SALES FORCE MENTORING AND SALES GROWTH OF SMALL BUSINESSES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The need to remain relevant in today's challenging business world has compelled small businesses to engage consultancy services to reposition the company and its staff toward achieving increased sales growth and performance. This study investigated the effect of sales force mentoring on sales growth of small businesses in Benue state, Nigeria. Data needed for the study was generated from small businesses studied. The study's hypothesis was tested with the aid of multiple regression statistical analytical tool at 5 % level of significance. Result of the analysis indicated that a significant positive effect exist from sales force mentoring and sales growth of small businesses in Benue state. (p-value 0.000< α 0.05). Arising from the above findings, the study concluded that sales force mentoring have effect on sales growth of small businesses in Benue state. Based on the findings, the study made a good number of recommendations including a call on the owners and managers of small businesses to regularly subject their sales force to realistic mentoring exercise to keep them abreast of current realities and selling skills that are capable of attracting sales growth in their small businesses.

KEYWORDS: Mentoring, Small businesses, Sales growth, Performance

Introduction
The dynamics of the current challenging and pervasive business environment which includes: globalization, rapidly evolving technologies and electronic applications, competition, as well as ever-closer customer partnerships has compelled organizations to transform the role of the sales force to a new dimension. Today, organizations strive constantly to properly mentor and train, guide and equipping their sales force with relevant tools, necessary to be competitive so as to achieve its strategic goals in the market. For Small businesses, the capability to put in place appropriate mentoring program for their sales force has long been
deemed a key strategic differentiator and means of achieving high and sustained sales growth performance and leverage over competitors. (Masato & Troilo, 2015, Zafarian, 2014). The importance of salesperson performance cannot be overstressed. The success of any sales and marketing organization ultimately depends on the success of individual salespeople, for their performance directly affects the firm’s bottom line, not just in the short run, but in the long run as well.

Mentoring is an indefinite, relationship based activity with several specific but wide ranging goals. It relates primarily to the identification and nurturing of potential for the whole person and can be a long-term relationship, where the goals may change but are always set by the learner. Mentoring seeks to build wisdom, the ability to make the mentee to identify and apply his or her hidden skill. Mentoring is an incredibly powerful tool for individuals who want to learn and grow within an organization. Moving or preparing to move into a new role, taking on new responsibilities, building confidence to develop your career further, or working in a new environment all seem much easier with a mentor to support you. Mentoring program harness the value of internal employee resources to develop others, which saves time, cost, and increases overall employee satisfaction and hence, performance. It has been alleged that a well and appropriately mentored sales force has all it takes to ensure an enhanced sales growth for his organization.

A Small business is an independent owner/managed business organisation of limited significance within the industry, employing very few employees, where the owner/manager’s omnipresence creates a highly personalised management style. It is a unique business entity that can be owned by anybody in any sector and any location in the economy. With the advance of the innovative era in the globalized and knowledge-based economy, to improve the performance development and competitiveness of small businesses demands this class of businesses to acquire, train, monitor and manage intellectual sales force. Schiuma, and Neely (2004) opine that organizations are more likely to perform well and create value when they implement strategies that respond to market opportunities by exploiting their internal resources and capabilities including sales force.

To survive and excel in an era of increasing competition requires that salespersons to be continuously mentored and in addition, learn and engage in creative activities. The importance of salesperson creativity is evidenced in numerous successful businesses.

This study investigates the effect of Sales force Mentoring on sales Growth of Small Businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The effective role of small businesses in economic development of nations have always been acknowledged (Aliyu & Mahmood 2014 and Hanmaikyur, 2014). But as Ediri (2014) opines, small businesses can only maintain such a position when a good number of strategies including employing appropriate consultancy marketing practices are put in place at the right time and in the right proportion to exert positive effect on operators and by extension sales growth and performance. Naelati and SobrotullImti, (2014) argues that consultancy practices have positive effect on performance of Small Businesses however, little has been established on the extent of such effect. Attempts in this regard have always resulted in mixed, conflicting, inconsistent and inconclusive findings.

