

Bringing the Real World to AgriSales Courses via

Multimedia and the Web

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Problem Statement and Objective

The number and importance of AgriSales courses has grown across the country. These courses have been developed because of the need for more and better-trained salespeople in the field. The modern sales representative in private industry is expected to deliver and service more high-tech products, deal with a changing customer base, and to explain new ideas to producers.

The growing importance and number of these AgriSales courses is accompanied by a need for good instructional materials. However, relatively few instructional materials exist for AgriSales courses. Even available textbooks are rarely accompanied by supporting instructional materials. To better communicate the role of and techniques often used by professional AgriSales people, two new resources for use in conjunction with AgriSales textbooks were developed to meet this need; 1) a website that tracked the daily activities of a new sales representative and 2) a series of digitized video clips demonstrating sales techniques. The objective of this paper is to report on the development, features, usage, and availability of these resources.

A Day in the Life of a New Salesperson

Students have little understanding of the actual role and life of a salesperson, especially at an entry-level position. The purpose of this tool was to develop a means to allow students to efficiently and effectively track a new sales representative online. It was also intended to bring core concepts of an AgriSales class to life by having students follow a real salesperson in the field on a daily basis so that they can see how many of the AgriSelling concepts and tools are actually used.

Development of the Web Site

The project lasted five weeks and was built primarily using WebCT software. Information on the website included how the salesperson adjusted to her new territory and began her sales career, as well as a daily posting of her professional activities and customer interaction. A recent graduate from an agricultural school was chosen so that students might more easily identify with the salesperson. The Internet was used as the delivery method, reinforcing students' computer skills.

Website development was complex and time consuming. Searching for the recent graduate to fill this role took some time because of the necessity to clear the activity with her supervisor and her company. As the process developed it became clear that simply posting logs daily could inadvertently lead to the disclosure of confidential or sensitive information. The solution was to delay posting of the daily logs until her supervisor cleared them. Communication with the salesperson was critical at this stage of the project. Our goal was to have the salesperson include as many real life examples and as much detail as possible without including private or uncomfortable information. Making the logs as 'real life' as possible gives students the best representation of what to expect when they begin their career and also holds their interest.

Design and modification of the website called for the expertise and time of a technical graphics student. Private access account setup by use of student logins and passwords, links to daily logs and information, design of web pages, and creation of online quizzes were all part of the site development. During the pilot semester of fall 1999 a great deal was learned about the challenges of administering an online project for a large group of students during the pilot stages

of the project. With refinements made to the base resources after the pilot semester, the addition of salespeople and general maintenance of the site is relatively easy.

The pilot salesperson was from the animal health industry (Elanco Animal Health). The development of additional web sites are underway and include sales representatives from the food, agricultural seed and chemical, and industrial products industries and should be available fall 2000 semester. The increased selection will allow students and instructors to choose a sales representative more closely related to their field of interest.

Instructors wishing to participate in this project need to contact the authors to establish login procedures. To begin, instructors are asked to send an electronic version of their class roster and a four-digit identification number. From this, usernames and passwords are created for each student.

Detailed instructions are provided for each student about the project. These include an explanation about how to locate the site, how to navigate through the site, and the schedule of the activities on the site. The instructor will receive a PowerPoint display that walks them through the steps of tracking the students online and how to access the student's quiz grades. Technical support from Purdue University staff is available. The project is completely administered by Purdue University staff and thus requires a minimal amount of time and no financial commitment from the local institution.

Features of the Web Site

During the first week students were to log onto the site and read background information about the salesperson, company, and how the sales process works in the company. Information included:

- Background information about the company, its products, and a link to the company website for more detailed information,
- Information about how the sales process works in this industry,
- A biographical sketch and resume of the salesperson, and
- A detailed account of the relocation process for the salesperson in their new territory and a question/answer session describing how the salesperson found their job and got started in their position.

Inclusion of these items was necessary to give students a picture of this salesperson and the industry. This, in turn, made the daily logs much more meaningful for the students who understood the context in which daily activities took place. It also gave students a perspective of what it was like to begin a new sales career, as they consider sales as a career alternative.

