed structural shifts in sales effectiveness (Table 2).

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Table 2. Comparative analysis of sales efficiency before and after the implementation of the model

Key Metric (KPI)	Baseline (Before)	After Value (Result)	Change (Δ)	Economic Interpretation
Conversion Rate	9.8%	14.3%	+46%	Increased trust in the salesperson's expertise. Reduced customer fear of making a wrong decision.
Time to Close (Sales Cycle)	16 days	11 days	-31%	Faster decision-making driven by transparent, value-based argumentation (KVC).
Upsell Rate	Baseline	+22%	+22%	Enhanced ability to justify the need for additional options (content, links, etc.).
Retention (6 months)	-	+15%	+15%	More realistic expectations set during the sales process reduce post-purchase disappointment and churn.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between competency growth and the shortening of the sales cycle.

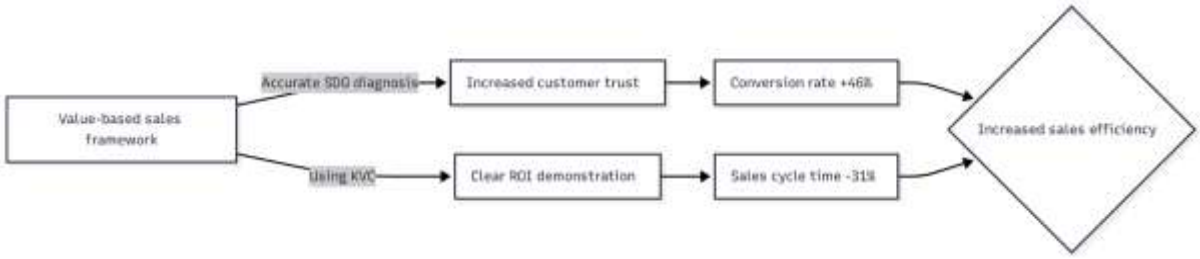

Fig. 1. Causal model of the impact of training on business results

A 46% increase in conversion is an exceptional outcome for a mature B2B services market. The effect of uncertainty reduction can explain this. SEO services are credence goods: the client cannot evaluate their quality even after consumption. Under such conditions, the salesperson's competence becomes the principal surrogate for quality. When the salesperson employs professional diagnostics (SDG) and mathematical modelling (KVC), the perceived risk of the transaction is reduced.

Reducing the sales cycle from 16 to 11 days also yields a substantial economic impact. With a sales

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force of 7,000, freeing 5 days per deal translates into thousands of additional man-hours that can be redirected toward prospecting and acquiring new clients.

One of the most profound insights of the study concerns the linkage between the sales process and the subsequent customer lifecycle (LTV). Analysis of a sample of 120 accounts showed average position gains of +18 ranking points, growth in organic traffic of +27%, and a +15% improvement in retention. Why did salesperson training influence the technical performance of client websites? The mechanism lies in the quality of initial expectations. Untrained salespeople frequently sold air or promised impossible timelines (top-1 in a week). This led clients to terminate contracts after three months when the promised miracle failed to materialise. Trained salespeople, relying on the long-tail concept and honestly communicating indexing timelines, formed realistic expectations. Clients were prepared to wait 6+ months for results, providing technical teams with time for rigorous work. Thus, ethical and competent selling became a prerequisite for operational success.

3.4. Implementation Barriers and Risk Management

Analysis of the implementation process revealed a series of resistance patterns characteristic of large organisations undergoing digital transformation. A significant portion of senior employees perceived SEO as too complex and incomprehensible. The solution was the use of anthropomorphic metaphors and gamification of learning.

The gap between headquarters and regional offices was substantial. The introduction of a unified certification standard and the option to retake the exam (2 attempts) helped level the competence landscape without demotivating lagging employees.

The traditional conflict training vs. sales targets was also evident. The transition to asynchronous micro-learning alleviated pressure on line managers, since learning no longer interrupted commercial activity.

3.5. Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The results of the Solocal case corroborate theoretical models of consultative selling. In the Sales 4.0 era, the salesperson’s role shifts from transmitting information (which is already accessible online) to interpreting and tailoring it to the client’s specific context.

The implemented model demonstrates that Sales Enablement is not merely a set of brochures but an infrastructure of knowledge. Tools such as KVC embody the concept of distributed cognition: knowledge resides not only in the salesperson’s mind but also in the instrument itself. This reduces the demands on individual employee IQ by shifting complexity to the system.

The original synthesis of the study lies in the conclusion that investments in deep, quasi-engineering literacy of commercial staff represent one of the highest-yielding investments in B2B service marketing. They influence not only the top of the funnel (conversion) but also its bottom (retention), creating a synergistic effect for the entire business model.

4. CONCLUSION

The study conducted on the Solocal case basis yields the following key conclusions. It is demonstrated that raising salespeople's technical SEO literacy leads to a statistically significant increase in conversion (+46%) and average order value (Upsell +22%). Product knowledge ceases to be a supporting function and becomes a driver of growth.

The success of large-scale training depends on the availability of applied tools (KVC, SDG) that enable real-time application of acquired knowledge, transforming technical data into economic arguments. High-quality sales grounded in an understanding of product mechanics shape accurate client expectations, directly increasing customer lifetime (+15% Retention) and reducing the burden on account management.

The combination of intensive immersion (Bootcamp) and sustaining micro-learning constitutes an optimal model for large distributed structures, allowing them to overcome the forgetting curve and ensure the durability of skills.

The practical significance of the work lies in providing a validated blueprint for companies undergoing digital transformation. The proposed model can be adapted for selling any complex technological solutions (SaaS, Cloud, CyberSecurity) where there is a comprehension gap between the salesperson and the client. The Solocal case demonstrates that bridging this gap through systematic education is a powerful lever for enhancing operational efficiency.

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