The exchange of goods is as old as humanity itself and remains essential for daily living. We have progressed from bartering for scarce goods to using cash as a generic medium for trade. Today, the short-term goal of selling is to generate as much cash, as quickly as possible, by persuading customers to buy.

In 2009 the SSMA realised that no marketing programme could be complete without addressing the process of selling. While marketing is about extracting value from a client base at the lowest cost and risk, selling is the activity that identifies the details of each client and interacts accordingly, to offer customer value in a profitable manner. This requires clear operational steps which are not automatically understood by everyone. They need to be taught in a well-structured and entertaining manner, which helps delegates to upskill themselves.

During 2010, the SSMA programme included a sales model and related tactics. It also emphasized the competencies required to be an effective salesperson, by offering a short psychometric test. It is relatively easy to understand sales processes and models; it is more challenging to discover one’s own suitability for selling, by being honest about one’s competencies. Some people are more natural salespeople than others because they have Confidence, Acumen, Knowledge and Empathy (CAKE). Historically, these traits have served salespeople well.

The SSMA programme used case material which allowed participants to develop opinions and strategies; it was hoped that this would get them thinking about sales possibilities in their own businesses. Inevitably, however, we had to address marketing strategy in order to understand sales activity clearly. Marketing establishes the strategic direction for a company and creates an environment in which selling may occur effectively. Selling is seen as a subsidiary function of marketing.

In future, technology will substantially influence the manner in which selling occurs. We have already seen the impact of call centres on reaching customers telephonically through personalised contact. The anticipated growth in Internet and mobile marketing, as well as electronic payment services through cell phones, will change the form of sales activity for many companies (i.e. the marketing mix will become more diverse).

Person-to-person interaction will always be required in business. Selling will always be an essential marketing activity. The procedures, models, tactics and personal competencies required will, however, change as the marketing environment becomes enriched with new technologies, more sophisticated customers and, indeed, a new breed of sales person.