

“We get to see them in a selling situation. That’s an advantage.”

How Future Sales Leaders Compete

Sales students flock to the Russ Berrie Institute National Sales Challenge

It could be called the Olympics of selling.

In a large-windowed room at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ, 49 sales, marketing, and business students from 18 colleges and universities around the country congregate, ready to strut their sales stuff.

From wall to wall, there are small tables where representatives from such companies as Enterprise, DHL, McKesson Pharmaceutical, and Hess are prepared to field two-minute pitches from a well-dressed cadre of soon-to-be sales grads. When the buzzer sounds, lines of hands shoot out for a quick shake, and the self-promotion begins.

If selling actually had an Olympic level competition, it would be the Russ Berrie Institute (RBI) National Sales Challenge (NSC), which was held November 8-10, 2007. William Paterson is home to the Russ Berrie Institute for Professional Sales, named for Russell Berrie, the plush-toy magnate and benefactor of the RBI.

At this inaugural event, which began as a 2006 beta test among William Paterson students, competitors did their best to show off their selling skills.

At the NSC, students participate in three events. Sales Call Role-Play requires students to engage in a 15-minute sales call role-play with a business executive, which is then scored on various criteria including approach, needs identification, objection handling, and close for next appointment. Speed Selling looks much like the ubiquitous speed dating. About two dozen tables are positioned throughout the room. Each

student meets with an executive for two minutes, highlighting reasons why he or she should be hired. Finally, the In-Basket Sales Exercise gives students a taste of the competing demands of daily sales life arriving via email, voicemail, and memoranda. Under deadline pressure, they sort through the information, prioritize the demands, and make decisions.

All of this selling requires a great deal of preparation on the part of both the students – some of whom have been preparing for this event for several weeks – and the sponsoring organizations, who field

Photos from left: **SPEED SELLING:** Clarissa Parkinson, University of San Francisco (left) and Stacy McClung, AT&T. **TABLE TALKS:** Jennifer Santiago (left), Enterprise Rental Car and Daniel Wallberg, Western Carolina University. **AWARDS:** (from left) Dave Reid, Laura DeMers, Josh Schiller, Robert Peterson, and Mike Glowacki.



the sales pitches and engage in role-play exercises. The lineup is impressive, according to Robert M. Peterson, PhD, and chair of the Department of Professional Sales.

If you add up the revenue of all of the 13 sponsors, you have combined revenue of \$280 billion, he says. That is the equivalent of the GNP of the world's 28th largest country – in one room.

Participating students are flown in and given accommodations as part of their entry. Winners are chosen in each of the three competition categories and then ranked overall in the competition. The top four overall students receive prizes like trips and new suits. More important, however, are the opportunities the challenge brings to many of the students: new contacts and interviews with some of the top companies in the country.

NO. 1 OVERALL CHAMPION

Chelsea Biermacher, 22

Western Michigan University

Graduation date: December 2007

Since switching from marketing to Western Michigan University's Business Sales and Marketing program, Chelsea Biermacher has taken selling seriously. In addition to

her coursework, Biermacher has completed three sales internships, the first one at a local health club during her sophomore year. "That was a really good internship because I got to see every part of the sales cycle from prospecting for new business, to signing on the dotted line, to working on relationship building and follow-up."

Biermacher was one of two students

selected to represent Western Michigan University. She prepped for nearly three weeks prior to the competition, meeting with faculty members two to three times a week for critiques. However, some of the scenarios were a bit been-there-done-that for Biermacher, who says that the role-playing scenario was familiar to her, since she has done so much of it in class. She



also says that her time as a waitress contributed to her sales acumen, from up-selling food orders to taking care of customers. Working in a restaurant taught her important lessons about relationship building for repeat business.

Even with five possible interviews lined up, Biermacher says that her heart is in medical device sales. The thought of working with doctors is particularly meaningful to Biermacher, who has a number of family members with health problems. "That has given me the passion to do something with health care and specifically with medical devices that could help save someone's life," she says.

NO. 2 OVERALL CHAMPION AND NO. 1 IN SPEED SELLING

Steven McKinney, 22
University of Toledo

Graduation Date: December 2007

Steven McKinney started his education at the University of Toledo enrolled in the pharmacy program. He had been working hard but was struggling and unhappy. One of the members of his rock band was enrolled in the sales program at the university. "I would go to class stressed out and

angry. He always seemed to like his classes. He sold me on the program and I decided to switch my major," says McKinney.

