



Real World Sales Training:

A Marketwired and Sysomos Case Study of Rehearsal VRP

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Overview

Sales training and coaching is often a trying experience. There are many roadblocks to interest, availability, engagement, and retention when organizing and executing programs. Timing is always a factor, as salespeople are in various deal stages at any given point. Geography plays havoc with live or online event scheduling. Materials may not be relevant to all in attendance, causing apathy. Mobile device distractions are ever-present.

How does one interest and engage salespeople, coordinate various geographic locations and schedules, and accommodate different experience levels? Marketwired and Sysomos worked on blended classroom, webinar, and self-guided eLearning approaches to combat training challenges, but were left looking for something to complete the experience. We found that the missing piece was Rehearsal Video Role-Play (VRP), which successfully enhanced and completed our training curriculum.

Training Needs at Marketwired and Sysomos

Marketwired and Sysomos are two businesses that operate out of one house. Marketwired is a leader in news release distribution. Sysomos is a leading global provider of social media data and monitoring technology. With over 150 sales representatives between the two groups and plans for future growth on both sides, effective training and onboarding is a critical component of company success.

Typical classroom training programs allow for relationship building, story sharing, and the crowdsourcing of valuable information that is normally held by only a few experts. All of this, however, comes at a price. Hard costs include travel, meals, location and materials. Up to 40% of total training costs are spent on travel and lodging alone. Soft costs may include lost productivity and reduced selling time. Webinars and eLearning programs allow for large quantities of information to be processed at a self-guided pace, resulting in lower cost. Soft costs for engagement and reinforcement are still incurred, however.

At Marketwired and Sysomos, the facilitation of engaging role-relevant activities yielded optimal learning results. The use of blended programs proved to be effective, but lacked ongoing engagement, repetition and reinforcement after module completion. Role-play was consistently suggested as the solution to improve training, but how it could be executed in a scalable and cost-effective way was undetermined.

Role-play is entertaining and enlightening to watch, but several variables may prevent full participation by trainees. These variables include limited activity time, few participants per breakout group, and self-conscious feedback. We also lacked an ability to capture and share role-play exercises in an efficient way. Finally, many trainees shy away from speaking in front of their peers and only the most confident people who want to challenge themselves step up to do role-play. Despite these drawbacks, role-play works consistently.

Selling is a Profession, Not Just a Skill

The Marketwired and Sysomos team decided to search for a solution that would utilize the benefits of role-play, without the live public display. We desired a solution that would feel personal and allow the unfiltered salesperson to shine through. Ideally, representatives would benefit from classroom-style energy and engagement, but would have the flexibility of self-driven eLearning. This solution would allow for ongoing development and practice without jeopardizing real client/prospect interactions. The philosophy: practice makes the professional.

The desired goal was for reps to run-through scenarios that dealt with a variety of verticals, business size, and personalities in order to transform them into professionals who could follow a sales process and adjust their delivery and approach on-the-fly, without waiver. Representatives would be able to learn from one another, cultivate solid answers, share best practices, and repeat responses with a delicate balance of confidence and tone.

The front-runner of the search was an audio solution whereby pre-recorded statements were delivered via phone and trainee responses were captured and shared in a common web repository for all to review and rate. However, it didn't prove to be an ideal solution. It didn't allow for one-on-one mentoring by managers, an inclusion of contextual information, or an ability to export a sound file. It was pure play without structured evaluation. Unfortunately, it also failed to provide basic metrics for analysis. The team wanted more.

A Solution to Meet the Needs

The frontrunner's solution wasn't solving the needs of the Marketwired and Sysomos team by focusing solely on voice. The most effective learning occurred when classroom role-plays were captured by video for evaluation. A decision was made that video was now a requirement.

Marketwired and Sysomos salespeople are taught to find the client or prospect's need and once that is uncovered, the conversations will flow. They are instructed to sell on value instead of features and the deal will close. Solve a client's issues and they'll stay a happy, renewing client. Finding a vendor who shares that approach is important when making software and service purchases. That approach was found in the Rehearsal VRP team.

