

A New Sales Tool for Digital Times

Shortening the Sales Cycle with Rapid Online Communications

By John Persinos, Editorial Director, Larstan Business Reports

Selling is a tough road. Sometimes, it's more of an art than a business, and the hurdles are many. Regardless of your vertical market, only one thing matters: getting prospects to sign on the line that is dotted.

It's an old challenge, but now there's a new tool to facilitate the often-daunting sales process: Web-based communications. Increasing numbers of companies are discovering the practical and very tangible benefits of online communications, and how online conferencing, self-running presentations and self-paced training can make the sales process more efficient, cost-effective, persuasive — and ultimately, more successful.

Online conferencing, presentations, and training represent the leading edge in workforce communications and allow companies to quickly communicate with employees, customers and sales prospects, by sharing their best, time-honored practices via an online environment. These virtual environments combine the expertise of sales staff with the benefits of online meetings or sales demos. It's increasingly apparent that, to remain competitive, companies must use Web-based communications, especially in the sales arena.

Web-based Conferencing: The Collaborative Experience

"Companies that utilize web communications can benefit from reduced travel costs, just-in-time training, increased productivity by reduced travel, decreased costs for recruiting and training new employees, as well as increased customer satisfaction," said Tony Petitt, Program Manager, Sutherland Global Services

Sutherland Global Services is an international business processes outsourcing firm with locations in the United States, Canada and India. The online medium, Petitt said, obviates the need for costly face-to-face presentations at his vast, sprawling company, which are not feasible for sales prospecting. "The result is increased customer satisfaction, increased credibility, and an overall richer sales experience," he said.

"Our online sales meetings become truly collaborative, whereby 'hands on' action can take place. There's nothing better than to have an instantaneous tool a salesperson can utilize to 'show his wares.' We now can become virtual door-to-door salesmen, demonstrating products anywhere in the world."

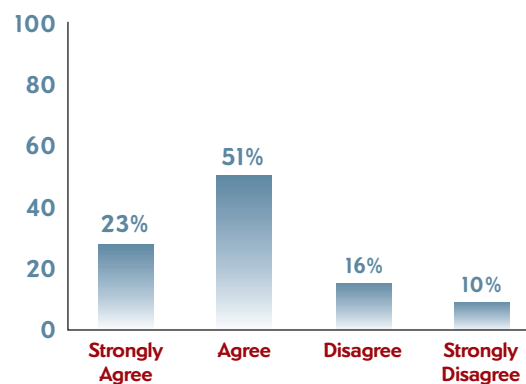
— Tony Petitt, program manager, Sutherland Global Services

Sales organizations have been among the leading early adopters of Web-based conferencing, and savvy sales reps are learning how to use online meetings to supplement in-person meetings with prospects. But let's not give short shrift to two equally important capabilities. First, self-running on-demand presentations, and the ways that sales reps can supplement live online meetings by delivering narrated, multimedia presentations that prospects can

view at their convenience. And, second, online training sessions, both live and self-paced, that help keep sales reps up to date and informed on changes in products, pricing and promotions. By providing training online, whether through live web meetings or via online self-paced presentations, companies can deliver sales training without taking their representatives out of their territories.

The companies that are realizing the greatest benefits are those that are combining live and on-demand online communications to streamline the entire sales process, from online sales training to virtual live sales calls to sending narrated multimedia proposals that "seal the deal".

A "Virtual Classroom" would facilitate better communication within my organization and better leverage our resources and save us time and money.



"Web-based presentations can reach many, many people at far lower costs than traditional methods. Using this type of advanced learning tool can help companies remain more competitive. The benefits of online knowledge transfer include the ease with which companies can update, modify and distribute content out to the mass of employees and customers. Increasingly user-friendly content development tools and training programs are other benefits."