Most studies on the effect of consulting on sales growth have always focused on large firms in developed markets and economies (Salavou, Baltas and Lioukas 2004) as well as in the Middle East and North Africa (Dutta 2006). Though few of them are conducted in Nigeria (Itodo, 2014), none is conducted in the study area. This study therefore fills the gap. Besides, similar studies may not have the same framework and variables.

The marketing practice of Small businesses is usually assumed despite the fact that this class of businesses are an important factor in the successful existence and development of any economy and that they dominate the landscape of all economies, from developed to developing and underdeveloped. Since marketing is concerned with the creation of customer, it should be the basis for the existence of any business organization.
It is important that the effect of consultancy services of this important class of businesses that dominate economies of the world should be investigated and understood so as to be able to improve on them.

Most writers on Small businesses in Nigeria have not given the marketing practices of these classes of organizations the necessary focus as their writings as they have always concentrated on the principles that should be adopted at the expense how such services should be acquired especially given the financial stricken nature of small businesses. The academic research on Small and Medium Enterprises have mainly concentrated on the factors militating against the success of these classes of businesses. This study therefore positions itself with the objective of studying the effect of marketing consultancy services and sales growth of small businesses in Benue state to bridge this gap.

This study therefore, seeks to ascertain the actual effect of marketing consultancy practices on the sales growth performance of Small businesses in Benue state in Nigeria.

**Objectives of the Study**
The main objective of this study is to determine the effect of consultancy practices on sales growth of small businesses in Benue state of Nigeria.

**Research Hypotheses**

This research work was guided by the following hypothesis

$H_0$: Marketing Consultancy has no effect on sales Growth of Small Businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

**Conceptual Clarification and Review of Related Literature**

**Consultancy**

In recent years, consultancy has become such an all-embracing pursuit, for a variety of reasons, that it is impossible to define consultancy as precisely as we would wish. There are almost as many definitions of consultancy as there are consultants; each consultant and consultancy has their own slant on the work they do. However, here are three definitions that together sum up what consultancy is all about. This study aligns itself with the definition of consultancy as provided by The Institute of Management Consultants which defines consultancy as the service provided to business, public or other undertakings by an independent and qualified person or persons in identifying and investigating problems concerned with policy, organization, procedures and methods, recommending appropriate action and helping to implement those recommendations. Consulting is a dynamic part of the ever-growing service sector in any economy. Consultancy is a separate commercial activity from management as it requires skills and techniques to practice it. Not only must consultants understand marketing management, they must also understand how to achieve tasks without power, using only their ability to persuade and influence the client. A consultant is a person considered an expert in a specified field with a wide knowledge of the subject matter and a depth of experience who gives professional advice and counsel to another

**Small business**

A small business is an independent owner/managed business organization of limited significance within the industry, employing less than one hundred employees, where the owner/manager’s omnipresence creates a highly personalized management style. This class of businesses are close to their markets, have great flexibility, have the capacity to operate on slim margins, can instigate decisions quickly, have limited financial, human, material and informational resources, they are evolutionary, face continuous uncertainty, they generally do not plan formally, they most commonly have bad attitude towards detailed day-to-day procedures. They are a wide variety and heterogeneous group of enterprises and a very important business segment that provides national socioeconomic development both for developed and developing markets and economies. They embody diverse kinds of sophistication, skills, capital, growth orientation and are found in
both formal and informal sectors (Eniola, 2015). They may be owned by individuals, groups, corporate organizations and government and their owners may or may not be poor (Naelati, and SobrotulImti, 2014). These classes of enterprises are found in a wide variety of industries and operate in very different markets (rural, urban, local, national, and international) and social environments (Ediri, 2014) and are drivers of economic growth as they contribute greatly to economic development of both developed and developing nations in diverse ways including reducing unemployment (among many others) even though they are usually characterized by lack of adequate resources, owner/manager operation, flexibility and low-tech involvement (Shehu, 2014).