Rehearsal VRP was the top Google hit when searching for "video role play." The Rehearsal VRP team made contact within twenty-four hours of the inquiry and provided a thorough amount of discovery discussion to help uncover the team's needs. The Marketwired and Sysomos training team watched the Rehearsal VRP demo videos and was impressed with the functionality, modern interface, easy user experience and responsiveness of the product. Furthermore, the team did not need to physically capture video with camera equipment. The only piece of equipment that was needed was a web cam. It was an all-in-one solution. There was concern, however, that it would not provide all of the desired functionality. After an initial evaluation, it was determined that Rehearsal VRP met most, but not all of what was desired. The product was still

young, and had several additions scheduled for release. The Rehearsal VRP team assured the Marketwired and Sysomos team that lacking features were either already scheduled for release in the coming weeks or would be inserted into the product roadmap for Q1. It was guaranteed that by the time the team was looking to implement, the needs would be met and release previews would be made available. Rehearsal VRP initiated a partner approach, which solidified the business relationship and enabled Marketwired and Sysomos to advise on product development. The Rehearsal VRP team made good on their word and all of the expected features were delivered on time, with some bonus features as well. Nothing was deferred.

The Rehearsal VRP team included an account executive, technical specialist, and client care manager. They showed great care in walking the team through the product before becoming clients. After signing, the same level of attention remained. The Rehearsal VRP team was instrumental in helping managers think through an action plan and a rollout strategy. They were even willing to record and pre-fill several of the agreed-upon programs with videos in order to jump-start use.

Preparing for Game Day

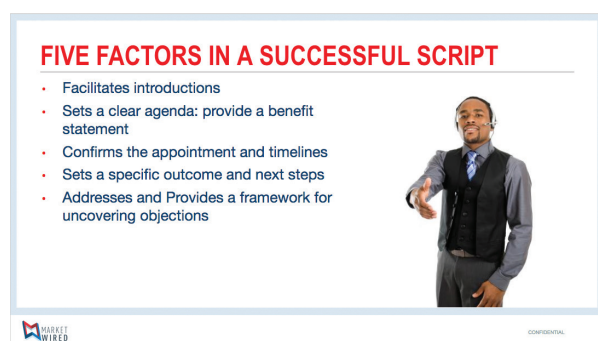
The Marketwired and Sysomos management team decided to conduct a ten-rep pilot to gather data on how learners would interact with the system and to finalize the first set of scoring criteria (see Figure 1). Representatives from both businesses participated, and the experience was positive. Reps even suggested scenarios for the upcoming Rehearsal VRP rollout. Soon, additional client scenario recordings were created using both the Rehearsal VRP capture feature and the import function. It was an all-in-one, painless solution with the Rehearsal VRP team on standby to assist.



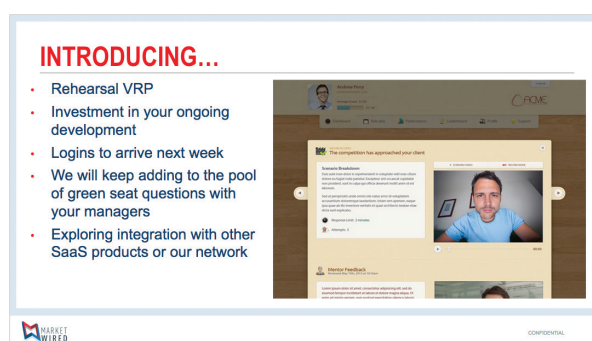
Marketwired sales team kick off in Chicago 2014

Video Role-Play was formally introduced to the entire Marketwired sales team, which at the time consisted of about eighty reps. Role-play is now part of the standard onboarding for all new Marketwired sales reps.

The initial Rehearsal VRP training included three main programs: Elevator Pitching, Product Knowledge, and Competitive Questions and Objections. The programs contained 13 role-plays, with several questions based on a geographic sales territory. Phone-reps were on-boarded first. Soon after, face-to-face reps were recording as well.



