



# Cisco's Security Sales Superstar Program: Driving \$2.8 Billion in Opportunities

Cisco Systems

Best Program for Sales Training and Performance

November 2024



## Company Background



Company-at-a-Glance	
Headquarters	San Jose, CA
Year Founded	1984
Revenue	\$49.2 B
Employees	84,900
Global Scale	AMER, EMEA, APJC
Industry	Technology Company
Stock Symbol	CSCO
Website	<a href="https://www.cisco.com">Cisco.com</a>



## Budget and Timeframe

Budget and Timeframe	
Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	~10
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	~15
Number of contractors involved with implementation	~7
Timeframe to implement	9/1/23 to 10/31/23
Start date of the program	11/1/23

## Fit to the Needs

### Overview

## Executive Sponsorship

*“Security is one of our most important priorities at Cisco, and we have simplified our product, our buying motion, and our message to make it easier for you and our customers to consume.”*

*“If we could just get 10% of the sales audience to learn the 15-minute pitch, that would be huge success. We need consistency.”*

*“We are running out of time. The window of opportunity to protect against competitors is quickly disappearing”*

**Jeetu Patel –Cisco Systems EVP/GM – Security & Collaboration**

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**Global Sales**  
ENABLEMENT TEAM

The Security Sales Superstar Program at Cisco Systems was designed to align with one of the company’s primary organizational objectives: “Win Security.” As the cybersecurity market expands and becomes more complex, Cisco aims to simplify security solutions for customers and ensuring that Cisco sellers can effectively communicate this message is critical.



The program was a comprehensive sales training and pitch contest organized by the Global Sales Organization to enhance the sales of Cisco’s security products.

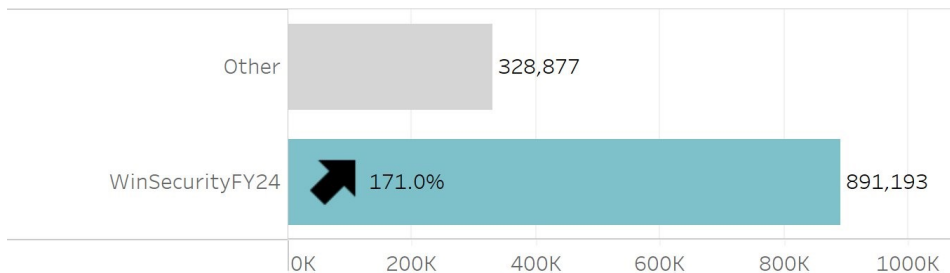
The program’s goals included improving sales pitches for Cisco’s security suites, increasing the number of high-value security deals, and ensuring that the sellers were proficient in communicating Cisco’s simplified security solutions to customers. These objectives were established to directly address the company’s aim to capture a larger share of the \$223 billion cybersecurity market.

To determine the program’s impact, a performance gap analysis was conducted before its development, identifying areas where sellers needed improvement. Additionally, Salesforce data was used to track the progress and outcomes of the program. A special tag (#WinSecurityFY24) was created for sellers to use when identifying security opportunities and associating the program tag with those opportunities.

The training required approximately 18,000 full-time Cisco employees to participate, with around 7,200 Portfolio Sellers submitting a 10-minute pitch on Cisco’s security suites. The program included self-directed learning, assessments, AI-assisted practice pitches, and evaluations by managers worldwide.

The results of the program were significant. As of March 2024, over \$2.8 billion in security opportunities were tagged with the #WinSecurityFY24 tag, demonstrating the program’s contribution to the organizational goal of winning in security. Furthermore, the average deal size for tagged deals was \$562k higher, an increase of 171%, and these deals were four times more likely to be in the Commit or Upside forecast categories.