**Marketing**

Marketing, a matrix of business activities organized to plan, produce, price, promote, distribute goods, services and ideas for the satisfaction of relevant need is important for the success of any organization whether service or product oriented. It is the pivotal part of any business that provides essential inputs to the firm’s overall strategies and is central to success in today’s fast moving competitive markets just as measuring marketing’s performance is critical to managing it effectively. It can also be seen as a bridge that all businesses need cross by practicing it appropriately if they must improve their performance, remain relevant and effectively take care of competitions (Masato & Troilo, 2015, Zaefarian, 2014).

Kotler, (2013) defines marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others. The process of marketing is therefore finding ways to provide people with products and services that they either need to function normally or desire to improve their well-being. There are two distinct categories of need that marketing aims to service. The first area includes: (i) basic physical requirements, such as food, clothing, shelter and safety; (ii) social needs, related to belonging and affection; and (iii) individual needs for knowledge and self expression. The second area includes wants or desires, which go way beyond immediate basic requirements for basic human operations and social interactions.

**Small Business Marketing**

Marketing theories applied to large enterprises are considered valuable for Small businesses as well (Hanmaikyur, 2016, Phyra, Aron, Keo & Mony, 2018). It is presumed that basic marketing principles are relevant to any kind of enterprise, regardless of its dimension (Reijonen, 2010). Some authors among them Gummesson, Kuusela and Narvanen, (2014) agreed that Small businesses have specific features that differentiate them from large enterprises which imply that their marketing approaches cannot be same. The marketing practices in Small businesses are subjected to opposing forces: the external dynamics encourage efforts in marketing communication; internal factors restrain investments in this area (Gyong, 2014). A good number of scholars and professionals including Schlinke and Crain, (2013) have agreed that marketing in small businesses is different from marketing in similar big companies. Gyong, (2014) and Hanmaikyur, (2016) opines that Small businesses marketing activities are identified by features such as accidental, informal, unstructured, reactive and developed in accordance with norms and standards of industry. In small businesses, Mazzarol, (2014) points out that marketing is used for current needs and pay a little attention to the strategies and plans. This is the opposite of big corporation whose marketing is formal, planned and highly structured.

It is expected that when small Businesses adopt the right approach to marketing, then they will achieve sales growth. Sales growth refers to the amount a company derives from sales compared to a previous corresponding period of time in which the later sales exceed the former. It is usually given as a percentage (Maphalla et al. 2009). Sales growth is considered positive for a company’s survival and performance and it is an important measure of performance (Chebii, 2017). Sales growth targets play a major role in the perceptions of business managers. Odhiambo (2013) argue that firms must use a wide variety of goals, including sales growth, to effectively reach their financial objectives.
Since many small businesses are not marketing experts and may either not have the resources to engage one, the only option left for them is engage the services of professional consultants to do the job.

**Marketing Consultancy**

Consultancy skills increasingly become core competencies or life skills for effectiveness and survival in a businesses and managerial positions. Marketing consultancy is about investment in the future: it is the means by which new marketing ideas, new skills new technology are disseminated to reposition the marketing strategy of a business organization. Consultants are unrecognized as wealth creators in an economy: they are catalysts and multipliers and this is their value, whether we relate them to global, regional or national markets. Management consultancy has moved great distances since its originators in the late nineteenth century set up their professional stall (Tisdall, 1982). consultancy today is no longer solely about diagnosis and identification, recommendations and implementation, but it is about the provision of complete business solutions. Such solutions involve the omnipresence of technology. The drivers therefore in the industry today are those organizations with technology expertise written into their structure.