Links to:

- [Terri's Welcome](#)
- [Terri's Résumé](#)
- [Terri's Company](#)
Elanco Animal Health
- [Terri's Early Days at Elanco](#)
- [Terri's Job](#)
- [Terri's Daily Log](#)
Click the date to view her posts
- [Home](#)

Terri Tempel
Swine Products Sales Representative for Elanco Animal Health

Welcome to **Sales and Marketing**

Web-Based

This screen print was taken directly from the website. Students follow all the links to learn about the salesperson. To view an online demonstration of this site go to this address:
www.agecon.purdue.edu/staff/downey/instruction/

The daily log postings were made available to the students for three consecutive weeks following the initial week of introductory material. These logs tracked the daily activities of the salesperson. The posts include details about planning daily activities, travel, meeting and building relationships with customers, interaction with supervisors, trials associated with getting

established, and even a detailed look at the companies sales training process and how it built on concepts they had learned in their AgriSelling class in college.

Online quizzes were given twice per week. The purpose of the quizzes was to make sure that students stayed on task and to keep them engaged. These quizzes were designed to be easy, as long as the student had read the information daily. Quizzes were administered and graded automatically using a special function of WebCT and results were made available quickly and easily to the instructor and student. Although various instructors chose to administer the project differently, most students were awarded bonus points based on their quiz performance as an added incentive to stay on task.

During the fifth and final week, via an online bulletin board, over 100 students submitted questions they would like to directly ask of the salesperson. The questions were summarized into a representative set of questions for the salesperson to respond to via a taped phone interview. Responses were then made available to all students via a PowerPoint presentation with embedded streaming audio files at the end of the fifth week.

Since the system is totally administered by Purdue University there is essentially no effort or cost to the local instructor. Additionally, since this is an Internet based system, any instructor or student with Internet access can participate. In the first two semesters, 1,100 students from Purdue University, Texas A&M University, North Dakota State University, University of Arizona, Iowa State University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Cobleskill-New York, and Vincennes University have participated.

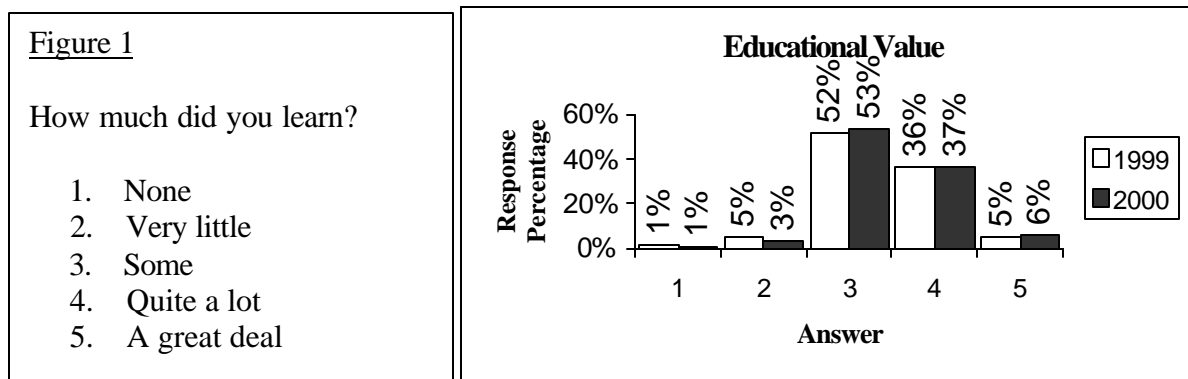
Usage of the Web Site

Fall 1999 was the pilot semester for the web project. To evaluate the content, delivery method, and consider student interests, a detailed online survey was conducted at the close of the

project. Some reoccurring points were brought out in the survey. Some of those points can be seen in the figures below and the reactions to the most frequent points are detailed at the end of this section. Complete results and conclusions from the survey follow.