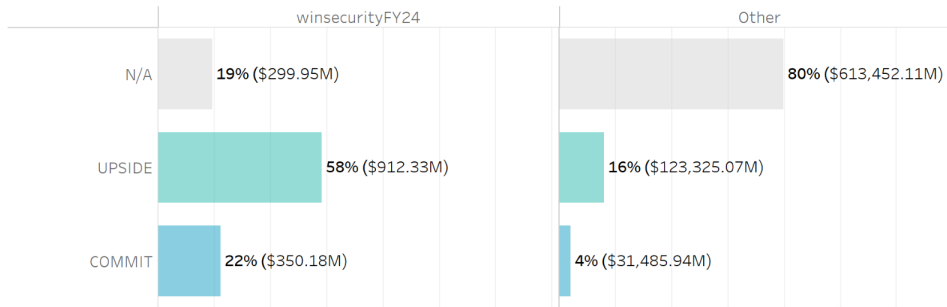
Deal Size



The average deal size for tagged deals is \$562k higher (+171%)



Forecast Status



Tagged deals are 4x more likely to be in Commit or Upside

The Security Sales Superstar Program was integrated throughout the enterprise by requiring the participation of full-time employees across different roles and regions. The program concluded with winners from each region, fostering a competitive and collaborative environment.

Overall, the program was successful in meeting its established goals by improving sales pitches, increasing the number and quality of security deals, and integrating the training across the organization. It not only tied into Cisco’s organizational objectives but also demonstrated a clear return on investment through increased sales metrics and showcasing the value of comprehensive and targeted training programs in driving business success.

## Security Sales Superstar Results

Global Program Results		Global Business Impact	
<b>8,500</b> Submissions were viewed, scored and coached by leaders	<b>98%</b> Training completion by ~18,000 people	<b>\$2.6B</b> Projected in #WinSecurityFY24 tagged pipeline	<b>+\$56M</b> Increase in large Security deals in Q2
<b>97%</b> Pitch submission completion (Portfolio Sellers/Ses)	<b>100+</b> Security Specialist volunteers who helped review	<b>+\$500K</b> Increase in Security pipeline when discussing Security on customer calls	<b>+\$562K</b> Increase in average size of tagged deals

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## Design of the Program

The Security Sales Superstar program was meticulously crafted to cater to its audience, ensuring an engaging and effective learning experience. As a pitch contest supporting Cisco's strategic goal to "Win Security," the program included comprehensive education on security products and the art of pitching. It unfolded over five rounds of reviews, culminating in winners from each region, highlighting the competitive spirit of the program.\

The design of the program was inclusive by utilizing the Mindtickle platform to accommodate various languages, supporting over 27, which is a testament to Cisco's global reach. Moreover, over 1700 managers were equipped with a bias mitigation guide to aid in the pitch review process, ensuring a fair and unbiased evaluation across the board. A standardized rubric and cumulative scoring were employed to maintain consistency and minimize bias in judging.

The program leveraged Mindtickle's world-class sales enablement methodology identified by the acronym TSPR (Teach, Show, Practice, Reinforce). This approach was tailored for the primary audience—Portfolio Sellers and Sales Managers—and even those outside this group. The description here primarily addresses the learning experiences of these two core roles.

Adding a layer of engagement, the program adopted an "American Idol" style theme, infusing competition and gamification to motivate sellers not only to participate but also to complete the program with enthusiasm and submit their best pitches.



## HOOK Your Audience: Fun, Music & Gamification

- Tapped into the ‘Search for...’ similar to Idol, X-Factor, AGT
- Shows have knock out Rounds – drama, judges feedback, live production
- Representing your country taps into Country Leader team spirit
- Idol is known for its entertaining and competitive atmosphere. By emulating this theme, we aim to create a fun and exciting atmosphere, which can boost morale and team spirit.
- Pop culture references like resonate with a diverse audience, making it a relevant and relatable theme for employees from various backgrounds.



### Portfolio Seller Learning Program:

Teach: Self-directed learning modules, coupled with rigorous assessments, ensured that sellers mastered the knowledge of the targeted security portfolio. The EVP of the Security Business Unit even contributed a recorded sales pitch to serve as a model for sellers.