Marketing consultancy is an industry that thrives on discontinuity (change) but not insecurity and uncertainty. It is a partnership between a business (client) and consultancy, the former being clear as to this objective, the latter upon the means of getting there (Hammer & Champy, 1993). There is a cliché often used, which says that you cannot do a ‘good consultancy for a bad client, or a bad consultancy for a good client’ (Hyman, 1991). Irrespective of whether the statement is true or not, it does underline one truism: unless client and consultancy work together on a constant basis, the likelihood of real added value resulting is debatable. This study focuses on the nuts and bolts of management consultancy.

Small businesses are in business to innovate and create new organization or products, services and ideas to the society for profit (Ayozie, Oboreh, Umokoro & Ayozie, 2013). Marketing has a crucial role to play in order to make small businesses to succeed in their quest to satisfy their target markets and also make profits. The duty to create customers, inform them of the availability of the enterprise’s goods and services and actually get customers to purchase the goods and services or ideas of Small business in the function of marketing. Marketing consultancy cannot be priced as if it is a commodity. It is about not only having a focus but also a breadth of knowledge and a vision.

Consultancy has become almost industrialized in terms of its scale and its marketing. Also, the trend towards doing implementation work for clients has broadened consultancy away from the traditional role of the professional as someone who just offers advice (Tisdall, 1982). For small businesses to succeed in this present business environment in the face of their financial constraint and inability to engage marketing professional, the only option open to them is to engage marketing consultants.

**Justification for consultancy in Small Businesses**

Consulting is simply the sharing of knowledge, wisdom and experience And maybe one thing more a passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter, whatever it may be Small businesses need consultants. Engaging a consultant offers Small businesses some real added value access to deeper levels of experience and expertise for a special, often short-term, need when it is not feasible to accomplish a particular goal through in-house experts It is cost-effective because the Small business can purchase only as much service from the consultant as is necessary to meet the need.

A consultant is a person considered an expert in a specified field with a wide knowledge of the subject matter and a depth of experience who gives professional advice and counsel to the needy. Consulting is simply the sharing of knowledge, wisdom and experience And maybe one thing more a passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter, whatever it may be.

**Methodology**

Survey design was adopted in sourcing first hand data from the institutions selected. Specifically, the sample survey is adopted to generate data from a sample in order to generalize about the population. This method of design was adopted to enable the researcher collect the different opinions from the respondents at a time. The opinions collected was used in achieving objectives of the study. The state has a lot of small businesses.
scattered everywhere with a little or very minimal performance, a development that informed the need for this study. The population of this study consisted of owners or managers of the entire Small businesses operating on fulltime basis in the study area which numbered about 175 (Researchers survey, 2020), offering various products/services to the public. To select an optimum sample size for any study, Roscoe (1975) emphasizes that between 30 and 500 will be quite suitable and appropriate. Green (1991), however, argues that an optimum sample size for any research work is based on the number of independent latent variables in the conceptual model. Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgins (2018), recommend that such a sample should be five to ten times more than the number of independent constructs for multivariate research. A sample size in a range of 150 to 400 is suggested considering the complexity of the model, missing data, and error variance of questions and items (Hair, Money, Samuel & Page, 2017). Though the population of 175 Small Businesses was arrived at in this study a deliberate effort was made by the researchers to minimize errors in sampling, effectively take care of the non response rate issue as well as ensure high sample size. To this end, the sample size was doubled or multiplied by two as submitted by (Aliyu & Rosli, 2014). Therefore, 350 samples (that is 175 x 2) was the determining factor for the total number of questionnaires that were finally administered. Doubling a study population is in line with Alrech and Settle’s (1995) submission that lower sample size has the tendency to attract higher errors. The author argues further that higher samples are more prone to accurate results. The data for the study were collected through the administration of self designed questionnaires to the respondents. In order to ascertain the validity of the instrument, the researcher employed factor analysis to measure the significant dimensions of human resource training and provides them a rating on a comparison scale and maintains the independence of each variable. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used to assess the construct validity of each variable in this study. Since the data reported 0.867, the researcher was confident that Factor Analysis was appropriate for this data. Bartlett’s test of Sphericity was employed to test the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix. At 1% level of significance, the results show that the data is highly significant (p<0.001), and therefore Factor Analysis is appropriate. According to the results from the KMO and Bartlett’s Test, the Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin (KMO) which measures the sample adequacy was .867 while the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (App. chi-square= 239.926, sig. is .000) which indicates the sufficient intercorrelations of the factor analysis. To ensure validity of the instruments, the researcher ensured that the results produced by the collection instruments were supported by empirical evidence after the face validity had been done by the supervisors.