The response rate for the fall 1999 term was 56 percent, with 225 responses from 400 students. Schools with participating AgriSales classes during the fall term were Purdue University (two divisions), Iowa State University, and Cobleskill – New York. The response rate for spring 2000 was 43 percent, with 304 responses from 700 students. Not all students participated in the project because it was offered for extra credit and not a required activity; thus the low response rate can be mostly attributed to this reason. Schools with participating AgriSales classes during spring 2000 were Purdue University (two divisions), Texas A&M University (three divisions), North Dakota State University, Southern Illinois University, University of Arizona, and Vincennes University.

Responses from the survey were positive. Around forty-five percent of the respondents felt they learned “a lot” or “a great deal” as opposed to only four or five percent who felt they learned “little” or “none” (Figure 1).

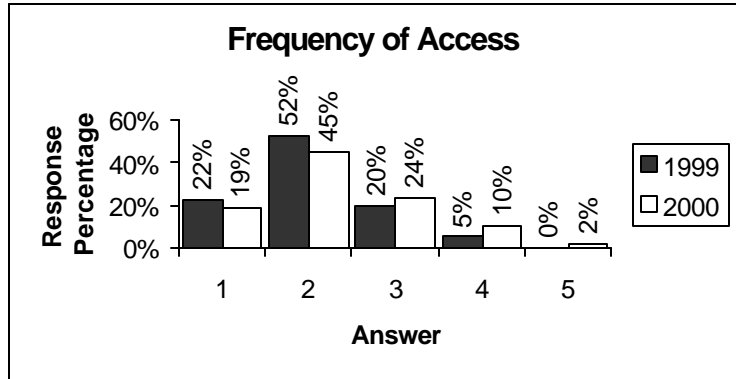


About 90 percent of the students logged on to the system one to three times per week, with the other 10 percent being logged on four or more times per week (Figure 2).

Figure 2

How often did you log onto the web site and follow Terri's posts?

1. About once per week or less
2. About twice per week
3. About three times per week
4. Three or four times per week
5. More than 4 times per week



The daily logs were found to be “somewhat interesting” by about forty percent and “quite interesting” by an additional forty percent of respondents (Figure 3). The background information about the salesperson was found to be “somewhat helpful” by forty percent of respondents and “fairly helpful” by another forty percent of respondents (Figure 4).

Figure 3

How interesting did you find the logs?

1. Not interesting
2. Somewhat interesting
3. Quite interesting
4. Very interesting

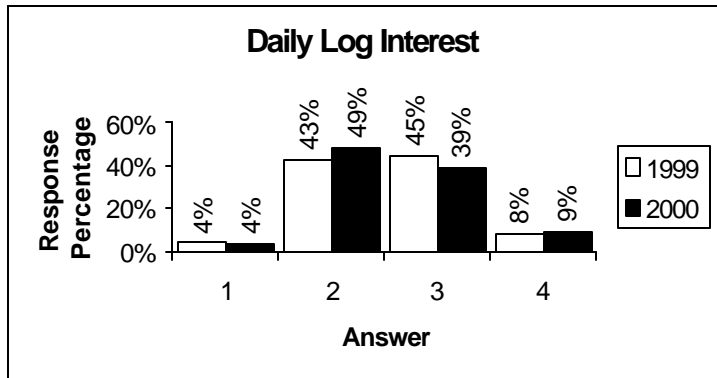
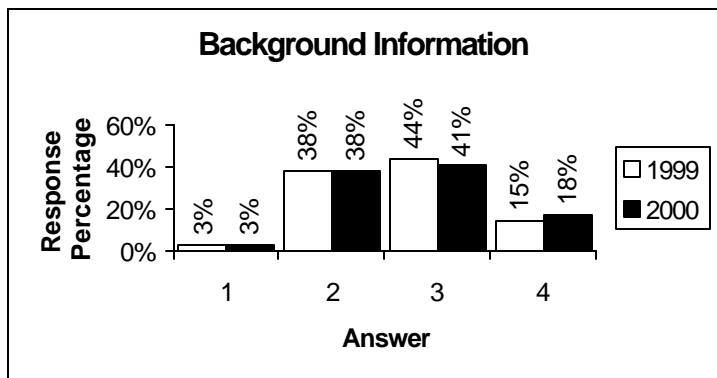