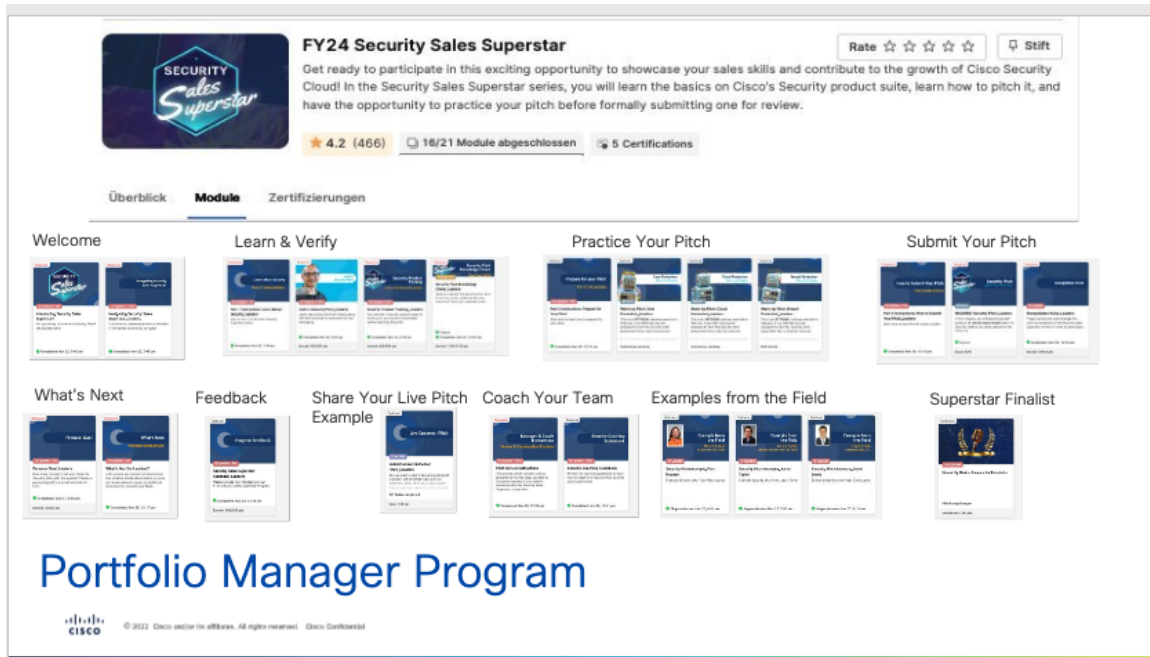
Show: As an option, sellers could observe demonstrations from top performers, showcasing “what good looks like.”



Practice: Utilizing platforms like Mindtickle, sellers recorded their security pitches following specific evaluation criteria. Mindtickle’s AI (Artificial Intelligence) tool, CoPilot provided feedback, allowing for iterative improvement before the official submission.

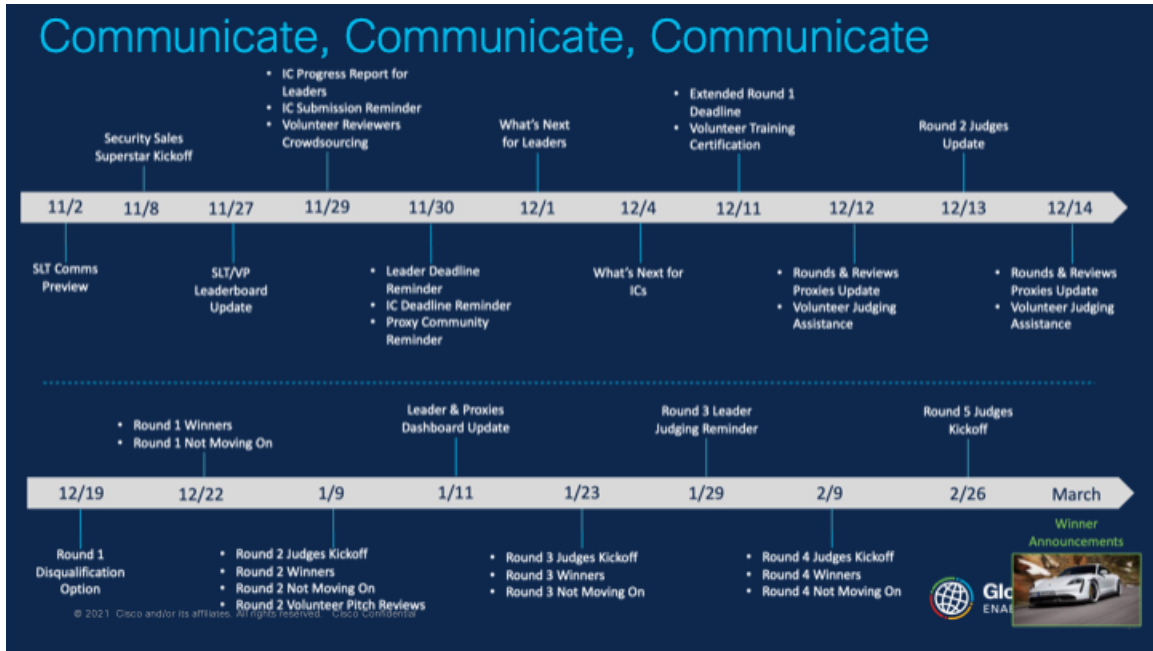
Reinforce & Win: Sellers received feedback in two ways—firstly, through the AI tool CoPilot before submitting their pitch, and secondly, from pitch reviewers after submission. Timely feedback was provided to all participants, with managers being notified of those advancing in the contest.

