

Student Perceptions Of Value Added In An Active Learning Experience: Producing, Reviewing And Evaluating A Sales Team Video Presentation

James J. Corbett, Merrimack College, USA

Boualem Kezim, Merrimack College, USA

James Stewart, Merrimack College, USA

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of a video team-based activity as a learning experience in a sales management course. Students perceived this learning activity approach as a beneficial and effective instructional technique. The benefits of making a video in a marketing course reinforce the understanding and the use of the sales process in a creative way. In addition, we found this learning activity helped develop critical thinking by engaging students in creating and developing innovative products and services. This unique procedure in involving them with hand-on learning activities through a video presentation is professed by students to greatly improve their performance in a sales management course.

Keywords: Active Learning, Critical Thinking, Experiential Learning, Sales Management, Video Team-based Activity

INTRODUCTION

Video can prove to be a very useful and adaptable tool in marketing programs. It can be used for the development of product strategy messages, explanations of product characteristics, uses and value, and the development of customer profiles. Video can also be used for internal purposes, including sales training (Cobb 1997). Sales presentations can be improved by videotaping salespeople while they practice their presentations. During the videotape presentation rehearsals, salespeople should have specific customers in mind and make exaggerated gestures until they become comfortable (Kaydo 1998). Whether participants are selling a product, a service or presenting a self-improvement program, the key is to create a true picture of the way things are going to be experienced in the product or service sales presentation. Proper crafting will fine tune the recognition of audience members' needs (Stinnett 2001). Furthermore, review of the video alerts team members to distractions and conflicts or inconsistencies in the team's performance.

Selling is a complicated and difficult process. It requires not only the right preparation but also the ability to become involved in several tasks during a sales call.

The salesperson needs to be making continuous observations at the same time they are talking about their services and products (Feuer 2004). The successful salesperson is one who is able to respond to subtle signals and explain the potential results of different purchase decisions in a way that the consumer understands the benefit of the proper decision (Broker Magazine 2002).

Making a presentation is usually difficult enough when independently prepared; when a group makes a team pitch, the stakes increase. Group presentations require all the skills of solo flight, plus the ability to handle the trick of public teamwork. Transitions need to be smooth and well choreographed, contradictions need to be avoided,

interest needs to be focused on the speaker and distractions need to be minimized. Some experts and veterans of team pitches offer these tips: prepare as a group, decide who the leader is and beware of body language, both when speaking and when observing (Neuborne 2002). Sales presentations should not be boring, monotonous or routine. They should be interesting and entertaining. Proper planning will insure that the team puts a best foot forward and consistently wins the business (Chase 2001). Sales presentation skills are becoming recognized as a vital weapon in the armory of the modern sales team. With practice, and proper attention to body language and voice, the message the team wants to send out has every chance of being understood and accepted (Hodges 1997).

The quality of a sales presentation and the language that a salesperson utilizes influence the customer (Sparks 2002). Customize every presentation to address only those exact benefits that the prospect needs and desires. (Brooks 2003). The following tips will help maximize the visual punch of the sales presentation: start with an outline, have a clear idea of the message, keep text simple and readable and assess the effectiveness of the layout (Selling 2004). Hold dress rehearsals for sales presentations with an audience (Gruner 1997). See if the product can perform outside the boundaries of a polished script. Recognize the design of the interaction between the buyer and the seller is every bit as valuable, if not more so, as the content of the presentation. In fact, the design of the presentation should be about the design of interactions in delivering the presentation's message (Schrage 2004).

The objective of a presentation is to share ideas that will help improve profitability through identifying business building techniques and/or solutions to problems. The product or service should be presented in the context of the customer's operation and what it can do to improve sales between team members and the audience (Arnold 1994). Make the presentation simple and concise. Use verbal presentation to elaborate on salient points. Maintain attention by keeping visuals pleasing to the eye and easy to read (Schrafft 2003). You have got to keep an edge in presentation. No Team member can afford to become complacent (Selling 2003).

The team's sales presentation quality and analytical content will often determine whether a prospect buys from you or a competitor. Yet, many salespeople miss this critical opportunity to hook the buyer's interest (Robertson 2004). Every salesperson is an actor on a stage; every customer is an audience; and every audience deserves a top performance. If the audience does not get what it expects, the result will be an unmistakable "thumbs down"; not only on the presentation but also on the deal the team is asking the audience to sign off on (Graham 2002).

As early as 1986 Capella identified problem-solving and analytic ability as necessary skills for entry level job success in business. The abilities employers want from graduates go beyond technical skills and include critical thinking, problem solving and social and communication skills. (Parish 1996). Current literature continues to point out that graduates lack critical thinking skills that are basic stepping stones for fundamental thinking activities and effective management skills (Miller 2006).