Reliability of the Instrument
To ensure predictability of the internal consistency of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using 1/3 of the population (1/3 of 348 = 115) to determine if the scale consistently reflects the construct it measures by employing the Cronbach’s Alpha procedure. This was necessary to ensure the consistency of the results. As can be seen in the Table below, the Cronbach’s Alpha for each of the constructs was greater than .70. This implies that all the constructs are reliable and can be used in this study as recommended by Fraenkel and Wallen, (1993). The authors emphasize that a useful rule of thumb for research studies is that reliability should be at least .70.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Reliability Total</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Variable Specification/Model Specification
The study is anchored on two major variables; the dependent variable (sales growth Performance) and the independent variable (Consultancy Marketing).

**Model Specification** for this study is as presented below.

\[ CM = f(SBG) \] \hspace{1cm} (1)
\[ SBG = f(CM) \] \hspace{1cm} (2)

Where:
- \( CM \) = Consultancy Marketing
- \( SBG \) = Small Business Growth

The explicit form of the model is shown below;

\[ CG = a_0 + a_1 SBG + e \] \hspace{1cm} (3)

Where:
- \( a_0 \) = Intercept
- \( a_1 \) = Parameter estimate
- \( e \) = disturbance term.

**Justification of the Model**

Consultancy marketing is a direct function of Small Business sales growth. The relationship here is that where a Small Business Manager is subjected to relevant and appropriate consultancy services on the job at the right time and in the right proportion, chances are that his/her performance will be commensurate to the growth of sales output that would have been produced which will be in-line with the performance of the organization as approved. This is done such that effectiveness and efficiency is highly optimized. Where a Small Business has not benefited from any form of consultancy, services, performance of sales duties assigned may evidently be carried out in an extravagant manner and will lead to inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Simple descriptive statistical tools such as percentages, tables and frequency distribution were also employed to present qualitative data. Formulated hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis.

**Decision Rule:** this study has adopted the following decision rule for accepting or rejecting hypotheses:

(a) if the level of significance of the t-statistics is below 0.05, we reject the null hypotheses, otherwise we accept.

(b) If the standard error of \( b_i[S(b_i)>1/2b_i] \) we accept the null hypothesis, that is, we accept that the estimate \( b_i \) is not statistically significant at 5% level of significance. If the standard error of \( b_i[S(b_i)<1/2b_i] \) we reject the null hypothesis, in other words, we accept that the estimate \( b_i \) is statistically at the 5% level of significance.

**Results and Discussion**

This section presents the analysis and findings of this study in accordance with the research objectives which were earlier formulated for the study. The results of the study are also discussed with reference to information from the literature reviewed.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

A total of 350 copies of the research questionnaires were distributed to the sampled staff who doubled as respondents in the study area. The sampled respondents were owners or managers of Small Businesses studied. 337 copies of the questionnaire distributed which is an equivalent of 96.28% were actually returned while 13 of them representing 3.71% were not returned. Of the 337 questionnaires returned, 25 of them representing 7.174% were not found useful because of different errors detected on them and were subsequently rejected. 312 of the questionnaires representing 89.14% however constituted the final sample for the research which is considered a good response rate. The percentage of the returned questionnaire is considered sufficient, adequate and objective for any realistic study based on Sekaran and Bougie, (2010)
argument that a 30 percent response rate is suitable for any good survey. Similarly, the response rate for the study is considered adequate going by the suggestion that a sample size should be between 5 and 10 times the number of study variable for regression type of analysis to be investigated (Hair, Ringle & Sarsiedt, 2011).