Sales Manager Learning Program:



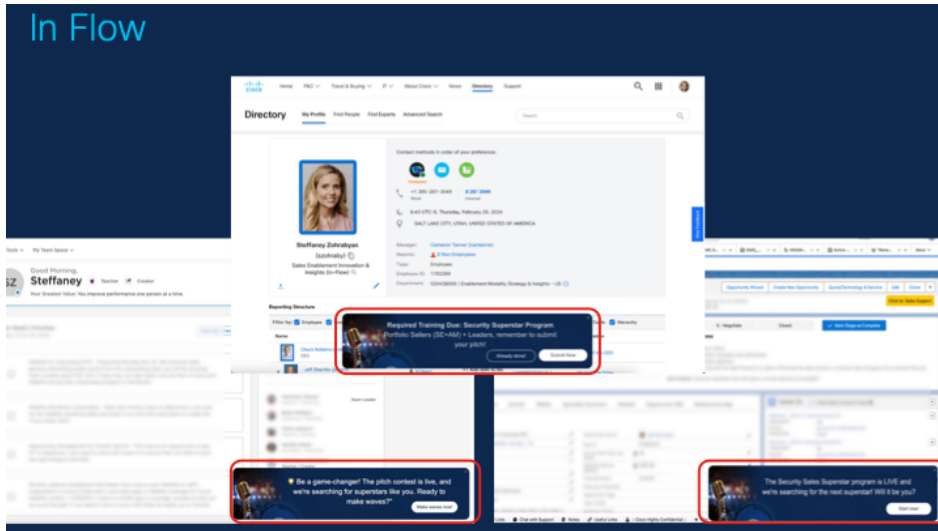
Similar to the sellers, Sales Managers engaged with the TSPR methodology through Mindtickle, and also received a coaching guide and practiced their pitches with AI feedback, which kept their experience aligned with that of the Portfolio Sellers.

Additional program elements included consistent communication, the awarding of achievement badges, and program certifications to incentivize progress and completion.



