Building the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling Brand Through the Use of Emerging Media

A Departmental Honors Capstone Project (HONRS 499N)

by

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ABSTRACT

This creative project focuses on building the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling brand through the use of emerging media. The intent of this project was to put together a series of short video segments to be featured on the current text-based sales center website. The included marketing initiatives and website content follow the suggested strategy that I have created. I have also included an explanation of the marketing suggestions that were made while developing the website's redesign. These suggestions were made based on completed marketing course materials and experience supported by current research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much appreciation goes to Dr. Scott Inks for sharing his time and expertise despite his busy schedule.

I would also like to thank my parents for their constant encouragement in every aspect of my life.
The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling

In 2008, ThinkTV released a television show across the nation profiling the men and women who are working to change the nature of sales and transform the industry. The hour long program, The New Selling of America, was the first public television documentary on the profession of sales and its role as the driving force of the American economy. During the program, experts contended that college level preparation is a must for this evolving industry. To support this idea, the documentary featured The University Sales Education Foundation's list of top university sales programs in the nation. Ball State University was one of these 26 and was even featured first on the list due to the luck of alphabetization. Ball State was also one of only 16 universities to be accredited by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the University Sales Center Alliance (The University Sales Education Foundation).

This list not only appeared on The New Selling of America documentary, but also in The University Sales Education Foundation's Top University Sales Education Programs 2008, as a special supplement to the April 2008 issue of Selling Power magazine. In the edition, Dr. Scott Inks, Ball State professor and Associate Director of the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling, wrote an article for the supplement titled "Serving as a Professional Selling Mentor—What it Takes and What it’s Worth." Ball State gained even more exposure through an advertisement for Ball State's H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling, which took up nearly three-fourths of a page in that same magazine. The advertisement included a photo of a group of professionally dressed students paired with two short paragraphs titled "Experience + Success." Included in one of these paragraphs was the statement "... the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling prepares students through experiential learning and state-of-the art technology." Also on the advertisement was the sales center's website in large bold red letters (The University Sales Education Foundation).

After reading the sales center's boast "state-of-the art technology," I couldn’t help but think that the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling (CPS) website was not up to par (The University Sales Education Foundation). The website is mainly composed of text and includes eight secondary links, two of which lead you away from the
topic of sales and back to the Department of Marketing and the College of Business. All of the information on the six sales-related web pages is presented in paragraph form, accented by a total of only two small photographs and a small calendar. Although Ball State’s sales program has been advertised in print, recognized on television, and active in the media, its website does not take advantage of the internet as a valuable communication tool.

**Why the Internet?**

In 2003, the number of Americans online reached 150 million, making it the fastest-growing medium ever. Online advertising is not only on the rise, but also appears to be headed toward long-term sustained growth (Altstiel 301). Currently, there are roughly 1.2 billion internet users worldwide and is estimated to almost triple by 2015 (Kotler 25). The internet has become an indispensable part of daily life, which has created exciting new opportunities for marketers. The world-wide web is available to consumers 24/7, providing optimal reach for a public institution such as Ball State University.

The students of Ball State come from every county in Indiana, 47 other states, one U.S. territory, and 82 other countries (Ball State University), supporting the idea that the internet is the easiest and fastest way for prospective, current, and past students to stay informed and connected. The most important beneficiary of the Center for Professional Selling is the students, making a dynamic website even more of a necessary. According to a Mintel Report on American Lifestyles, research is one of the more common online activities and is expected to increase this year (Mintel Group 2009). This increase indicates that consumers browsing the web will be more likely to demand objective information before making large purchase decisions. Education is a very large purchase decision, which gives the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling an even greater need to capitalize on its website.

Following these findings, I approached Dr. Scott Inks about an honors thesis project that I could complete that would also benefit the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling. He had already been thinking about restructuring the website, so we decided that creating short video segments and adding photos to highlight the sales center would benefit this redesign. Dr. Inks provided me with a packet outlining his ideas for redesigning the website along with footage that could be broken down and used for the segments.
Why Video?

Due to the center’s focus on technology, photos and video segments were an obvious choice to enhance the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling website. The use of video and audio in addition to print would create more impact, while still remaining practical and affordable. Video and pictures have become critical elements of the increasingly creative internet communications among Americans, especially for young adults. These trends indicate that video will eventually become “the norm” by which future communication platforms are judged (Mintel Group 2009). The increased usage of online video and other forms of rich media are fueled by the growth of broadband internet access, which is expected to reach 84 million American households by 2010 (Mintel Group 2008).

In order to stay on the cutting edge of technology, but still cater to those with a slower internet connection, video segments should last no more than a minute and a half. The shorter the segment, the less time it takes to load and the greater the chance it will be watched from start to finish. With viewers’ attention spans shrinking, it is critical to capture and hold the viewers’ attention in the first few seconds. To keep the viewer engaged, video segments should ideally last between 30 seconds and one minute. The video segments and photos should connect with the sales center’s target audience, while still maintaining consistency with the strategic plan of Ball State and the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In order to familiarize myself with the sales center’s strategy, I began exploring the Ball State sales center’s website, including all of the information that was included in the text. I then compared it to the changes that Dr. Inks had begun outlining and extracted the pertinent information. Once I was familiar with the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling’s website, I began to explore the websites of other sales centers that were recognized by The University Sales Education Foundation. I also took detailed notes of five universities’ sales center websites that Dr. Inks had recommended. Once I felt these notes were inclusive, I compared and contrasted the different features, links and overall structures and designs that were used on these websites.
One crucial thing Ball State's CPS seemed to be lacking was a clear strategic plan. Although Ball State has a successful sales program, it still needs a basic plan for long-run survival and growth. In order to evaluate the center's strategic planning process, I used text from the current website as well as interviews with the director and associate director to define the center's overall mission, current business portfolio, and objectives and goals. They are as follows:

Mission Statement

The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling is dedicated to enhancing and promoting the field of professional selling—through research and service to the business community as well as by producing college graduates who are highly prepared for successful sales careers.

Current Business Portfolio

- Degree Programs: Sales Concentration, Sales Minor
  - Four Undergraduate Sales & Sales Management Courses
    - MKG 325 - Professional Selling
    - MKG 425 - Seminar in Advanced Professional Selling
    - MKG 427 - Sales Management
    - MKG 429 - Sales Technology Application
  - One Graduate Sales Course
    - MKG 630
    - Two additional courses pending
  - Related Marketing Electives
- Professional Programs
  - Sales and Customer Service Training
  - Seminars
  - Presentations on Current (and timeless) Sales Topics
  - Annual Sales Career Fair
  - Sales Symposia Every 18 Months
The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling was founded as a cutting edge sales center with tremendous recognition and accreditation. H.H. Gregg's generous grant of $1 million made the Professional Selling Institute able to move into a suite of offices and be recognized by the University as an academic "center." One of the driving success factors of the growing Sales Center is its motivated faculty who are truly passionate about the field of sales. The Ball State sales faculty has been putting on the Annual Sales Career Fair for fifteen year and has grown it to one of the largest in the country. The CPS has many strengths and should be able to use them to offset its weaknesses.

Weaknesses

The main problems that the center faces relate to communication. The Sales Center currently faces issues with effective communication both internally and externally. This involves communicating with areas of the University, as well as with potential students. The Sales Center also faces a lack of community awareness. This weakness can easily be turned around with the right promotional activities. Another problem that the CPS faces is
that it currently does not include a sales major. This deals with the difficulty communicating the need for a sales major with Ball State’s administration. Other sales programs are capitalizing on being able to offer students a major in sales, which weakens the Ball State Sales Center’s position in the market.

Opportunities

Although the sales major was one of the CPS’s weaknesses, it is also one of the Center’s greatest opportunities. If and when the sales major is added, Ball State will be able to promote an even more advanced program, creating a selling point that is above many other universities. Another key selling point of the CPS has been its state-of-the-art sales labs. Technology has improved since its inception, but the Center has not been able to keep up. The restoration of the sales labs and other areas of technology is yet another opportunity the Sales Center can take advantage of. With this ever expanding program, there is also a growing number of successful alumnae. The CPS should use these people to support its development, aid in its success, and encourage and educate its students. By seizing these opportunities, as well as capitalizing on its strengths, the sales center should be able to overcome its threats.

Threats

Even though the Center for Professional Selling may be able to overcome the threats put upon it, they should not be underestimated. The CSP began as one of the few sales centers in the country, but this area of education is spreading to more and more universities each year. This threat causes an even greater need to be able to successfully market the program. As mentioned before, the ever changing technology is also threatening the CPS’s ability to stand out against other sales programs. In order to be able to face these threats, the Sales Center must first be able to overcome issues with Ball State’s administration. This complex relationship threatens the Sales Center’s ability to successfully market itself to sustain growth. Maintaining growth is key to overcoming the threats previously discussed, as well as offsetting problems that have occurred due to the downturn in the economy.
After evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, I was able to begin establishing a list of necessary and attainable goals and objectives to add to the Sales Center’s strategic plan. Once I had an idea of what was going on both inside and outside of the Center, I met with Dr. Inks to identify the most important goals and objectives that needed to be focused on. We came up with twelve goals, as follows.

- To be the #1 sales program in the nation
- To develop and implement a Sales Major
- To grow the Sales Minor to 25 students
- To have at least 15 students earn sales certificates each semester
- To have at least 5 students complete a sales internship each semester
- To have at least 50% of students in the program employed by graduation
- To compete in 5 sales competitions each year
- To include experiential learning in each course
- To incorporate student sales portfolios into the curriculum
- To be recognized as a leader in sales video lab technology
- To publish at least 5 articles per year
- To hold a sales symposium every 18 months

These goals are to be reached by the Director and Associate Director of the H.H. Gregg Center for Sales with the help of sales faculty and staff, as well as students. These goals and objectives must also be supported by the Sales Advisory Board and evaluated at the end of each academic year.

MARKETING STRATEGY

Segmentation and Positioning

The completed strategic plan will be used to guide the rest of the functional strategies, including the marketing strategy. In order for further success and growth, the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling needs to implement a
strong marketing strategy to create customer value and foster profitable customer relationships. This process involves segmentation and targeting of the sales education market, as well as differentiation and positioning of the sales center compared to its competitors. The sales center currently divides its market into four segments ranked by relative importance: students, businesses, the university, and the community. Of these four segments, the student population is the center’s top priority. Although students are the Center for Professional Selling’s main focus, businesses, the university, and the community all have interconnected wants and needs making it possible to serve all of these segments simultaneously, creating a win-win situation. For example, the sales center wants to give the students the opportunity to be recruited by the best businesses, and also wants to give recruiters the best sales students to fill their job openings.

Overall, the H.H. Gregg Center is positioned as one of the top ten sales centers in the nation, but in order to satisfy all of their market segments, the center must position itself within each market. Although the sales center has received notable publicity in its first few years, it does not have a clear identity with college students. That is not to say that within a few years The H.H. Center for Professional Selling will not be attracting prospective students to Ball State for the program alone, but at this time the center is relying on the university to attract quality enrollees and is then attempting to market to those potential students. Within the Ball State community, the center must position itself in a sea of about 180 majors, more than 130 minors and multiple program certificates. This is quite a challenge not only because of the large numbers, but also because many of these majors, minors, and programs are already well-known and established. Many students on campus are unaware that the sales center even exists or if they do, they are uncertain of what the H.H. Center for Professional Selling offers. In the past, a career in sales has been thought of as a less than desirable line of work, so it is crucial now more than ever to emphasize that today’s salesperson is more than just a pitchman. The sales center should be positioned to Ball State students as a dynamic and interactive program that will lead to many future opportunities, including a rewarding, well-paying career. The sales center is also steadily expanding and gaining publicity, forming a positive image that could help to address these challenges. The success of the H.H. Gregg Center relies heavily on the business community, both as a consumer of services and an engaged buyer of the end product. To target the business community as a general consumer, the sales center should be positioned as an essential resource for continuing education. Outreach and extension in the business
community are critical to the development of the sales center's professional programs. Businesses need to be made
aware that the center is not just a resource for sales knowledge and expertise, but a tool for career development.

With more and more professionally trained salespeople entering the workforce, pressure is being put on those who
began their careers as pitchmen before the nature of sales began to change. These pitchmen are prime candidates for
the center's professionalism programs. Although the economy is uncertain and many businesses have decreased
spending, the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling should be able to capitalize on this position leveraged by the
value of the services being offered. The business community should also be made aware of Ball State sales program
graduates and their value in the industry. Many organizations and companies have taken advantage of this by
attending the annual sales career fair. The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling already has one of the largest
sales career fairs in the country, bringing together over 80 companies and more than 300 students. Organizations and
companies interested in recruiting salespeople should recognize the sales center's position as a unique source for
successful salespeople. This should be an easy sell because the sales center wants to connect the best recruiters with
the best sales students to create opportunities that are beneficial to all parties involved.

The Marketing Mix

Product
Students Prepared for Successful Sales Careers
Service to the Business Community
Professional Selling Research

Price
Degree Programs: In-State and Out-of-State Tuition
Professional Programs: Cost of the Event

Place
Campus
Indianapolis
Internet
On-Site (Consulting)
Promotion

Faculty Networking: Ramon Avila is the “Face” of the Center

Community Programs
Magazine Advertisements
Collegiate Marketing Materials
Regional Sales Competition Sponsorship
Campus and Regional Sporting Event Sponsorships
High School Visits

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

After assessing the Center for Professional Selling’s strategic plan and marketing strategy, it is apparent that there are a few key issues that need to be addressed. For the most part, these issues revolve around the promotion aspect of the marketing mix. The CPS must plan, integrate, and manage the promotion blend in order to successfully communicate the product to its target market. The majority of people on campus and in the community do not know what the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling is or what it does, making it apparent that the communication channels currently used by the Center have not been effective. One of the main problems lies in the communication channels that are between the CPS and potential sales students. The Center must not rely on direct communication with current and potential students, but be able use the marketing department, the Miller College of Business, and the Ball State administration as a support system. These three University groups, if not more, should be able to communicate the mission of the Center and actively promote it to the student population. The H.H. Gregg Center should focus on strengthening these communication channels in order to use these groups to its greatest advantage, facilitating the growth of the Sales Center.

The main focus of the CPS’s promotion activities should be to inform its target audience. In order for the Center to gain awareness and attention, promotions must break through the clutter of information in the marketplace and gain the attention of those in the target market. By informing the potential customer of what the CPS is and does, he or she will begin to gain knowledge and develop attitudes related to the Center. Once the consumer’s attention is gained, there is a greater chance to inform the consumer of why they should care. As awareness and interest in the CPS grows, promotional activities should aim to move the target market toward further
involvement and create a strong desire to find out more and possibly get involved. The promotions should clearly communicate why they should choose the sales program over other options. The more sought after the CPS becomes, the more likely promotions will cause consumers to take action and choose sales over other academic areas. This process is explained in the following table.

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<tr>
<th>Promotion Objectives</th>
<th>Adoption Process</th>
<th>AIDA Model</th>
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<td>Informing</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Attention</td>
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Another factor that needs to be considered when developing a promotion blend is that sales education is between the market introduction and market growth portion of its life cycle. For many potential students, sales education is a new concept and they need to be reassured of its validity. On the other hand, a few potential students may be well aware of what sales education has to offer and simply needs to be informed as to why the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling is the right choice for them. Promotion of the CPS needs to be able to straddle both of these informative approaches.

With all of this considered, the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling needs to implement the easiest and most effective way to communicate to its target market. The communication medium needs to be affordable to maintain, convenient, and easy for viewers to understand. Although the CPS already has a website, revamping the current web pages could create awareness, develop interest, spark desire, and trigger action to join the sales program.
REFERENCES


H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling

The M.S. in Professional Selling is dedicated to enhancing and presenting the field of professional selling through research and service to the business community and by producing college graduates who are highly prepared for successful sales careers.

The center's Sales Orientation includes four sequences in sales and sales management and related management courses. Like other areas of the College of Business, the M.S. Gregg Center for Professional Selling stresses practical classroom teaching with valuable experiential teaching that gives you the opportunity to practice your skills. Experiential-related center work includes setting advertising space in the local business community, row placing in a video lab setting, managing events and territories using customer relationship management (CRM) software, and sales management.

You will also benefit from the career connections you make through the annual Sales Career Fair, the largest of its kind, typically attended by several dozen companies and 250 students.

News & Events

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The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling

Mission Statement
The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling is dedicated to enhancing and promoting the field of professional selling through research and service to the business community, as well as by producing college graduates who are highly prepared for successful sales careers.

Click on three areas below to find out what the H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling has to offer:

Degree Programs
- Sales Minor
- Sales Concentration
- Graduate Level Courses

Recruitment Programs
- Annual Sales Career Fair
- Current Recruiters
- Get Involved

Professional Programs
- Sales Symposium
- Sales & Customer Service Training
- Seminars

Bridging the Gap
The real world is explained in business terms.
The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling is bridging the gap between learning and the practical application of advanced selling techniques.

Annual Sales Career Fair
The H.H. Gregg Center for Professional Selling hosts one of the largest sales career fairs in the country. See what Senior Sales Career Student Mike Kinchen has to say about this year's event.

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