Table 2: Questionnaire distribution and retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaires Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires Distributed</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires Returned</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>96.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires Not Returned</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires Rejected</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires used for analysed</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>89.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researchers Field survey (2020)

Presentation of Respondents views on consultation in Small Businesses

i. Respondents' Views on consultancy services in Small Businesses

Table 3 showed the result of the analysis of the question items on consultation in Small Businesses. The researcher sought to know from respondents whether their small businesses engage consultancy services for its staff and company. Findings revealed that, 108 respondents representing 34.6 % strongly agreed with the submission, 147 other respondents, an equivalent of 47.1 % agreed. 45 or 14.4 % of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 12 respondents representing 3.8 % strongly disagreed. The implication of the above findings is that over 60% of the study's respondents supports the assertion and the findings is upheld in the study.

Respondents were also requested to comment on whether Consultancy services have positive effects on sales growth in their small businesses. Results obtained showed that 134 or 47.1% of them strongly agreed with the submission that Consultancy services have positive effects on sales growth in their small businesses. 178 (57.1) other respondents merely agreed with the submission and they closed the chapter as there were no more respondents to either disagree nor strongly agreed. by the above submission, it becomes clear that Consultancy services have positive effects on sales growth in all the small businesses in the study area.

The question on whether employees and their small businesses are exposed to the reality of selling by consultancy services was put across to the respondents and their responses are as presented below: 113 respondents representing 36.2% strongly agreed with the submission. 134 or 42.9% of the respondents merely agreed. 43 other respondents or 13.8% and 22 respondents or 7.1% disagreed and strongly agreed with the submission respectively. Based on the above submission, the researcher has no option than to conclude that both employees and their small businesses are exposed to the reality of selling by consultancy services. The development has all it takes to achieve sales growth in small businesses.

Another question put across to the study's respondents was whether they are satisfied with the consultancy policy and practices offered by their small businesses. findings revealed that 139 of them or 44.6% strongly agreed with the submission. 43.6% of the respondents representing 136 of them simply agreed. 11.9% of the respondents which equates to 37 of them disagreed with the submission with no strong disagreement from any respondent. Based on the fact that over 88% of the respondents are satisfied with consultancy policy and practices in their small businesses, this study has no alternative that to uphold the submission.

The last question put across to respondents in the study was whether appropriate Marketing skills are impacted to employees through consultancy practice in their various small businesses. Finding revealed that 106 respondents representing 34.0% strongly agreed with the submission. 50% of the respondents or 156 equally but merely agreed. 26 other respondents, an equivalent of 8.3% however disagreed with the submission while the remaining 24 respondents representing 7.7% strongly disagreed. Based on the submission of majority of the respondents, the research is right to conclude that appropriate marketing skills are impacted to small business employees through consultancy practice put in place by their companies.
Table 3: Respondents’ Views on Consultancy in Small businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My Small business carries out consultancy services often</td>
<td>108(34.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Consultancy services have positive effects on sales growth in their</td>
<td>134(42.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small businesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Both Employees and the company are exposed to the reality of selling</td>
<td>113(36.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by consultancy services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am satisfied with the Consultancy policy and practices in my Small</td>
<td>139(44.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Appropriate Marketing skills are impacted to employees through</td>
<td>106(34.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consultancy practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


ii. Respondents’ Views on Sales Growth Performance of their Small Businesses

To establish the effect of mentoring on performance, respondents were requested to religiously offer their views. The first question put across to them was whether their small businesses are specific on sales growth measures. Responses in that regard revealed that 125 of the respondents representing 40.1% strongly agreed with the submission. 145 other respondents or 46.5% strongly agreed while 24 of the respondents or 7.7% and 18 of them representing 5.8% respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. By such a revelation, it is right to conclude that Small business studied are specific on Sales Growth measures in their companies.