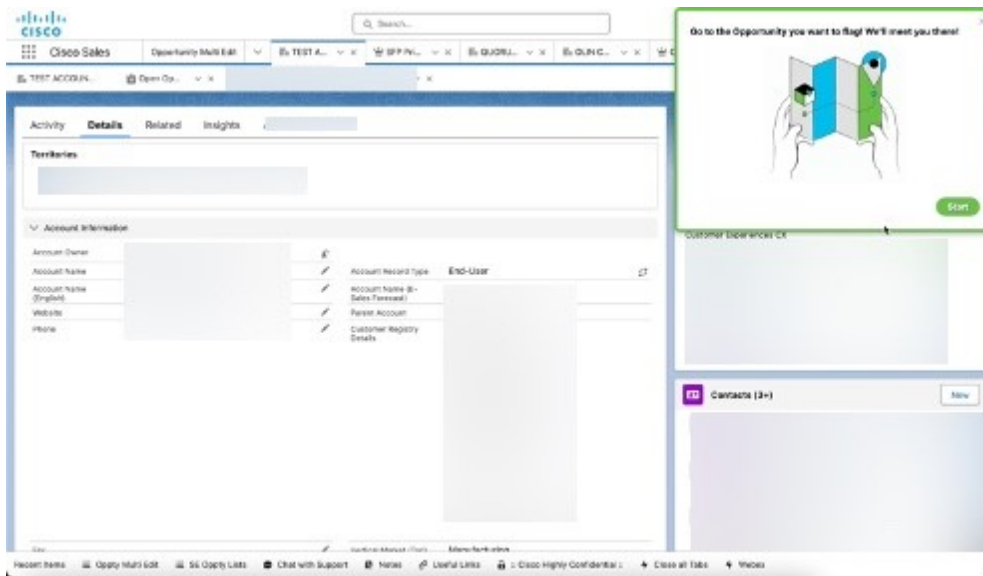
In-Flow alerts were strategically deployed in tools frequently used by sellers, such as the Cisco Directory, weekly check-in tools, and Salesforce, guiding them towards program modules.





### Three Examples of In-Flow alerts

As part of the program design, In-Flow alerts were used to drive seller behavior in Salesforce. The In-Flow alerts (presented top right) walked the seller through how to tag a security opportunity with the #WinSecurityFY24 tag in Salesforce.

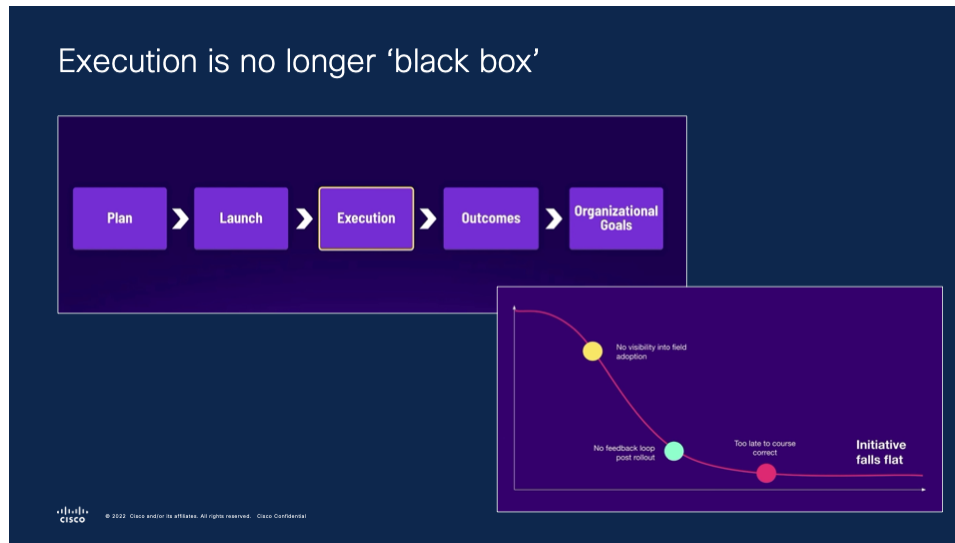


Lastly, the program solicited feedback to make real-time adjustments, ensuring the program's adaptability and relevance to the participants' needs.



## Delivery of the Program

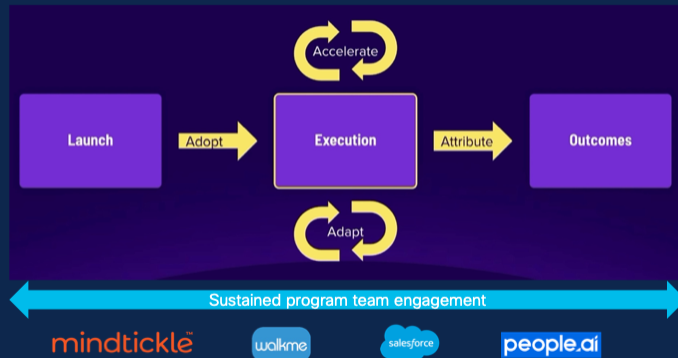
The effectiveness of the Security Sales Superstar program hinged not just on its comprehensive content but also on its strategic deployment. A common pitfall of many programs is halting momentum post-launch and failing to nurture and guide participants toward achieving the desired outcomes.