— Paul Ritter, senior analyst, Wainhouse Research, LLC, "rich media" consultants

Online communications is on track for explosive growth, as it plays an increasingly mission-critical role in training, presentations and conferencing, especially in sales. According to Wainhouse Research, a Boston-based communications research and consulting firm that specializes in "rich media," the demand for rich-media training will grow at a compound rate of 90 percent a year, for the next three years. "There's clearly a migration of corporate spending away from large learning management systems, which tend to be very expensive, to cost-effective alternatives, such as Web-based training," said Paul Ritter, senior analyst and research director at Wainhouse.

Online Communications: The Key to Success

In January 2005, Larstan Business Reports sent out a survey to top corporate managers. The data gleaned from this survey was provocative and provided empirical confirmation of the efficacy of online learning and presentation environments, sometimes referred to as Virtual Classrooms.

Notably, among the 155 respondents, 74% said that a Virtual Classroom would facilitate better communication within their respective organizations, better leverage their resources, and save them time and money (see [chart previous page](#)).

The survey also found that an overwhelming majority (91%) of respondents agreed that rapid economic changes today make it more important than ever to leverage the latest technology for rapid online communications.

Online communications is indeed a burgeoning field, and Wainhouse's Ritter cited the firm Macromedia as occupying the vanguard. He said two important tools that buttress the online communications market are from Macromedia: Breeze and Captivate.

Breeze uses Microsoft PowerPoint as its foundation, allowing subject matter experts the flexibility to adopt existing content and easily add sound, assessments, and animations. Captivate represents a similar approach, allowing developers to capture actual screen shots and mouse movements to rapidly construct training content focused on PC and web applications.

"Macromedia has traditionally for many years produced software products used by training development managers, so the company is not new to the rich-media niche and not new to the training sector," Ritter said. "This historical leadership position has given the company expertise and a large base of end-users. Now, the Macromedia Breeze online environment is becoming a well-known brand name in this market."

The Efficacy of On-demand Presentations

Analysts say that Web-based conferencing and on-demand presentations give the sales effort a powerful new tool. They also warn, though, that sales managers and reps who use online communications should not fall into the trap of being myopic, by merely focusing on the cost-savings and efficiencies. To be sure, Web-based conferencing saves money and sales people don't need to travel as much for training and to make sales calls. But it's important to note that online communications enhance — and don't necessarily replace — existing selling techniques and practices, from the pitch and presentation to closing the sale. Important sales functions, such as the need in key situations for face-to-face contact, are not eliminated.

The fact is, Breeze allows sales reps to hit the ground running, using time-honored, user-friendly computer tools. Breeze allows reps to rapidly forge creative sales presentations in PowerPoint,

without special training or technical assistance. To boost the effect of on-demand presentations, they can even record narration and synchronize it with animations. Breeze adds audio recording, quiz creation, and publishing wizards within familiar PowerPoint menus.

In essence, sales reps can become their own, autonomous creators and publishers of audio-enhanced presentations. Breeze provides flexible on-demand delivery of these presentations through any standard Web browser. By using Macromedia Breeze on-demand presentations, a sales rep does not have to be a multimedia "expert" to quickly and easily create slick, high-quality multimedia presentations. What's more, sales prospects can easily view these presentations 24/7, at any time that's best for them. Viewers don't even need Microsoft PowerPoint applications, or any other special plug-in, to see and hear the sales presentations.

The Many Attributes of Online Communications

Wainhouse's Ritter elaborated on Macromedia Breeze's long list of attributes:

- The "instant on" of Breeze presentations and meetings; the viewers and meeting attendees don't need to download and install special plug-ins, because they already have the Macromedia Flash Player.
- The ease of authoring narrated Breeze presentations, complete with video and animations, using PowerPoint.
- The content library, which makes it possible for a sales organization to share Breeze presentations.
- The ability to deliver live and on-demand presentations or sales force training.
- The ability to operate "persistent" or "always available" meetings (e.g., pre-populating and saving meeting rooms).