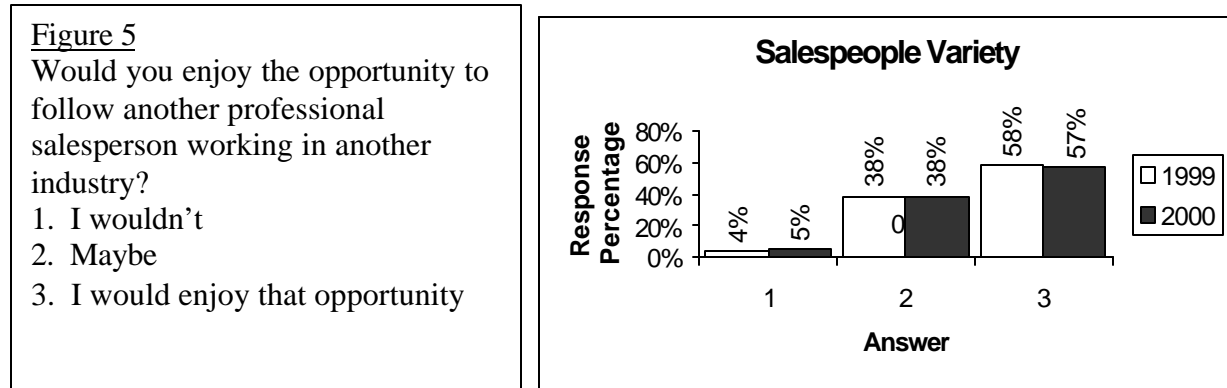
Figure 4

How helpful was the “initial” information (background, Interview with Terri, Resume)?

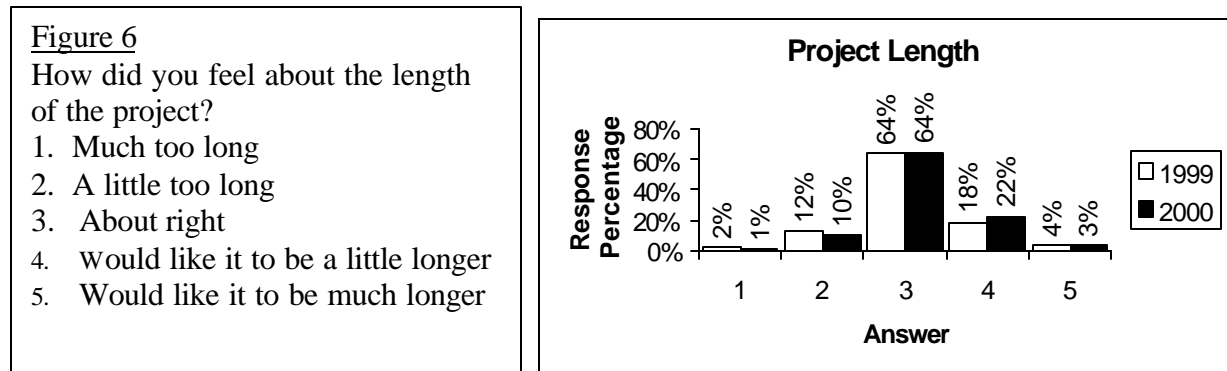
1. Not helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Fairly helpful
4. Very helpful



Nearly sixty percent of the students would have enjoyed the opportunity to follow another salesperson in a different industry (Figure 5). An additional 38 percent said they might like to do so.