Slides from the Marketwired sales team kick off



Results, Challenges, and Changes

The Rehearsal VRP training module was a success. It offered a complete solution to the team's training needs. The product offered a platform where the team could provide contextual information, record and respond using video, give one-on-one feedback, post top responses, and share scoring criteria ahead of time in order to set expectations. Approximately 95% of the reps performed their assigned role-plays on time. The role-plays were completed on laptops 80% of the time, on tablets 15% of the time, and on smartphones 5% of the time, with the recording location split 50/50 between home and office.

At first, many representatives were apprehensive of the new training platform, but after using it, the majority expressed positive feedback. Open disclosure and playful banter began as reps uncovered bad visual and oral habits such as playing with their hair, touching their face, and saying "uhm" every few words. It was eye-opening and seemed to drive reps toward self-betterment.

Sales managers and team leads noticed immediate improvement in live responses, enhanced game faces, and increased confidence levels. Additionally, managers observed heightened conviction in reps responses. Representatives that were required to redo their initial submissions tackled the task with determination rather than disappointment. Representatives began recording role-play responses at their desks and reviewed them with peers before and after submission. It became fun, competitive, and educational.

Unlike a traditional classroom setting, every person was provided constructive criticism. Rehearsal VRP encouraged knowledge sharing and provided a platform where role-plays could be completed during off-hours, allowing managers more time to manage people during business hours. Sales managers began highlighting specific responses at team meetings. The training team then used the Leaderboard feature, where exemplary responses were posted for everyone to view. The training team was extremely happy with the results and managers seemed grateful for the solution.

There were a few minor technical challenges at first which included issues with browser plugins and webcam drivers on older desktops. The Rehearsal VRP tech support team was incredibly responsive and even assisted one rep in a remote office whose Internet Service Provider (ISP) blocked a particular port on his modem. The tech team counseled the rep on what to advise the ISP. The port was configured properly and the issue was resolved. This white glove treatment continues today. Rehearsal VRP is serious about client experience and product adoption. Touch points are frequent and welcomed.

SCORING CRITERIA

ANSWER:

- Was the response creative and energetic?
- Did the rep jump straight to the answer or deflect?
- Did the rep articulate value and discuss benefits?
- Did the rep demonstrate proficiency in our solution and company?
- Was the rep concise?
- Did the rep use Client Voice or leverage a story?

TONE:

- Did the rep speak confidently without hesitation?
- Did the rep deliver the answer with authority? (No uhm's or gaps in phrasing)
- Was there good intonation in the voice?
- Was the rep physically composed and not fidgeting? (Touching face, etc.)

CLOSE:

- Did the rep attempt a next step? (e.g. trial close, leading question)
- Did the rep confirm if this objection has been addressed?

Scores for each criteria will range from 1-4

- 1 - Novice (record again)
- 2 - Average (record again)
- 3 - Above Average (acceptable, but consider scripting your response)
- 4 - Mastery (Leaderboard material)

*Only perfect scores should move to the Leaderboard after Sales Manager Team review.

Figure 1

The Complete Training Experience

Rehearsal VRP has become a complementary piece of the Marketwired and Sysomos training toolset. It allows the sales team to demonstrate and reinforce their knowledge, as well as practice and refine their skills. It provides a platform where role-plays and lessons can be added and tailored to the ever changing sales market. The Marketwired and Sysomos management team decided to continue the relationship with Rehearsal VRP. The executive leadership team demands world-class solutions. Rehearsal VRP is one of these solutions.

The Marketwired agency team has joined the Marketwired and Sysomos sales team in using Rehearsal VRP for training and both teams plan to use it to train their client care teams in 2015. The sales team plans to create additional programs specific to business groups and verticals. These programs may include questions specific to small businesses or enterprises, CPGs, the automotive industry, and the technical industry. The Sysomos General Business sales team is experiencing Rehearsal VRP as part their official training curriculum in Q4/2014. There is also interest in Rehearsal VRP from the New Client Acquisition and Enterprise sales teams, which expect to roll out the training program in early Q1/2015.

The engagement and learning opportunity that Rehearsal VRP provides has been invaluable. The team anticipates incorporating many of the upcoming features into their training program. Rehearsal VRP has allowed Marketwired and Sysomos to take their training programs to the next level.