Since then, McKinney has been racking up experience. RBI's NSC was his fourth sales competition, with a track record of two wins and two second-place spots. He is vice president of human resources of Pi Sigma Epsilon, a professional fraternity in marketing, sales management, and selling. All of this, he says, helped him in the competition, for which he began prepping six weeks prior.

Of course, for McKinney, the pressure was a bit less intense than it was for the other participants. He had already landed a job in industrial outside sales with 3M and was ready to start shortly after graduation. However, it was a job he also got through selling himself.

"After I transferred from pharmacy school, I didn't really have real-world sales experience. I met with the recruiter, and he said, 'I don't think you really want this job. I don't think sales is for you,'" McKinney recalls.

After that, when McKinney saw the recruiter, he approached him and updated him on his latest successes – sales competition wins and being elected to the sales

and marketing professional fraternity. Eventually, he won the recruiter's respect – and a job with the company immediately after graduation.

NO. 3 OVERALL CHAMPION AND NO. 1 SALES ROLE-PLAY CHAMPION

Mike Glowacki

William Paterson University

Graduation Date: December 2007

When Mike Glowacki was in high school, his family had a garage sale that was turning out to be a dud. Traffic was slow and sales were sluggish. So Glowacki put a traffic cone on his head and donned a reflective vest that belonged to his father and began directing traffic toward the sale. Traffic picked up. Sales were brisk. And Glowacki negotiated with his mother for a cut of the proceeds.

Still, when he decided to make sales his major, making the change from finance in 2006, his mother wasn't thrilled. "She was in real estate sales and she was dealing with hot and cold markets all the time. She wanted something more steady for me. But, eventually, she saw my passion and came around," he says.

Glowacki believes that his success in the role-play competition was because he wouldn't let the client off the hook. "He was trying not to commit to anything and to stall. I pride myself on being a closer and getting results. I don't want to go to meetings to hang out. I want to have some sort of business result. I nailed it because I was actually able to close," he says.

His sales acumen landed him two prospective interviews before the conference had ended. He is weighing his options, speaking with companies such as DHL and News America, among others. "Getting that face time with large companies is so important," he says. "It really lets you know where you stand."

NO. 4 OVERALL CHAMPION

Steven Harvey, 21

University of Toledo

Graduation Date: May 2008

When he played high school football, Steven Harvey admits that he broke a few bones. "It seemed like I was always on crutches, and always being on crutches sucks, so you want to learn how to stay off them," he says. It's a challenge he equates to selling, where salespeople have to constantly overcome the challenges of the job.

Harvey plotted out his sales career when

sponsorship

HOW SPONSORS WIN

Sixteen companies signed on to sponsor the Russ Berrie Institute National Sales Challenge (NSC). Sponsors got their obligatory plugs in printed matter and on banners at the event. But, more important, they got the opportunity to meet the students and watch them in action. That, says Brian Ferreira, vice-president of sales for McKesson Pharmaceutical, is valuable.

"Many of these selling programs are quite young. I think you'll start to see more companies looking at the students who come out of these programs, because they're prepared for selling. So it benefits us [McKesson] to be here and to be involved with programs like this to meet the students and introduce them to our company. We get to see them in a selling situation. That's an advantage," says Ferreira.

AT&T had never sponsored an event like the NSC before, but Jeremy Tudor, the company director of emerging sales professionals and internship programs, is quite sure they will do so again. Tudor and his team walked away from the day with 18 prospective candidates. Considering that the company will need between 50 and 100 sales representatives over the next 12 months, he says that it's a very worthwhile investment of time. "This one opened our eyes. By doing this, AT&T is reinventing ourselves in the recruitment area," he says, stating that he would ordinarily spend much more time and resources recruiting 18 candidates by other methods.

For Pam Webster, corporate recruiting manager of Enterprise, the benefit lies in meeting not just the students, but the teachers as well. "The professor provides an opportunity for Enterprise to build a relationship with the school. The students will graduate, and we'll move on to students from the next class. The professors will be there year after year and are an important connection to the students," she says.