Business students should therefore be given more opportunities to develop critical thinking skills by solving realistic business problems. (Wind 1996). To be effective, learning must involve the linkage of different bodies of knowledge and critical thinking that synthesizes thought and action. (Robothan 2003). The pedagogy of this project offers a supportive environment to accomplish this goal. There is opportunity for self, peer and faculty feedback across customer, market, economic and effective communication domains. Students indicate active involvement and excitement about project results and the breadth of applicability.

The purpose of this research is to measure students' perception regarding the effectiveness of a video team-based activity as a learning experience in a sales management course. Do students perceive this learning activity approach as an effective instructional technique? The study seeks to determine if there is a perceived benefit of making a video in the marketing course and will this, in a creative way, reinforce students' understanding of the sales process? In addition, we examine the impact of this learning activity to help students develop critical thinking by engaging them in creating and developing innovative products and services. Moreover, we examine the students' performance perception in using this procedure by involving them with hands on learning activities. The activities include the team development of a video presentation in a sales management course, critical analysis of content and delivery through intra and inter-team feedback as well as instructor critique.

BACKGROUND

This project sales presentation is a combination of marketing and the selling process. The students are randomly assigned to teams consisting of four or five members. The charge to each team is to develop a new or existing product and/or service which will be marketed to a particular customer. The student teams meet in class as well as outside of class to work on the project presentation. The first stage in the project presentation is mainly focused on marketing because the students are concerned with a new or existing product and/or service to be marketed. During this stage, the students' concern is with new product development as well as the four stages of the product life cycle.

Once the team has decided on their specific product and/or service, then it becomes a sales team and proceeds to write a script covering all the stages of the selling process. Once the group is comfortable with the final product, it is ready to video tape the sales presentation. The sales presentation video must be no more than twenty minutes in length. It must be delivered to the professor two weeks prior to the final class of the semester. Each video is shown in class and rated by the professor and the students. Following the presentation, all class students share constructive criticism. Prior to final grading, the student team members also provide the instructor with written evaluations of each other concerning the team contributions and effort exerted by each member. The instructor then provides a grade and written evaluations to each student. The sales video thus becomes an instrument for providing constructive feedback. Giving and receiving feedback can be perceived as a highly risky venture. Although we want to understand how others see us we are anxious about what might be said and we are afraid to hurt others feelings with what we might say. (Finch 1976) The active interaction of reviewing videos with opportunity for self, peer and instructor evaluation in an open environment provides support and encourages evaluative discussion. The information is then processed and passed back to each student. This feedback is generally appreciated by all members of the class.

METHODOLOGY

In early summer of 2005, a total of 300 Sales Video Questionnaires were mailed to graduates who had participated in the sales video component of the Sales Management course. The sample in this study consisted of 17 classes from 1992 through 2005. These classes were taken at a small private Catholic College located in New England.

Eighteen (18) of the returned questionnaires were not useable. However, ninety-three (93) usable questionnaires were returned and used in the study. This resulted in a very acceptable yield and rate of return of 33%.

The questionnaire mostly consisted of eight evaluation variables that were based on a five-point Likert scale. The complete questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

RESULTS

Percentage distributions for questions 6 through 13 indicated strong support for the entire process of making the sales video as a learning experience in a sales management class. Approximately 76% of the respondents agreed that learning the stages of the selling process was helpful or very helpful during the process of making the sales video. While 16% were neutral, only 7.5% of the respondents believed that learning the stages of the selling process was barely helpful or not helpful at all during the process of making the sales video. Table 2 provides the percentage distribution relative to question 9.

Referring to question 10, namely, "Was the making of the sales video an effective instructional technique?" We found 82% of the students asserted the making of the sales video is an effective or very effective instructional technique. While 12% of the respondents were neutral, only 6.5% thought it was not effective. Table 3 summarizes the global percentages for question 10.