Over sixty percent of the students reported that the project was about the right length, twenty percent would have liked it to be a little longer, and about ten percent would have liked for it to be a little shorter (Figure 6)



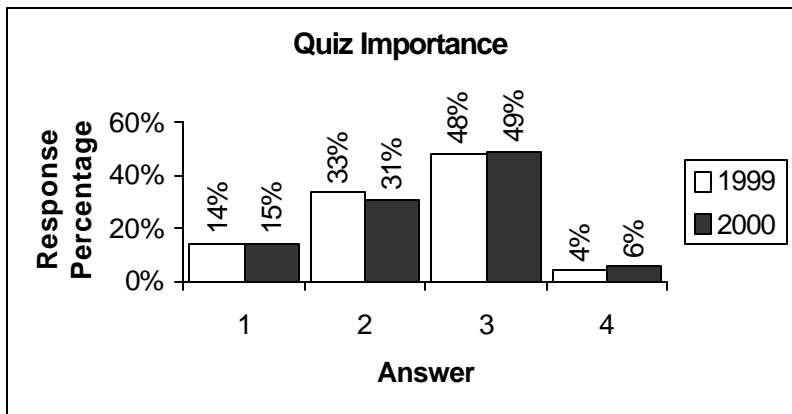
Student comments reinforced the importance of using the quizzes as a reward mechanism and to keep students engaged in the material regularly. Only about five percent indicated that they would likely have read the daily logs without the quiz reinforcement (Figure 7).

Approximately fifty percent said they would follow along when they had time and nearly forty-five percent said they would not likely follow the daily logs closely were it not for the incentives provided by the frequent quizzes.

Figure 7

Would you have followed the daily logs if the quizzes were not required?

1. No
2. Probably not
3. When I had time
4. Yes, regularly



Student Quotes from the survey on items they liked about the web project: Students were encouraged to make comments about the project. Their comments added to our understanding of the value of the project in helping them understand more about professional AgriSelling.

Representative comments included:

- *One thing I liked was the ease of using the web on my time, whenever I wanted, and not a set time in class.*
- *It allowed me to learn more about the profession of sales and how the concepts learned in class really apply to the real world.*
- *I really liked seeing day in and out the life of an actual salesperson. I think that reading the logs will be very helpful in determining if I want to go further with Sales and Marketing.*

After considering the survey results and additional written comments, some small changes were made to the project and its operation. The overwhelming positive response from students to the project and their interest in tracking sales professionals in other agri-industries has provided additional incentive to develop more and different sales people to track. A second suggestion of extending the time window of quiz availability was rejected because it directly contradicts our original purpose for the quiz, which was to keep students engaged in the material

on a regular basis. Finally, the solution to making the learning curve of logging in less steep was to create a link from the login page that took the students to another page that listed the login name for each student alphabetically. While the student's password was not posted here, they were told to use the four digit numbering convention described in class by their instructor for login purposes. This allows the students to look up their login name, but still keeps access restricted to those without knowledge of their password. Initial login difficulty was not a problem during the Spring 2000 project run.

The results obtained from the online survey closely matched our expectations. Overall students liked the project, learned quite a lot, would not have followed the project without quiz reinforcement, and would like to be able to choose among different industries to follow. The responses from both semesters are shown to be very similar with the use of a paired t-test. The results of the paired t-test for all questions considered indicated no significant statistical differences in the data sets.

Digitized Sales Video Clip

A series of digitized sales video clips were developed that can be easily inserted into existing PowerPoint Lectures or used with the PowerPoint Lectures developed here at Purdue University. The video clips allow an instructor to recapture the attention of students during a long lecture and they provide supporting perspectives on sales techniques and the AgriSelling profession.

Development of the Digitized Sales Clips

The video clips were developed, categorized, and are available in a Clip Library CD set. The clips in the Library were compiled from interviews with seventeen food and AgriSales people. Instructors can choose which clips best fit into their lecture material and can thus

enhance their lectures using the combination of the PowerPoint Visuals (described below) and the clips in the library. A list of participants and the companies they represent, as well as subject matter of the clips are presented in Table 1.

As part of the pilot project, several copies of the PowerPoint Presentations and Clip Libraries have been sent out to college AgriSales instructors around the country. Responses back from those who have received and used the materials are positive. Instructors like the ease of use and the flexibility provided with both of these materials.

