

CASE STUDY

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## How to Create & Use an Audio Testimonial Library to Shorten Your Sales Cycle

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### SUMMARY:

Last year, 67% of surveyed b-to-b marketers said their average cycle was six months or less. Now the tide has turned, and 55% of surveyed b-to-b marketers say their average cycle is \*more\* than six months.

More than ever, your reps need every possible tool to turn prospects into customers.

Our new Case Study reveals how one enterprise software company recently created an audio library of client interviews to help move prospects off the fence.

(Note: Although this story is about a marketer at a large publicly traded company, we suspect marketers for almost any size company can use this tactic without breaking the budget:)

### CHALLENGE

When Tami Andrews joined NetIQ (NASDAQ: NTIQ) in late December 2003, the marketing and sales department offices were empty.

"It was a week and a half before Christmas and it was like a graveyard up here. There was no one for sales to call; all deals that were going to close had closed by December 15th."

Sitting alone in her office, Andrews used these two weeks of quiet time to map an attack plan for the coming year. Her job, Customer Excellence Marketing Manager in charge of all marcom testimonials, Case Studies and references, was new both to her and to the company.

"Oh my gosh, before I started it was every man for himself," she explains. "Everyone had their own ways of securing references. There was no centralized program to capture or administer them."

The situation was a painful one for NetIQ's 300-strong field sales force, who were too busy focusing on selling to spend time gathering marketing collateral.

"Their job is to provide customer references when it becomes important to a prospect in the sales cycle. I get emails and frantic voicemails sometimes at 3m or 4am," notes Andrews. "They're getting ready to meet with a potential customer at 8am that morning and they need references readily available to them."

Andrews had to come up with a plan, not only to get great customer references, but to organize and house them so any sales rep could find what he or she needed super-quickly and easily.

### CAMPAIGN

In addition to traditional client case studies and press releases, Andrews

wanted to give the sales team collateral with far more impact than the written word... voices.

As the world-famous Clue Train Manifesto says, "Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked."

#### Step #1. Gather potential client reference-sources

Andrews set about inveigling everyone in the sales department to help her figure out which clients might provide viable references. "We give recognition that our sales reps own those accounts. Their relationship is very important to maintain and preserve. I never go outside of them -- always go through them."

She recognized that reps were too busy to spend a lot of time helping her. So, she did her best to collar people cheerfully in hallways, and to attend every conceivable internal sales meeting in hopes she could get in a one minute mention for the program.

Although she reported to the Director of Corporate Communications in the PR department, "I'm very tightly aligned with sales VPs, marketing VPs, and program VPs. They are touching their folks to make them aware this program exists."

When a possible client was located, next she checked with the service department to discover if that client had any outstanding concerns she should know about. Then the idea of serving as a reference was pitched to the client.

Key -- Andrews pre-empted many of the typical reasons why clients might say no to the idea. For example, the reference interviews would only take two hours of their time maximum, and be canned digitally for future use, so the client wouldn't be bothered with reference requests constantly.

The recordings would not be available to the general public, but only to selected prospects and analysts seriously considering NetIQ's products. Plus, clients could give a list of competitors and peers they preferred not hear their recorded interview. And they were asked to speak honestly, not faux-glowingly, about their real experiences with the company. Plus, their interview could be removed from the library at any time, quickly at their command.

#### Step #2. Use a 3rd party interviewer

Clients have a hard time telling their vendors what they really think, so Andrews hired in a third party interview team who were themselves all former IT sales reps.

Clients received questions ahead of time. The questions covered everything that a prospect might ask if they got that client on the phone directly. So they didn't ask, "Isn't this wonderful?" but instead asked, "Tell me about your implementation process..."

And, they urged the client to be as candid as possible. The only way a pre-recorded reference system will work is if your prospects truly feel they are getting the "real thing" -- insider information and honesty they'd normally only expect to get by making the reference calls themselves. If the end-product wasn't palpably candid, it would be useless. Prospects would continue to ask reps for "real" reference calls... which are harder to line up in the volume needed.