Table 1: Data set

General Information			
Question 1	Date of graduation at the institution		
Question 2	Sex		
Question 3	Marital status		
Question 4	Occupation		
Question 5	Education		
	This section asks questions about the process of making the sales video	Male ; n = 40	Female ; n = 53
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Question 6	Did the professor stress the importance of utilizing the making of the sales video for a class assignment?	4.23 (0.73)	4.30 (0.80)
Question 7	Were the group members encouraged to express their own ideas during the entire process of making the sales video?	4.48 (0.64)	4.66 (0.52)
Question 8	How helpful were the group members during the process of making the sales video?	4.20 (0.79)	4.15 (0.95)
Question 9	How helpful was the making of the sales video in learning the stages of the selling process?	4.20 (0.85)	3.98 (0.97)
	This section asks questions about the entire process of making the sales video		
Question 10	Was the making of the sales video an effective instructional technique?	4.18 (0.87)	4.09 (0.93)
Question 11	How demanding was the entire process of making the sales video?	3.55 (0.85)	3.68 (0.80)
Question 12	Was the grading of the sales video fair?	4.50 (0.68)	4.36 (0.65)
Question 13	Was the overall experience of making the sales video a positive one?	4.55 (0.64)	4.43 (0.77)
	Open question		
Question 14	What were the overall benefits of making the sales video to you personally?		

Table 2: Percent Distribution of Scores for Question 9

Satisfaction	Score	Percent
Not Helpful	1	0.00
Barely Helpful	2	7.53
Neutral	3	16.13
Helpful	4	37.71
Very Helpful	5	38.71
Helpful or Very Helpful	4+5	76.42

Table 3: Percent Distribution of Scores for Question 11

Satisfaction	Score	Percent
Not Effective	1	1.08
Barely Effective	2	5.38
Neutral	3	11.83
Effective	4	43.01
Very Effective	5	38.71
Effective or Very Effective	4+5	81.72

Similar results were found regarding the other questions. For question 6, roughly 83% of the respondents agree that it is likely or highly likely the professor stressed the importance of utilizing the making of the sales video for a class assignment. While for question 7, a strong 95.7% of the students agree that the group members were encouraged or highly encouraged to express their own ideas during the entire process of making the sales video. Only 4.3% of the respondents were neutral and none believed they were discouraged.

Regarding questions 8, 12 and 13, we obtained the following results:

1. For question 8, approximately 80% of the students agreed that the group members were helpful or very helpful during the process of making the sales video. Only 5.38% of the respondents indicated members were barely helpful or not helpful at all.

2. For question 12, approximately 90% of the students asserted the grading of the sales video was fair or very fair. Only 10% of the respondents were neutral and none thought it was not fair.
3. For question 13, 89% of the students asserted the overall experience of making the sales video was a positive or very positive one. Only 10% of the respondents were neutral and 1% thought it was not a positive experience.

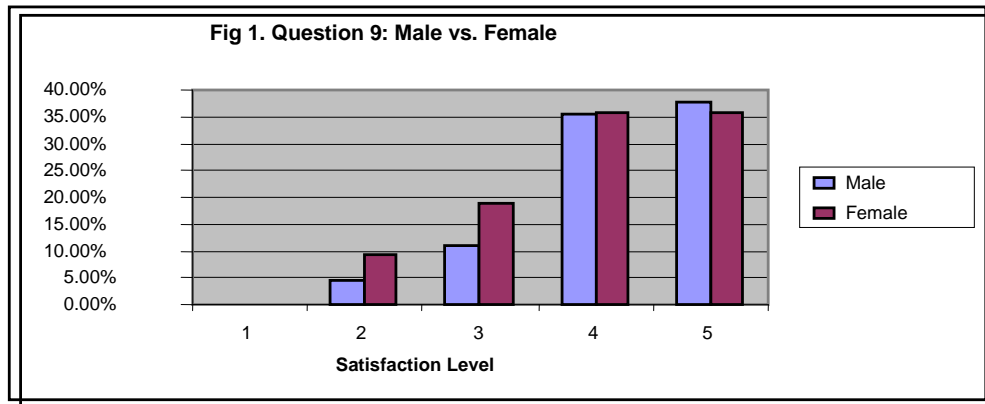
Overall, the results gave us encouragement that the making of the sales video was an effective instructional technique. Moreover, the making of the sales video seems to be perceived as very helpful in learning the stages of the selling process for the students in a sales management class. We were pleased with the consistently strong positive perceptions ranging from a low of 76% positive responses to a high of 97% positive responses on the survey questions.

A Gender Comparative Study

Descriptive Analysis

Given the trend of increasing opportunities for women in business education and the business community, the authors decided to evaluate whether or not the students’ level of satisfaction perception showed any differences based on gender. Descriptive statistics are presented for each question in Table 1.