Respondents were also requested to comment if their companies encourage employees to work hard to achieve Sales Growth. 150 of them or 48.1% and 117 or 37.5% strongly agree and merely agree respectively. 39 other respondents representing 12.5% disagreed with the submission while the remaining 6 respondents or 1.9% strongly disagreed. Based on the rule of simple majority, it was concluded that small businesses studied encourage employees to work hard to achieve Sales Growth.

Respondents were equally requested to comment if their Small Businesses maximize employees potentials to ensure sales growth. In their response, 153 of them which is an equivalent of 49.0% strongly agreed with the submission. 129 other respondents or 41.3% agreed. 21 of the respondents or 6.7% and 9 respondents or 2.9% disagreed and strongly agreed respectively. Based on the above findings, it is clear that Small Businesses maximize employees potentials to ensure sales growth.

On whether mentoring of staff help to ensure high turnover and improved sales growth in their small businesses, the following findings were revealed. 72 respondents or 23.1% and 183 respondents representing 58.7% strongly agreed or agreed respectively. 15 other respondents or 4.8% disagreed while the remaining 42 respondents or 13.5% strongly disagreed with the submission. Based on the above findings, It is clear that mentoring of staff help to ensure high turnover and improved sales growth in their small businesses studied.
The last question put across to respondents was their views on whether Mentoring helps to improve the quality of services offered by staff. In their response, 108 of them representing 34.6% strongly agreed that Mentoring helps to improve the quality of services offered by staff. 147 other respondents or 47.1% and 45 of the respondents or 14.4% of the respondents agreed and disagreed respectively. The remaining 12 respondents representing 3.8% strongly disagreed with the submission. Based on the responses, it was clear that Mentoring helps to improve the quality of services offered by staff.

### Table 4: Respondents’ Views on Employee Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My Small business is specific on Sales Growth measures</td>
<td>125(40.1) 145(46.5) 24(7.7) 18(5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Company encourage employees to work hard to achieve Sales Growth</td>
<td>150(48.1) 117(37.5) 39(12.5) 6(1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My Small Business maximize employees potentials to ensure sales growth</td>
<td>153(49.0) 129(41.3) 21(6.7) 9(2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mentoring of staff help to ensure high turnover and improved sales growth</td>
<td>72(23.1) 183(58.7) 15(4.8) 42(13.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mentoring helps to improve the quality of services offered by staff</td>
<td>108(34.6) 147(47.1) 45(14.4) 12(3.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2020.

### Regression Analysis Results

The result in Table 9 showed that the regression coefficient, $R = .924$ which shows the relationship that exist between the independent variables and dependent variable. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) 0.854 explains the extent to which changes in the dependent variable is explained by the change in the independent variables or the percentage of variation in the dependent variable (employee performance) that is explained by all independent variables (job rotation, coaching, conference and orientation). The coefficient of determination showed that 85.4% of the variation in employee performances explained by sales force mentoring.

### Regression Analysis Results

The result in Table 5 showed that the regression coefficient, $R = .924$ which shows the relationship that exist between the independent variables and dependent variable. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) 0.854 explains the extent to which changes in the dependent variable is explained by the change in the independent variables or the percentage of variation in the dependent variable (Small business sales growth performance) that is explained by the independent variables (consulting Marketing). The coefficient of determination showed that 85.4% of the variation in small business sales growth performance is explained by job rotation, coaching, conference and orientation.
Table 5: Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adj. R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.924a</td>
<td>.854</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>1.977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consulting Marketing
b. Dependent Variable: Small business sales growth performance


The F value (450.241) from the ANOVA Table shows that the significance level = .000 which is less than 0.05. This implies that the overall regression model is statistically significant, valid and fit. The valid regression model implies that all independent variables are capable of explaining a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable (employee performance).