Developing the video clips began by taping interviews with the seventeen salespeople from different companies (listed in Table 1). The interviews were then digitized and edited into short clips (most between 30 seconds and three minutes in length). These clips were then organized into a library and made available on two CDs. Instructors can then easily copy the clips that they believe will be useful in their classroom and play them directly or embed them into their own Power Point lectures. Or alternatively, Power Point lectures on a wide variety of AgriSelling concepts and tools with appropriate video clips already embedded are also available to AgriSelling instructors.

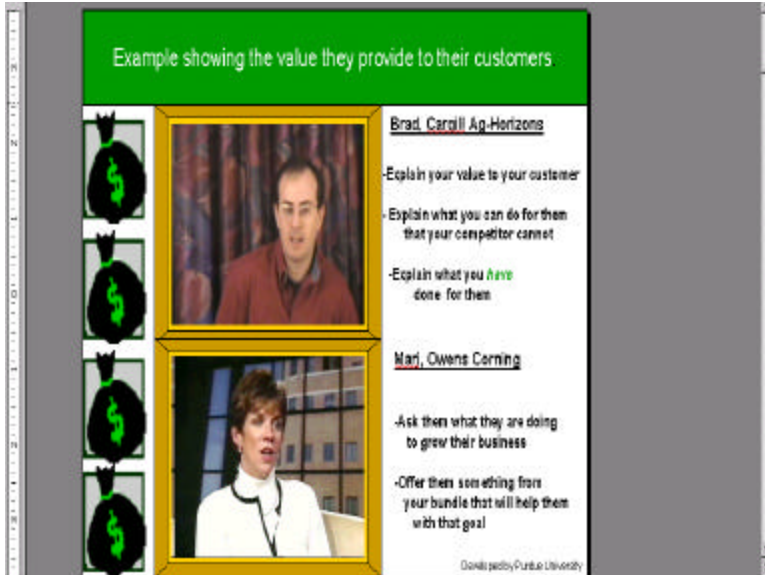
A series of questions for the salesperson were developed before the interview took place. The questions were formulated by researching AgriSales instructional materials and finding the topic areas where salespeople could add expertise. Each interview began by having them describe their job and how they started in their position. The question sequence would then walk the salesperson through the steps of a typical sales call. Questions about sales in general, dealing with difficult customers, and advice for new salespeople were also posed. The best answers received from a salesperson were typically in the form of an example or story. Students seemed to grasp a real-world example of a situation more clearly than if given a theoretical explanation.

The combination of theory from the instructor and 'real life' examples from the salesperson proved to be an effective learning tool.

The requirements for use of these materials include the ability to play the multimedia clips. The user's computer system must be equipped with a sound card, speaker system for sound amplification, and a Multimedia Player (Windows Media Player, Real Player, etc.). It is also recommended to use at least Windows 98 and Office 97 for PowerPoint displays. The ability to clearly hear and understand the audio is critical to the successful use of the materials. In most cases this will mean connecting the computer into a sound system or attaching external speakers. Fortunately, many campuses now have classrooms that are capable of utilizing multimedia materials. Instructions for inserting and using clips or customizing presentations are included with the CD's.

Features of the Digitized Sales Clips

The PowerPoint visuals with embedded video clips were employed in two AgriSales classes at Purdue during the fall semester of 1999. The clips were strategically placed within PowerPoint Presentations for all lectures. The clips added realism and were effective in reinforcing key points and providing supportive explanations to common AgriSelling concepts and techniques. For example, in lectures about how to close a sale, clips were inserted giving examples as to how a professional would close a sale. Some of the clips are actual demonstrations, while others are commentary by AgriSales people talking about a concept and how they use it in with their customers. All of these are designed to reinforce or demonstrate fundamental AgriSelling concepts and techniques commonly taught in AgriSelling classes. A description of the content of the PowerPoint Visuals can be found in Table 2.



This is an example of how the clips can be used in conjunction with a PowerPoint Presentation. Bullet points to the side highlight the important topics covered by the salesperson in the clip. Students enjoy the different perspectives provided and instructors find the materials very beneficial and easy to use.

The 70-clip CD library and a set of PowerPoint lecture visuals are available for any college AgriSales class. Clips and PowerPoints can be used together or separately, as the instructor prefers.

