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12-12-2013

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### Recommended Citation

USU Jon M. Huntsman School of Business and Eaton, Steve, "USU "Sales Jedi" Enter State-Wide Competition and Leave With Top Prizes" (2013). *Jon M. Huntsman School of Business News Collection*. 46.

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# USU "Sales Jedi" Enter State-Wide Competition and Leave With Top Prizes

By Steve Eaton



When the Utah State University students walked into the room for the competition, the judges had no idea they were dealing with Aggie "Sales Jedi."

All they knew is that Utah Valley University had invited the best sales students from colleges around the state to a competition where they would be tested in high-pressure, role-play situations that one student said were like doing sales pitches "on steroids" because they were expected to close a sale in under 10 minutes.

When the First Annual Utah Valley University American Marketing Association Intercollegiate Sales Idol Competition was over, USU students had taken first and second place, and won an honorable mention, claiming three out of the top six spots.

The students were all "Sales Jedi" because Sterling Bone, assistant professor of marketing, had dubbed them so for successfully completing his strategic sales management course. He says they are "Sales Jedi" because they have "used the truths of selling to eliminate the dark side, and restore trust and order to the universe." Dr. Bone teaches the students about integrity in sales and urges them to hold themselves to high standards while genuinely trying to meet the needs of their customers.

The competition was the idea of some UVU professors who used to work at Brigham Young University with Dr. Bone where he had set up a similar competition before coming to USU. This first competition drew students from UVU, USU, and Brigham Young University.

"We wanted to create an intercollegiate competition where each school could pick its best, brightest, and finest sales professionals, and give them the opportunity to compete with other schools across Utah," he said.

Half of the students took on the role as sales professionals for Property Solutions, a company that is a leader in cloud-based property management software, and the other students represented Qualtrics, a firm that helps its clients gather "real time insights" through its cloud-based survey software. Their job was to sell that company's product to someone who was pretending to be an interested customer.

Bluffing and making up information about the companies they were representing, however, would have been a bad strategy because the people pretending to be interested buyers were employees of Property Solutions or Qualtrics. They were there, in part, in hopes of discovering new talent they could hire, Dr. Bone said. Each buyer was accompanied by another person who was to observe and judge the presentations.



After the first round of sales calls, where students were expected to introduce the company, discover the buyer's needs, present a compelling product demonstration, handle an objection, and close the sale in under 10 minutes, six people were selected to go on to the finals. For the final round of the competition they had to again make a sales presentation, only this time it was before twelve judges and in front of a crowd of their competitors.

Tom Goldhardt, a senior majoring in marketing, took first place and earned a \$1,000 cash prize. Second place went to Cache McKinley, a senior majoring in business administration, who earned \$500. An honorable mention and a \$50 prize went to Jason Porter, a junior majoring in business administration. The students were selected from a larger pool of USU students who had hoped to participate. The final team also included Bree Arnold, a junior majoring in marketing, Daryn Frischknecht, a senior majoring in marketing, Michael Gallacher, a senior majoring in marketing, Amy Nelson, a senior majoring in public relations, and David Whitaker, a senior majoring in marketing.

"Our goal was to be the most winning team of all schools represented at the competition," Dr. Bone said, "and we by far surpassed that."

All the competitors were given more than a month to research and prepare for the competition. Jason said he researched the name of one of the company's real clients and made up a business card with her name on it and passed that card to the buyer as someone he could contact to hear from a happy Property Solution's customer. It was an extra-mile preparation move that seemed to surprise and impress the judges, he said.

Tom made his presentation as a Qualtrics sales professional but had the added advantage of having used Qualtrics software at USU and as an intern on two different jobs.

Dr. Bone, who was able to hear the judges deliberate, said they were impressed the students had gone to such great lengths to understand the products and services they would be selling.

"I was proud to be the faculty coach and advisor to this team and to see them succeed and thrive," he said. "They took what they've learned in class, what they've learned in their internships, what they've learned in their experiences here at Utah State, and they demonstrated that knowledge in a very competitive, real-world format," he said.

He said a sales manager from a global pharmaceutical company flew in to see the competition and spoke with Dr. Bone about how impressed he was with the USU talent. A primary goal of the competition was to give the students a chance to network and showcase their abilities with potential employers.

Mike said that he benefited from hearing the feedback from the judges on his presentation. They told him that once he identified a need he should have dug deeper to find ways he could fulfill that need.

"That was really useful to have that feedback because otherwise you'd almost be wasting your time if you didn't find out what you could have done better," he said.

While the students had all had opportunities to role-play sales scenarios in Dr. Bone's class, they said that to make a pitch in such an intense, competitive environment offered them experience they had not before had.

"I think what makes an Aggie Sales Jedi, distinct from other Sales Jedi that I have worked with is their work ethic, their commitment, and the drive they have to be the best that they can be," Dr. Bone said.