In contrast, the program team behind the Security Sales Superstar program maintained an active and vigilant approach to ensure success. The program team conducted daily stand-up meetings to monitor progress, and the Program Owner meticulously reviewed reports to gauge the program's health. This vigilant oversight often led to real-time adaptations, enhancing the program's effectiveness. The team estimated that approximately 70% of the effort to drive a successful program occurred after the program launch, emphasizing the importance of engagement and support throughout the deployment phase.

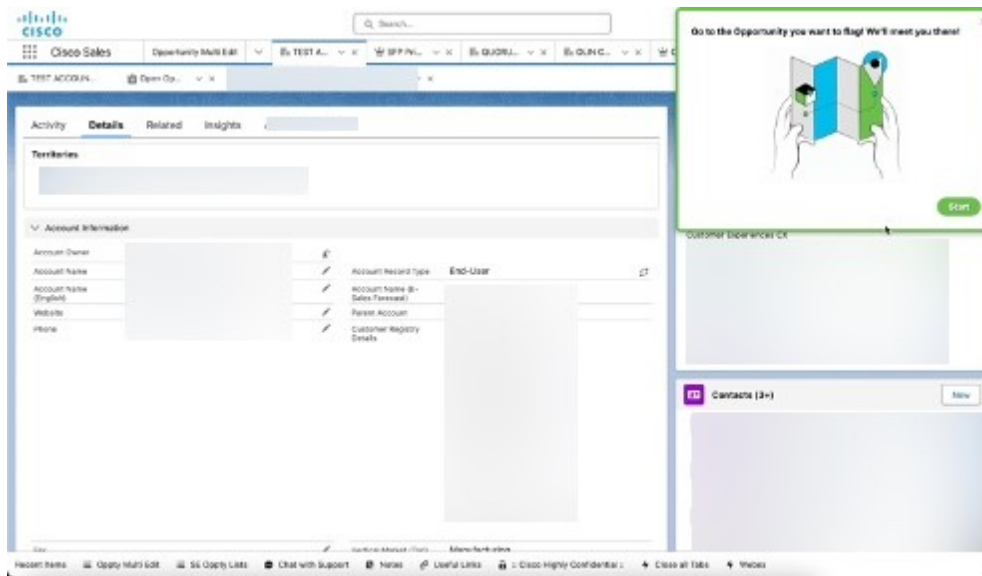


### The 4 'A' model to Revenue Enablement



The deployment of the program was facilitated through the Mindtickle platform, which offered a blend of self-directed learning modules with clear due dates. The platform skillfully balanced mandatory content with optional resources, allowing for a personalized learning experience. Participants utilized Mindtickle to record their pitches, receive AI-generated feedback, and ultimately submit their pitch entries for review. Managers engaged with the platform as well, completing pitch reviews and providing feedback within the same ecosystem, creating a seamless loop of interaction and growth.

Moreover, the deployment strategy extended to the usage of In-Flow technology, such as WalkMe, to drive behavior within Salesforce. This integration ensured that the learning experience was not isolated but was instead connected to the tools and systems that sellers use daily, reinforcing the application of new skills in real-world contexts.



The combination of a proactive program team, a versatile learning platform, and the smart use of technology to guide user behavior resulted in a deployment that was as robust as the program content itself. This methodical and responsive approach to deployment played a crucial role in the program's success, illustrating the power of a well-executed learning strategy.

The Security Sales Superstar Program's journey through design, development, and delivery was marked by continuous innovation and adaptation. The team faced various challenges head-on, creating effective solutions to keep the program on track.

One significant obstacle was managing the substantial volume of pitches requiring managerial review, which proved to be overwhelming for some with large teams. To address this, the program team proactively engaged with the Security business unit, enlisting the help of Security Specialists to assist in the review process. Over 100 Security Specialists, trained specifically for this task, volunteered to support portfolio seller submissions, thereby ensuring all reviews were completed on time.

Another challenge arose from the weekly dashboard reports, which included sellers on leave, skewing the team completion rates. The program team established an exception process to accurately reflect active participation by excusing and removing sellers on leave from the program and the reports.