A statistical analysis of the means and standard deviations (see Table 1) relative to questions six through thirteen shows no major difference between male and female scores. For instance, relative to question 9, this side-by-side bar chart shows clearly that more than 70% of male and female students believe that the making of the sales video in learning the stages of the selling process was helpful or very helpful. There is an obvious agreement between male and female students in the perception represented by this question.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary questions 9, 10, and 13 are addressed to determine whether students’ level of satisfaction perception is dependent on gender. This can be determined through a hypothesis test, namely the chi-square test, in which the null and alternative hypotheses are stated as:

- Ho:** Gender is independent of the students’ level of satisfaction perception.
Ha: Gender is dependent on the students’ level of satisfaction perception

In order to properly use the chi-square test, which requires all expected cell frequencies to be at least 5, we combined categories 1, 2 and 3 into a single category which can be interpreted as neutral and below neutral.

Relative to question 9, the chi-square test with a low value of 1.12 and a high p-value of 0.57 shows that there is no statistical evidence to believe that students' level of satisfaction perception is related to gender. Male and female students are in agreement in terms of the usefulness of the making of the sales video in learning the stages of the selling process.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution for Male and Female relative to question 9

Satisfaction Level	Male	Female	Total
3 (Neutral or below)	7	12	19
4 (Helpful)	17	17	34
5 (Very Helpful)	16	24	40
Total	40	53	93

Relative to question 10, the chi-square-test shows again no significant relationship in the level of satisfaction perception between male and female students with respect to the effectiveness of the making of the sales video as an instructional technique. (See results in Table 5).

Table 5: Chi-Square values comparing the Satisfaction Level of Male and Female relative to questions 9, 10, and 13

	Question 9	Question 10	Question 13
Chi-square value	1.12	1.49	2.34
P-value	0.57	0.47	0.31

Concerning question 13, namely "Was the overall experience of making the sales video a positive one?" the chi-square analysis reveals that we do not have sufficient evidence to conclude that the students' level of satisfaction perception is dependent on gender.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we found that a video team-based activity that promotes active student involvement can be a very useful tool in marketing programs. The findings of this research suggest that the entire process of making the sales video can improve student performance. Throughout the project, the steps in the selling process are reinforced as the students go through the activities of planning, designing, making, delivering and reviewing the sales presentation video. This learning activity helps develop critical thinking by engaging students in creating and developing an innovative product and / or service. This unique procedure of involving students with hands-on learning activities, such as creating a script, editing the script and filming the sales video, covers all the steps in the selling process. Finally, in the examined sales management course pedagogy, the process of reviewing the videos with the opportunity for three staged feedback (self, peer and instructor) seems to greatly improve self-efficacy, student perception of performance and learning experience value.

Regarding the open question; namely, "What were the overall benefits of making the sales video to you personally?" students generally stated the following:

1. "This process was a fun and worthwhile part of the sales management course. It involved all aspects of the selling process."
2. "This was a creative assignment to not only learn the stages of selling but to apply them in a business application."
3. "The benefits of making this video were that we were able to understand and use the sales process in a creative way. Making the video was a fun way to understand the underlying concepts of sales."
4. "Being able to work in a team environment and using creativity to apply our knowledge was a valuable experience."

The respondents provided strong support for the entire process of making the sales video as a learning experience in a sales management class. Overall, the results gave us encouragement that the making of sales video

was an effective instructional technique. Moreover, the making of the sales video seems to be very helpful in learning the stages of the selling process for the students in a sales management class. It also provides an excellent opportunity for experiencing task team management and process. Because of the small sample size from a single institution, one must be careful about generalizing to different college populations. Nonetheless, we believe that the conclusions presented provide useful guidelines for improving student satisfaction in a sales management course.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

James Corbett is an Associate Professor in the Department of Marketing at Merrimack College, North Andover, MA. He holds a B.S. degree in History from the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA., an M.B.A. from Suffolk University, Boston, MA., and an Ed.D from Boston University, Boston, MA. He joined Merrimack College in 1981 and has over 35 years of teaching experience in higher education. Dr. Corbett is an active member of the Food Distribution Research Society where he has been on the board of directors and a past president.

Boualem Kezim is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management at Merrimack College, North Andover, MA. He holds a M.A. and a Ph.D. in statistics from Boston University, Boston, MA. He joined Merrimack College in 1999. Dr. Kezim is the author of articles in the Journal of Communications in Statistics, the Journal of Business and Economics Studies and the Journal of Education for Business. He is a member of the Decision Sciences Institute. Dr. Kezim's research interests include Bayesian theory, applied statistics, and experiential learning.

James Stewart is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management at Merrimack College, North Andover, MA. He holds a B. S. in Psychology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, and an M.B. A. from Golden Gate University, San Francisco, CA. He joined Merrimack College in 1978 and has over 30 years of teaching experience in higher education. Professor Stewart is an active member of the Society for the Advancement of Management. He has served on several boards and continues to serve on the Board of the Society for the Advancement of Management.

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