"The 'instant on' of Breeze is a huge competitive advantage," Ritter stated. "In fact, it's probably Macromedia's single largest advantage. Sales people appreciate the ease of authoring narrated Breeze presentations, complete with video and animations, using PowerPoint. The user friendliness of the rich media and rich content development tools is another big plus."

The content library, meanwhile, is a cost-effective data management solution that sales managers can use to improve the delivery and management of sales content. Also, persistent, perpetual meetings are vital, because content can be easily re-purposed and doesn't need to be re-created.

Josh Bersin, principal at Bersin & Associates, training and technology consultants in Oakland, California, concurs with Ritter's assessments. "Macromedia Breeze is one of the easiest-to-use tools on the market," Bersin said. "It essentially builds content

from PowerPoint. It's a one-stop training solution for someone who knows PowerPoint, and PowerPoint is the technology of choice for most people who instruct."

Bersin emphasized that PowerPoint is "incredibly" prevalent and most instructional material is based around it. "People can take that exact material, tweak it up, and deliver it on their computer," he said. "A teacher doesn't have to learn very much to conduct e-learning. It's a remarkable new area and it's growing very fast. Macromedia didn't invent this space, but they sure got to it early. Breeze is remarkably easy to use and that's one of its biggest advantages."

Bersin pointed out that the corporate training market tops \$60 billion-a-year in sales. He said that, until recently, nearly 100 percent of that training was comprised of people physically teaching in classrooms. Now, about 25 percent of the training market is Web-based training. "Nearly every organization we talk with tells us that between 30 and 50 percent of training needs fall into the rapid e-learning category," Bersin added.

"We use Macromedia Breeze and it's a really great product. It has everything you need. You don't need to know anything about Web publishing; you just press a button. It saves a lot of money and it's very cost effective. When we want to present content to several people in one place, we don't have to buy a lot of plane tickets for them."

— *Josh Bersin, principal, Bersin & Associates, e-training consultants*

Time as the Enemy

Bersin said time is often the enemy of a sales training program. Online communications is an enormous advantage in this regard, because it prevents the duplication of effort and communicates to large numbers of people in one fell swoop.

"As time marches on, the business challenge continues to grow, and often the training problem itself will change," he said. "For example, suppose your job is to build a sales certification program for a major new product release. You need to reach out to several thousand sales people and resellers quickly. But you also know that six-to-nine months from now there will be an update release and probably new features and pricing. By the time you get your course published, will it be out of date? Also, the product managers are busy — how can you get enough of their time? You need them now." The answer to this dilemma, he said, is rapid communications via the Internet.

Rapid online communications also allows quick broadcast of essential information. "You can quickly tell everyone about, say, a price change," Bersin said. "You may not be interested in educating them about pricing in general, but it is critical to get the information out quickly. Perhaps this is the approach to use with sales managers. In this approach, often e-mail is

enough or perhaps a conference call." Rapid e-learning fits well here, he said.

Kevin M. Lynch, vice president of marketing and eLearning, Macromedia, said the broadcast of essential information is especially useful during the initial sales process. "From a marketing standpoint, with the sales process, you want to reach a large audience, but you also want to create a high-impact and creative message — with a low budget," said Lynch. "Our on-demand component presents a rich media experience on a broad level that doesn't require sophisticated expertise to create. It then links this presentation through an e-mail link or Web site, to start the sales process, to conduct that initial marketing."

Then, typically, the call to action is an invitation to attend a webinar, which also can be conducted via Breeze. "The webinar helps accelerate the selling timeline," Lynch said. "All of this is accomplished without any travel in the initial phases."

"Web-based presentations are an efficient, highly leveraged way to narrow the sales pipe from the very beginning. The alternative would be time-consuming and expensive face-to-face sales calls."

— *Kevin M. Lynch, vice president of marketing and eLearning, Macromedia.*

Lynch emphasizes that none of these online methods completely replaces actual meetings with sales prospects; it only makes the meetings that are conducted "really count, because they're pre-qualified."