The 13 sponsors represent a combined revenue of \$280 billion.

he was in high school, participating in DECA, the international association of sales and marketing students in high school and college. He found through his participation there that he was self-motivated and could take rejection. He also had a background in retail sales from working at Sears and Best Buy. So, he chose the University of Toledo, which featured one of only three sales programs in the country at the time, he says.

He credits his team sports background with giving him a competitive streak that makes it hard for him to accept no for an answer. "If you ever get a 'no,' you have to try that much harder to get a 'yes.' Once you get a 'yes,' it's not over. You have to get another 'yes,'" he says.

His NSC experience led to at least two possible interviews with prospective employers. For now, he's taking his own advice about being persistent, networking, applying for another sales competi-

tion, and getting prospective employers to say, 'yes' to his pitch for employment.

WINNER, IN-BASKET EXERCISE

*Courtney Milligan, 21
University of New Orleans
Graduation Date: 2008*

The fact that Courtney Milligan manages school, extra-curricular activities, a job, and membership in a sorority – not to mention a large, close-knit family which owns a business in which she periodically takes part – makes her someone who's used to working with competing demands. So, it's probably no surprise that she aced the In-Basket Exercise portion of the event, where she was given a list of competing demands and asked to prioritize them under time pressure.

"I've been active my entire life," she says. "I like to be challenged. You had to really look at what mattered to the work and make choices based on that."

Milligan also credits her theater background, which included training at the School for Arts, with helping smooth out some of her nervousness during the competition. That helped her better focus on the tasks at hand. Another seemingly unlikely advantage is her membership in Chi Omega sorority, where the "rush" process – which consists of a series of meetings with prospective members, educating them about and selling them on the sorority – is similar to selling a product or service, she says.

While the interview potential of prospective employers from the event is still being examined, Milligan has no doubt that she'll have a job lined up when she graduates in 2008. While she loves sales, she also wants to love the company for which she works so that she can become part of the recruiting effort. "I want to be the person going to the next competitions and letting students know how great my company is," she says.

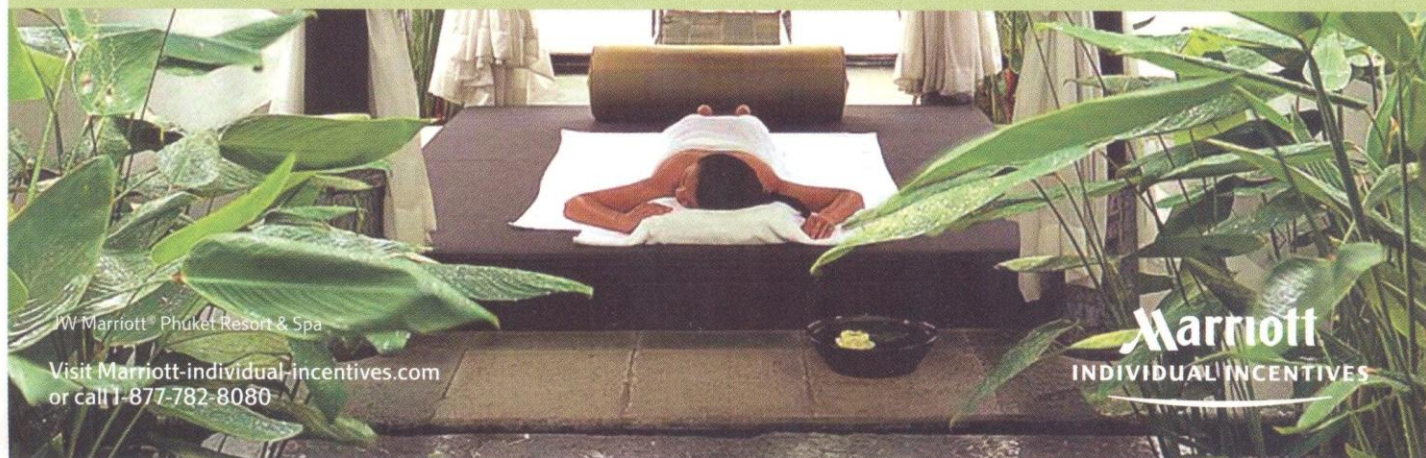
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