Usage of the Digitized Sales Clips

Students and professors reported that they liked the clips because they break up the lecture and provide a different or supporting perspective on lecture materials. While first experimenting with the clips, we had some difficulty getting the clips to work properly. Video quality, sound quality, computer/software compatibility, and other items posed a definite learning curve to the creation of the final versions of these items.

Students seemed to quickly become accustomed to having the video clips as part of the lectures and became vocal if they were missing. Purdue has two divisions of this class. If students in different sections talked to one another and found that one section got to watch clips and the other did not the students would ask the professor in class if they could go back and view the clips they had missed.

The CD sets of PowerPoint Visuals were released to several instructors across the country and a few in Canada in a “beta test” format. They also have received and are using the PowerPoint Visual Lecture Notes with the embedded video clips. During spring 2000, we released the video clip CD Library. These additional video clips can be used with the

PowerPoint Visuals or stand-alone. These materials are also gaining popularity among the AgriSales classes across the country. Growth in the clip library database and expanded use in different schools is expected to continue.

Summary and Conclusions

Courses in AgriSales continue to expand across North America, as agricultural universities respond to industry demands to provide training for professional sales representatives. To date, one struggle for instructors of such courses has been the paucity of instructional materials to supplement available textbooks. The development of a web site that tracks the daily activities of a sales representative new to her career and the series of digitized video clips demonstrating sales techniques provide important support material for instructors of AgriSales courses.

Initial responses from student surveys and instructors who have used these tools are very encouraging. With both tools, the developers have taken care to minimize the costs of usage to faculty members. The web site and CDs are available at no monetary cost, but in addition, with minimal startup or maintenance by the adopting professor. Being able to track the path of a recent graduate provides students with an additional benchmark to determine whether they truly wish to consider a career in sales. Finally, the CDs allow professors to bring the real world to their classroom through a series of interviews designed to correspond to most courses in AgriSales. In short, the tool kit for instructors of AgriSales courses is more complete because of the contributions of the development team, the funding support from the USDA, and the collaboration of professional sales representatives and their companies.

Table 1

Salespeople contributing to the Multimedia Clip Library are available on two CD set. Each clip content category contains several individual clips providing varying perspectives and different techniques on the given topic.

<u>Contributing Salespeople/Companies</u>	<u>Clip Content Categories</u>
Jeff Cole - Dow AgroSciences	Call Preparation, Targeting, and Prospecting
Mike Dennison - Semex UK	Open the Call
Carla Finke - Armour-Swift-Eckrich	Building Rapport and Probing
Melissa Horton - Kraft Foods	Features and Benefits
Marj Humiston - Yellow Jacket Insulation	Objections
Bob Kozlowski - Agway Ag-Products	Buying Signals
Brad Knuth - Cargill Ag-Horizons	Close the Call
Gene Manhire - Diamond Walnut	Follow Up
Dan Marriner - Green Acres Genetics -UK	Opinion leaders and testimonials
Paul Nobbe - Laura's Lean Beef	Value and expectations
Bruce Norton – Sunsweet	Sales General
Joe Palmer - Agway Ag-Products	Miscellaneous
Dave Parker - Agribusiness Group	
Mark Pickett - M&M Mars	
Tim Ryan - Hormel Foods	
Kevin Severns – Sunkist	
Bob Weller - Agway Ag-Products	

Table 2

Content of AgriSelling Lecture Visuals included on two CD set. Visuals are presented in PowerPoint and include embedded Multimedia Sales Clips.

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Title/Subject Matter</u>
1	What is Selling
2	The Selling Profession
3	Rewards of an AgriSelling Career
4	Why People Buy
5	How People Buy
6	Customers Buy Value
7	The Marketing System
8	Selling with a Strategy
9	Prospecting
10	Planning and Organizing
11	Opening the Call and Building Rapport
12	Identifying Customer Needs and Wants
13	Presenting Your Value
14	Dealing with Resistance
15	Closing the Sale
16	Creating Customer Satisfaction