The Pervasiveness of the Internet

The popularity of online communications, and its growing influence within the sales process, is in large measure a function of the pervasiveness of the Internet.

"Increasingly, people have broadband access in the workplace," said Geoffrey Bock, senior vice president, Patricia Seybold Group, Boston-based technology analysts. "It's ubiquitous, at home and at work. So, as the Web grows, we don't simply want access to information. We want to do something with that information. One of the ways to do that is to deliver the right information to the right people, just in time, so they can do something with the information."

Bock said online communications is a natural fit for the exigencies of the sales process. "Companies want to be able to give sales people the latest information about their company's new products, positioning, and competitive benefits, to enable these sales people to go out and sell more effectively," Bock said. "In the good old days, before the Web, we used to call this kind of information delivery 'sales training.' Now, companies can do this information delivery more effectively over the Web."

Bock said Macromedia confers a rich Web experience. “Breeze not only allows you to display text, but you can integrate images and pictures and you can add sound, which means your sales people no longer have to read the information you send them,” he said. “They can also listen to the presentation and see the visual information from their desktops. It becomes a much richer and more interactive experience.”

Bock emphasized that Macromedia accomplishes another important goal: easy storage and retrieval, for continual replay and re-purposing. Sales meetings are no longer ephemeral; they can be called-up and viewed again. This function saves considerable effort and money, and allows sales staff to more effectively manage their precious time.

“If you look at a product like Breeze, it makes the ability to capture this experience much easier, so a company expert can deliver a sales presentation by sitting in his office or talking to a few sales people in a live presentation, and his information and experience can be captured, stored, and then delivered on demand to other sales people who are not there for his live presentation,” he said.

He pointed out that Web-based training is a new tool with which companies should supplement and extend their existing real-time meetings. “Online training is a much more cost-effective, lower-cost, higher-impact kind of medium,” he said.

“Web-based training won’t replace the quarterly sales meeting, or the weekend workshop, if those are tools the company uses, but it will allow the company to continually update its sales force, to help its sales people respond to competitive threats and challenges, and to make its sales people more effective. If you want to be competitive, Web-based training needs to be a tool in your toolkit of training methods.”

— *Geoffrey Bock, senior vice president, Patricia Seybold Group, Boston-based technology analysts*

The Real Benefits of Going Virtual

The real-world experience of leading companies has shown that rapid online communications can accomplish the following:

- Provides sales teams with training, tracking and reporting on the latest standard operating procedures;
- Arms sales teams with the skills and knowledge they need to sell effectively and to introduce new products;

- Assesses and measures sales performance and enables sales professionals to obtain the competencies necessary to advance in their careers;
- Aligns people with the right positions in the organization, thereby enabling companies to effectively recruit and retain the best sales people;
- Allows sales organizations to respond more quickly to training requests that would not have been met through traditional classroom training;
- Prepares and motivates sales instructors to start training online;
- Prepares sales managers for quick e-learning implementations; and
- Provides interactive and engaging online sales conferences.

For a full copy of Larstan’s survey on Web-based communications, go to: [www._____](http://www._____.). To view a complete set of Larstan reports, go to: www.larstan.net.

Resources:

Macromedia, based in San Francisco, is a provider of digital experiences where reach and impact matter most, in the areas of training, e-learning, sales and marketing, and entertainment. The company’s software empowers millions of business users, developers, and designers to create and deliver effective, compelling, and memorable experiences — on the Internet, on fixed media, on wireless, and on digital devices (www.macromedia.com).

For more information, please see http://www.macromedia.com/go/larstan_breeze_info

To speak to a Breeze Solutions Specialist in North America, please call 1-888-649-2990.

To speak to a Breeze Solution Specialist anywhere in the world, please provide your contact information: http://www.macromedia.com/go/larstan_breeze_contact