Additionally, engagement with the dashboard and reporting tools was less than expected among managers. To combat this, the program team collaborated with managers to identify proxies or Executive Assistants who could assist with the oversight of reporting and metrics, thereby ensuring progress monitoring.



The program's novelty compared to previous offerings meant that frequent feedback and sentiment checks were crucial to gauge the target audience's pulse and adjust accordingly. Regular summary reports were provided to executives, offering unprecedented visibility into the program's progress and impact.

As the program progressed to the semi-finals, language diversity presented another hurdle. Submissions arrived in various languages, so the program team requested Security Specialists to identify the languages they were proficient in, allowing for precise matching of submissions to reviewers. When submissions were received in languages without a designated reviewer, AI translation tools were employed to convert the audio to English, ensuring no participant was left behind.

Through these strategic responses to challenges, the program not only overcame obstacles but also elevated expectations for future initiatives. It has redefined what is possible, influencing how programs can drive meaningful business outcomes and setting a new benchmark for excellence that other executives within the organization now aspire to meet.

## **Measurable Benefits**

The Program team adopted a rigorous data-driven approach to measure the impact of the Security Sales Superstar Program across various metrics. These metrics were meticulously chosen to provide a comprehensive picture of the program's effectiveness, from skill development to business outcomes.

The first set of metrics, referred to as Enablement Metrics, were within the program team's control and could be precisely measured. They included:

- Competency Improvements, based on the initial skill and performance gap analysis.
- Strategies for Performance, Learning, and Program Design.
- Field Engagement and Satisfaction.
- Program Completion Rates and Adoption.
- Execution of Sales Expectations.



## Enablement Metrics – What we Control



COMPETENCY  
IMPROVEMENTS



PERFORMANCE,  
LEARNING &  
PROGRAM DESIGN  
STRATEGY



FIELD ENGAGEMENT  
& SATISFACTION



PROGRAM  
COMPLETION RATES  
& ADOPTION



SALES  
EXPECTATIONS TO  
EXECUTE

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The completion rates were exceptional, with 96% (17,461 out of 18,189) completing the required training by the December 4th deadline and 99% (3,019 out of 3,151) of People Leaders meeting their earlier deadline. A total of 96% (6,123) of Individual Contributor Portfolio submitted their role play pitches, with a minor 2% (347) submitting after the deadline.

The AI (Artificial Intelligence) role play simulations were a significant component of the program, with 3,024 employees attempting them, resulting in 14,771 total attempts. This AI-driven practice saved approximately 38 weeks of managerial time by providing employees with scores and comprehensive feedback, illustrating the program's efficiency.

However, 1% (251) of participants failed to pass the knowledge check assessment on the messaging of the Security Suites, highlighting areas for further improvement.



The second set of metrics focused on Business Outcomes:

The infographic is titled "Business Outcomes Metrics - What we Influence" and is set against a dark blue background. It features three circular icons in a row, each with a corresponding text block below it. The first icon is a line graph with an upward arrow, representing sales activity. The second icon is a blue tag with the hashtag #winsecurityfy24, representing a leading indicator for tagging security opportunities. The third icon is a speedometer, representing pipeline, win rates, and deal velocity. At the bottom right, there is a logo for the Global Sales Enablement Team, which includes a globe icon and the text "Global Sales ENABLEMENT TEAM". At the bottom left, there is a small copyright notice: "© 2021 Cisco and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Cisco Confidential".

**Business Outcomes Metrics -  
What we Influence**

- SALES ACTIVITY (E.G. ACTION GROWTH SPRINTS LEADS, MEETINGS TO SHARE THE PITCH, TARGET NEW BUYERS)**
- LEADING INDICATOR: TAGGING SECURITY OPPORTUNITIES IN SFDC WITH #WINSECURITYFY24**
- PIPELINE, WIN RATES, DEAL VELOCITY, DEAL SIZE, BIG DEALS, BOOKINGS, NEW LOGOS**