The team ran a pre-interview with each participating client for about 30-45 minutes to go over the questions. Then a day or two later they did the real call, digitally recording the interview.

Next they did some light editing, just to take out any coughs and "um"s. No 'real' content was removed.

The team also asked clients for a digital snapshot of themselves as well. The best snapshots were like the best audio interviews -- realistic instead of perfect and glossy. "We get lots of pictures of people standing next to putty grey walls with a little shadow on their heads."

If the client was camera-shy, the team substituted that client's company logo.

About every 120 days, the interview team briefly re-contacted interviewed clients to discover if anything had changed on their end that NetIQ prospects should know about. If the client, for example, had upgraded to newer NetIQ tech, the interviewers might ask a few supplemental questions. If the client had left his or her job, the interviewer would retire the interview.

### Step #3. Create an easy-to-use online audio library

As the interviews and snapshots were gathered, Andrews had them placed in a private online library for her sales reps to use. At first she considered using NetIQ's main marketing database system, but "it's just massive, by the nature of what it does."

Andrews needed an interface that was so obvious to navigate that sales reps could figure it out quickly, without days of training or the headaches of learning a fancy database system. The new library could be searched in ways sales reps prefer - by industry vertical, geography, and NetIQ product deployed.

Key -- no client or prospect could search this library. It was strictly private. If a sales rep wanted to share an audio file with a prospect, they simply clicked a button to generate an email to that prospect containing a unique click link to just the file in question. The link went dead automatically after 30 days to preserve privacy.

Although most audio interviews were 30-45 minutes long, nobody had to sit through irrelevant content to get to the good stuff. Instead the prospect saw a menu of questions from the interview and they could click on whichever bits they were most interested in.

Sales reps would get feedback reports not only on which prospects listened to the audio, but also which specific questions these execs chose to listen to. (Very useful stuff to predict upcoming sales objections.)

Sometimes text content is more useful than audio, so the prospect also could download a PDF transcript of the interview.

### Step #4. Relentlessly promote it internally

Once the library launched, Andrews stepped up her internal promotional activities, ceaselessly reminding everyone in sales, PR and marketing that the database existed.

### Step #5. Generate quarterly ROI measurement reports

"If you can't show ROI there's no benefit," says Andrews. Every quarter she created a report for upper management that cross-referenced recently closed sales with touches from the interviews. If you can say X% of the new business generated this quarter used this tool before they closed, you've pretty much nailed your budget for the next year.

## RESULTS

Starting with zero client references in December 2003, Andrews was able to build a library of 200 audio references in just 20 months. Sales reps love it, customers love it, industry analysts love it, and prospects love it. Everyone is saving time, saving effort, and giving and getting the honest

information they need.

Although Andrews could not release specific data on her own use, we were able to get aggregate numbers across similar audio reference libraries used by six different business technology companies:

- o Average times a recorded reference interview is sent out per month: 12
- o The most a recorded reference has been used in a month: 74
- o Invitation link use (invitation sent out, link used to listen to/read interviews): 72%
- o Percent of time a transcript is downloaded as part of a prospect's visit to a reference center: 23%
- o Percent of reference requests satisfied by recorded interviews: 78%

**Useful links related to this article:**

Creative samples - what the audio library looks like, along with a sample audio interview snippet and transcript:  
<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/netiq/study.html>

Point of Reference - the third party audio interviewing firm that created and hosts the library for NetIQ:  
<http://www.point-of-reference.com>

MarketingSherpa's IT Marketing Benchmark Guide (the source of the sales cycle data cited in the summary of this Case Study):  
<http://www.sherpastore.com/c/a.pl?1148 p.cfm/2150>

Cluetrain Manifesto:  
<http://www.cluetrain.com>

NetIQ:  
<http://www.netiq.com>