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ETEC 601
Literature Review
For Master’s Project – Instructional Design Study
Sales Training via Podcasts
May 2009
A retail store’s salespeople largely determine how much customers will enjoy their experiences and whether they will purchase from it (Sussman, 2008). The revenue generated from sales is vital to a company’s profits and is the key determinant between success, survival, and failure (Longenecker, Moore & Petty, 2000).

The importance of the sales function for a business is what prompts some companies to spend vast sums on training their salespeople (Salisbury, 1998). According to TrainingIndustry.com (2008), it is estimated that several billions of dollars a year is spent on sales training. “If executed properly, employee training in retail can yield increased revenues, higher productivity, and motivated employees” (Sussman, 2008).

However, retailers spend relatively little, per employee, on training, because they often do not recognize the relationship between sales training and sales growth. Instead, they view sales training as an expense (Salisbury, 1998; Sussman, 2008). Companies are often reluctant to provide sales training because of the full turnover of sales staff in typical retail establishments, the inability to schedule sales staff to come together at a common location for an extended period of time, and the resistance by experienced salespeople who are reluctant to change anything that has proven successful to their selling (Leigh, 1997; Salisbury, 1998; Sussman, 2008).

The majority of sales training conducted, addresses sales methodologies (TrainingIndustry.com, 2008). According to Kodz, Atkinson, Perryman (1997), “[sales]elling skills…require an understanding of the processes through which people go in making a decision…[a]s competition is increasing and customers are becoming more sophisticated and demanding, customer service, a customer orientation, and selling skills are increasingly important.” People go through a buying-decision process that includes
problem or need recognition, information gathering, pre-purchase trial and evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Blythe, 1997; Fill, 1995). That the decision process in buyer-seller interactions follows a methodical process would seem to lend itself to the use of sales scripts for sales staff. (Leong, Busch & John, 1987).

According to Salisbury (1998), successful salespeople stick to sales scripts. They may not know exactly what they do, but they know it works, so they are reluctant to change it. The difference between experts and novices is that experts have more elaborate knowledge structures. Successful, experienced salespeople have a plethora of sales scripts that they call upon to adapt to the great variety of sales situations they encounter (Leong, Busch & John, 1987). Leigh (1987) states that inexperienced salespeople are especially in need of sales training that allows them to obtain a mental picture of the sales process and develop a cognitive selling script. Such sales training would allow inexperienced salespeople to obtain the skills that would make them effective salespeople without going through numerous trial-and-error selling experiences and rejection, which can be traumatic and lead to high turnover (Leigh, 1987).

Leong, Busch, and John (1987) found that highly successful sales agents “engage in a more extensive determination of client needs and attempt to satisfy them with a greater variety of…recommendations than do less effective” sales agents. According to Sussman (2008), specialty retail stores, in particular, can benefit from training its salespeople because of a focus on a customer’s shopping experience. Sussman states that high turnover and scheduling issues make short e-learning modules effective for training.

Asynchronous e-learning video modules offer convenience and conceptual clarity to learners who might not otherwise meet for a face-to-face class (Copley, 2007; Gorm
Hanson & Schlensinger, 2007). Learning is a social process, so most people prefer to interact with their peers synchronously. However, the anytime, anywhere possibility of learning through asynchronous online modules offers a very appealing convenience (Bishop-Clark, et al, 2006-2007; Clark, 2002; Hiltz, 1998; Ndahi, et al, 2007). Learners are not under short and inflexible time constraints to respond to questions or participate in activities, but can instead do so more thoughtfully (Lively, 2007). One mode of asynchronous distance learning that has been well received is the video podcast (Agnvall, 2007; Brown & Green, 2007-2008; Copley, 2007; Gronstedt, 2007).

“A podcast is an audio or video file placed on the Web for individuals to subscribe and listen to or watch using a computer or a portable digital media player such as the Apple iPod. The term ‘podcast’ like that of ‘radio’ or ‘video’ can refer to either the content or the method of delivery.” Podcasts can be downloaded and transferred to the user’s computer or media player for later use (Brown & Green, 2007-2008). Video podcasts, also known as vodcasts, are increasingly popular due to the growth of video-enabled portable media players and phones (Gronstedt, 2007). Although podcasts can also be viewed on computers, the portability and size of the view screen are significant considerations for using vodcasts to facilitate learning (Brown & Green, 2007-2008).

According to Brown and Green (2007-2008), vodcasts can be beneficial in learning complex concepts because of its multimodal presentation. The Metiri Group (2008), noted that “[s]tudents engaged in learning that incorporates multimodal designs, on average, outperformed students who learn using traditional approaches with single modes. Gellevij, et al. (2002), found “that in a realistic context, multimodal instruction leads to better outcomes than unimodal instruction. Training time is shortened, learning
is improved, and cognitive load is not altered.” Those findings support the theory that instruction utilizing multiple mediums, such as text and pictures, is cognitively processed into memory better than instruction that uses just a single medium (Gellvij, et al, 2002).

By using a combination of audio, video, pictures, and text, video podcasts have become a well-received asynchronous mode of teaching and delivering training or to provide information (Abreu, et al, 2008; Agnvall, 2006; Copley, 2007; Gronstedt, 2007). Sales staff at many companies especially appreciate the convenience in time and location afforded by podcast trainings. Sales agents report that they often engage in podcast training between sales calls or when they want to renew their knowledge and understanding on a certain training topic. The asynchronous nature of podcasts makes it very conducive for just-in-time learning (Agnvall, 2006; Gronstedt, 2007).

Podcasts and other modes of asynchronous distance learning also allow learners to take the time they need to absorb their material and reflect upon it and their activities (Lively, 2007; Salmon & Edirisingha, 2008). According to Fiddler and Marienau (2008), reflection is important for learners to convert their experiences to meaningful learning. Lowe, et al (2007), state that reflection is thought to be of significant importance in implementation of learning from short learning modules into practice. Additionally, the likelihood of reflection can be increased if the learning process and practice context are conducive to the use of reflection. Smith, et al. (2007), state that reflective activities during and after the application of learning into context encourage deep learning. Moreover, when those reflective activities are tied to a workplace context, learners are enabled to “develop a sense of their own personal and professional development” (Smith, et al., 2007).
References:


