



Selling “Effectiveness” to a Sales Team

Our philosophy is that we are making sellers more effective versus enabling them to sell better.

By Don Schmidt



These days, the internet makes buying anything a deep dive into product reviews, consumer ratings, and price comparisons. Buying a car is no different. **Edmunds.com was named one of the most trusted prominent online review sites** and was once ranked 4th overall, outperforming Yelp, Google+, Hotels.com, City Search and others. With more than 20-million unique monthly visitors and more than 8,000 car dealers adding their inventory to Edmunds.com's catalog of used and new vehicles, being trusted is important. But what do you do to sustain that ranking and to maintain the trust of millions at a time in their lives that many say is more stressful than saying 'I do'? Edmunds.com believes that the answer is the journey toward "effectiveness" and the leadership team at Edmunds.com is committed to finding and implementing the technologies that will make the company's effectiveness practices scalable, culture-changing, and KPI determined.

We now have greater confidence that training is being delivered accurately and consistently

Edmunds.com is a web-based automotive research site that connects millions of car shoppers with thousands of car dealers.

Edmunds.com's product suite helps consumers navigate the car buying experience by providing options.

Edmunds.com's sales team of 140 field sellers nationwide with 12 regional directors work to sell

Edmunds.com to car dealers to expand that network of buying opportunities. Sellers fall into one of three

groups: Sales Executives --- selling only new business;

Relationship Managers --- retaining and upselling current dealers; and Account Executives, a hybrid of the two previous

roles in rural areas. **For quite some time, Edmunds.com's**

regional directors would physically "ride-along" with their direct

reports to ensure proper and successful selling techniques; however, this activity was occurring less and less as other leadership activities were taking up the regional directors' time.

Edmunds.com started using web-based training to give the sale effectiveness organization greater confidence that training was being delivered accurately and consistently. The web-based training while certainly more scalable was still a one-way teaching method. Hence, Edmunds.com added a "flipped classroom" component which kicked off with video-based courses sent to all sales team members followed by Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT) content delivered by Sales Effectiveness Managers via a web-based sharing tool. The hope was that Sales Executives and Relationship Managers would use the new skills on the road and with dealers.

Hypothesize, Test, Validate toward Greater Engagement

Rehearsal, a video-based practice tool, attracted Edmunds.com by showing how easily the technology allowed for videos to be re-recorded before “publishing”.

Rehearsal’s clients in aggregate tend to record themselves approximately 6 times before they publish a “final product” to share with others. Edmunds.com thought **the ease of use to re-record videos would promote and encourage repetition --- and practice.**

Edmunds.com quickly worked with Rehearsal’s Client Success team to execute a contract and **the system was turned on in a day.** The initial pilot brought together 20 sellers flown into the company’s Santa Monica Headquarters. Sellers were trained to learn about a new product in a traditional classroom setting. On the first night, sellers then recorded their pitches with Rehearsal in their hotel rooms. The next day, sellers and sales leadership watched the videos and selected the best pitches by adding them to Rehearsal’s leaderboard. That afternoon, those leaderboard pitches were projected in a classroom-setting with the entire group and attendees voted on the best pitch before awarding a prize to the seller with the winning pitch.

Based on the reactions from the initial run, Edmunds.com moved into a new phase of implementation: HTV, or hypothesis, test, validate.

The Sales Effectiveness Team uses a continuous method of HTV to validate and create hypotheses based on results from each phase of testing. The team’s hypothesis was that if they assigned Rehearsal tasks to some sellers on a pre-existing product and allowed the regional directors to be the mentors (coaches) then the coaching advice and sharing of best videos would increase the sales of that product.

For the testing phase, Relationship Managers (RM) --- 1/3 of the sales team --- were sent multiple assignments on pitching a specific product, handling situations, and managing objections. The Sales Effectiveness Team sent out the assignments and monitored if any RM had neglected to complete a task. **As a result, 100% of participants completed the assignments.**

The take-away was that not all managers know how to coach constructively

Regional Directors were assigned the role of mentor/coach and were responsible for accepting and/or rejecting

each video published by the RMs. **The company encountered an unpredicted learning opportunity:** some directors were simply “checking the box” while others provided genuine and constructive feedback. The take-away was that not all managers know how to coach constructively.



The Results

The validation stage was astounding. During the six months prior to introducing Rehearsal, the company had witnessed a flattening of that specific product's sales. In the month following the implementation of Rehearsal, the company realized the following:

- Those who used Rehearsal: Relationship Managers --- **more than doubled total revenue with a 102% increase in sales.**
- Those who did not use Rehearsal: Sales Executives and Account Executives --- only increased revenue for this product 33% and 3%, respectively.
- No bonuses, other incentives, or month-specific inputs were offered or notable.
- The best performing regions were those which received constructive coaching from their mentors (including use of the conversation thread which allowed for back and forth commenting and re-recording of videos until the Relationship Managers achieved the best response.)

Relationship Managers doubled total revenue with a 102% increase in sales.

The company noticed that during this period the only change to the Relationship Managers' training and selling experience was the introduction of Rehearsal. As a result, senior sales managers jumped fully into supporting Rehearsal and are now expanding the use of the technology to develop the sellers who are performing at the bottom 1/3 of the sales team.



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