

**TEACHING TIME MANAGEMENT IN A SALES PROGRAM: THE
APPLICATION OF A COMPUTER SIMULATION GAME**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a discussion concerning the use of a computer simulation game to teach Time Management in a sales management degree program. The results from a before-after student survey are also presented.

**IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT
IN PROFESSIONAL SELLING**

Time management is a critical element in professional selling. The value of training and technology is limited unless combined with the effective use of time by the sales representative. Today's sales representative must link the essentials of proper time management with the effective use of contact management software. The results obtained by a sales representative are dependent on the proper application of time management principles.

**TEACHING TIME MANAGEMENT IN
SALES COURSES**

Time management is often included in sales textbooks under titles such as managing self, time, and territory. The focus is usually on how salespeople spend their time, how they analyze sales call activities, sales call planning, and eliminating time wasters.

Another approach is to offer a separate course which uses a time management simulation to teach the principles of effective time management for sales representatives. This approach has the value of involving the student in hundreds of time management decisions and makes the student responsible for results. This approach should be integrated with the more traditional materials used in sales textbooks and commercial time management materials.

**USE OF THE TIMESIM COMPUTER
SIMULATION GAME**

The TimeSim computer simulation game was developed specifically for use in one of the author's sales management program. The game has been class tested for two quarters at the time of this writing and appears to be free of serious bugs or other problems.

The TimeSim simulation is similar to other business simulations in that the game proceeds for a number of decision periods. Students enter decisions for each game period and then receive results before making their decisions for the next period. However, the students are not competing against each other but rather each is trying to create the most efficient time utilization schedule that they can. There are no winners or losers in the game unless the instructor wants to compare results outside of the game environment.

The game places students in the role of a salesperson who must schedule their time each week; deciding on which prospects to call and what type of sales call should be made in each case. Each game period begins with a hypothetical sales meeting. Students are given information about current product availability in the warehouse and any customer service requests that have been received. Some time will be prescheduled for meetings, personal time such as illness or vacation, as well as training. The object of the game is to schedule the remainder of a forty-five hour week in the most efficient manner possible.

A prospect/client database with over 2,000 firms is built into the game. This database has information about every firm in the sales district; examples include how many units of each product was used last year, how many of these units were purchased

from us, the results of the last sales call., and demographic information about the firm such as its size and industry. Students can construct queries to request information from the database in a simplified format that allows them to use standard Structured Query Language (SQL) without actually needing to know SQL itself. In addition, a survey can be requested for any query so that students can learn how the upper-quartile and lower-quartile of firms returned by the query differ with respect to their attitudes about the firm and the firm's products. These survey results can help guide the students' scheduling efforts.

Each game period, decisions must be made for each firm in the database. The default decision is no-contact. Either a telephone contact or a field sales contact is possible, both with different levels of intensity. Once a student has allocated their time, results can be calculated that will show the outcome of each sales contact as well as the total units of each product sold, gross profit made on sales, and the salesperson's commissions. These results are based on how each prospect firm sees the firm and its products, how many units of each product the prospect firm uses in a year, and the prospect's firm inventory level at the time of the sales contact. The only information not available to the student through queries to the database is the prospect firm's inventory levels and that can be estimated by looking at sales patterns. Long term success in the simulation is a function of gross profit earned in the sales territory over many game periods.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the effectiveness of using a computer simulation game to teach time management, a before-after study was conducted. Three separate classes participated in the study: a Sales Management class, a class devoted solely to Time Management, and a Marketing Research class. The Marketing Research class was used as a control., students in this class were marketing majors at about the same level of progress towards their degrees but there was no mention of time management during the course.

During the first week of the quarter, students in each of the three courses were asked to complete a brief questionnaire that asked them to score the relative importance of ten different areas of sales management on a 1-5 scale as well as to indicate what they perceived to be the most and least important area.

The difference between the Marketing Research control group and the two sales management related courses was significant at the .000 level. The slight increase in the importance of Time Management Skills in the Sales Management Course from the pretest to the post-test was not significant and was probably due to the unavoidable overlap of discussion between the Sales Management Course and Time Management Course. Likewise, the slight difference in scores on the pre-test between the Time Management and Sales Management classes was not significant. It would be expected that students enrolled a course in Time Management might give that topic a slightly higher score.

CONCLUSIONS AND PLANS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researchers had hoped to show that the students would consider Time Management skills to be more important after participating in the TimeSim simulation than before. The data did not support this position; and perhaps the wrong issue had been investigated. During informal discussions with the Time Management class, the authors learned that students had enjoyed playing the game and felt that it helped them integrate the various lecture topics in the class. Finally, the authors are developing some new classroom exercises that the students would use with the simulation game as part of the course.

The authors are now working on a new instrument that will measure Time Management skills. A future study is planned to investigate whether the simulation game has an impact on actual skills.