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>272.506</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>68.127</td>
<td>450.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>46.453</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>318.962</td>
<td>311</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Small business sales growth performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Consulting Marketing


The Estimated Model Coefficients shows that the general form of the equation to predict Sales growth (SG) from staff Consultancy (CM): Predicted SG = .464. The regression coefficient in Table 12 for Consultancy Marketing (β1) = .322 which implies that one percent change in consultancy marketing will result to 32.2 percent change in small business sales growth performance if other variables are kept controlled.

Table 6: Coefficients of Variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>4.162</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy Marketing</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>4.084</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Small Business Sales Growth Performance


Test of Hypotheses

H0: Marketing Consultancy has no effect on sales Growth of Small Businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

To test the study hypothesis, the strength of the effect of consultancy marketing on small business sales growth was measured by the calculated p-value = 0.000 at a significance level (α) of 0.05. Using the standard error test, S (bi) <1/bi(0.028 < 0.113) and since the computed p-value is less than the significance level (α) of 0.05 (p-value 0.000<α 0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected. This imply that we have option than to accept the alternative hypothesis since the estimate bi is statistically significant at 5% (0.05) level of
significance. This implies that consultancy marketing has significant positive effect on sales growth of small businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings
The discussion of findings was based on the objectives of the study as follows:

Effect of consultancy marketing on sales growth of small businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

Relevant data was collected and subjected to test using multiple regression analysis to establish the effect of consultancy marketing on sales growth of small businesses in Benue State, Nigeria. The analysis of the data revealed that consultancy marketing has a positive effect on sales growth of small businesses in Benue state, Nigeria. From the responses gathered, it was clear that most respondents were satisfied with the consultancy policy and practices in their small businesses and this helps to improve their sales growth and by extension, organizational performance.

Regression was used to test the hypothesis that was earlier on put in place at 5 % level of significance and the p-value 0.000 was less than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value 0.000 < α = 0.05. This result was in agreement with the result of previous similar research works. The result of the study by Critchley, (2001) revealed that the knowledge acquired by employees for consultancy training is beneficial not only to the employees but also to the organization as it may increase sales to the advantage of the organization. Rebbeck and Knight, (2001) also asserts that consultancy marketing has been used to implement the increasing employee momentum and taking active part in job within the organization, which are incredibly vital for valuable performance. According to Rassam, C. (2001) consultancy in business organizations establishes a successful routine of increasing skills, talents, enthusiasm, encouragement and motivation of an employee which leads to both improved performance within the organization and competitive advantage in the industry.

Summary and conclusion.
This study investigated the effect of consultancy services on sales growth of small businesses in Benue state. Relevant data were collected from the study units within the period of the Research. Data collected was analysed with the aid of multiple regression. Findings revealed that a significant positive effect exist consultancy service and sales growth of small businesses in Benue state. (p-value 0.000 < α 0.05).
Based on the research findings, it is concluded that small businesses should regularly subject their staff to effective and timely to enable them acquire skills in performing their jobs to ensure the growth of their sales among many other benefits.

Recommendations
Based on findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

i. There is need to mentor staff so as to ensure effectiveness. This will enhance the competitiveness of the staff as they will be equipped with necessary competencies and current trends to ensure sales growth in their businesses.

ii. Management of Small Businesses should create enabling consultation environment that will give every worker opportunity to excel.

iii. Small businesses should on a regular basis organize appropriate consultation programmes for new recruited as they stand to gain. Beside, such employee minimizes wastage which reflects to cost reduction.

Suggestions for Further Studies
As this research study was limited to Small Businesses in Benue State, further studies could be done to consider all types of businesses. A qualitative research study could be conducted to examine the effect of consultation in the public sector as it affects performance. Qualitative methods would allow the researcher...
to use interviews to collect data from the respondents, as in-depth interviews give more information compared to questionnaires. There is need for more research on this topic, mostly in the areas of seeking effective methods to improve consultation in Nigeria.

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