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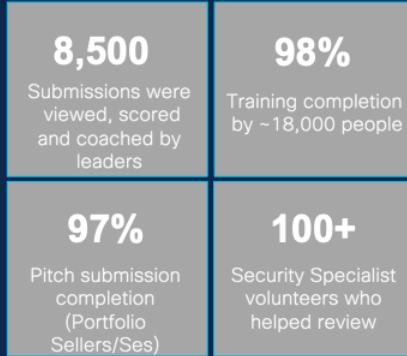
**Global Sales  
ENABLEMENT TEAM**

- Baseline measurements of skills and Salesforce opportunities were taken before and after the program to gauge improvement.
- The program influenced \$2.8 billion in Security opportunities in the pipeline.
- Q2 saw a \$56 million+ increase in large security deals.
- There was a \$500,000+ increase in the Security pipeline from customer calls mentioning Security.
- Tagged deals saw an average increase of \$562,000+.



## Security Sales Superstar Results

### Global Program Results



### Global Business Impact



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Further analysis revealed a correlation between high-scoring pitches and better sales performance, signifying the program’s direct influence on seller efficacy.

## Security Pitch Proficiency Pays Off in Bookings Boost



Sellers with high Security Pitch Evaluation scores outperform with **\$110k more in Security BE bookings** since December

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The program not only led to quantitative benefits but also qualitative improvements, evidenced by pre- and post-training surveys:

- A notable shift in sales motivation.
- Enhanced identification of opportunities.
- Reduced demand for coaching, possibly due to increased seller confidence.
- Impact on Sales Performance, including bookings and pipeline.
- Growth in the average deal size.
- A rise in the number of large deals.

Seller testimonials echoed these findings, with many reporting:

- Enhanced sales strategies.
- Improved customer engagement.

The data and feedback unequivocally demonstrated that the Security Sales Superstar Program delivered measurable benefits, successfully aligning with the organization's priorities and objectives. Through rigorous training and practice, the program significantly boosted sales skills, leading to more substantial and valuable security deals, thereby establishing a compelling case for the program's return on investment.

## **Overall**

The Security Sales Superstar Program provided a wealth of insights, serving as an invaluable case study in innovation, execution, and the critical role of data-driven decision-making. Here is a summary of the key findings and lessons learned:

**Audience Definition:** Accurately defining the target audience is crucial. The term 'portfolio seller' lacked clarity due to its non-reliance on job titles, necessitating a combination of HRMS data with sales compensation tools to identify those with sales quotas.

**Establishing a Baseline:** To effectively measure the impact of any program, it is essential to start with a clear understanding of the current state. Baseline metrics should be established before launching the program to enable meaningful comparisons and demonstrate change.



**Resource Allocation:** The program required more resources than initially anticipated. Adequate planning and resource allocation are imperative for the success of such comprehensive programs.

**Logistics:** The logistics of running a contest, especially one as complex as the Security Sales Superstar Program, were initially undefined and required significant development, including contest brackets, terms, and conditions in collaboration with legal, and considerations of finance and regional taxes.

**Adoption and Engagement:** Post-launch efforts are critical. The team estimated that approximately 70% of the effort to drive a successful program occurred after the program launch, emphasizing the importance of sustained efforts to promote adoption and engagement are vital for achieving desired outcomes.

**Program Management and Documentation:** Effective orchestration across various stakeholders requires a dedicated Program Manager and a well-documented strategy. A program playbook is essential for coordinating all elements and ensuring smooth execution.

**Timelines:** Achieving good results takes careful planning and often more time than expected. Realistic timelines are key to managing expectations and delivering a successful program.

**Adaptability:** The ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges was more effective than attempting to preemptively plan for all possible issues. The team's agility allowed for the creation of real-time solutions, resulting in a now-replicable model for future programs.

**Future Outlook:** The success of the program has sparked interest from other executives eager to replicate its results. The program team's next step is not to create similar programs for each request but rather to educate other Sales Enablement teams on the methodology. This approach aims to scale the knowledge and experience gained throughout the organization, thereby multiplying the benefits, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

In conclusion, the Security Sales Superstar Program has set a precedent for future initiatives within the organization. By applying the lessons learned and sharing best practices, the team looks forward to scaling this success and driving further innovation in sales enablement across the enterprise.



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