

How to Gamify Sales Certification

The Complete Competition Playbook



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Overcome "the forgetting curve" with engaging competitions

It's a given that sales teams need regular certification, to make sure that they know your company's brand messaging, your value proposition, and all the material related to your solution.

But certification is so much easier said than achieved. Sellers are never enthusiastic about certification programs, to put it mildly. Sales enablement employees are fed up with having to chase sales reps to complete their course, and sales employees resent having to take time away from work for what feels like a box-ticking exercise.

On top of that, even when sales employees complete their certification, you can't be sure that they really know the material. The German psychiatrist Hermann Ebbinghaus coined the phrase "the forgetting curve," following research that revealed that a typical student forgets 75% of new material within 24 hours. But he also found that people remember things much better when they have an emotional connection to them, or when they review them many times.

Of course, just because sales employees know the material, it doesn't mean they have the confidence or ability to hold an effective sales conversation in real life. The good news is that gamification can make a real difference. Role playing games and competitive challenges that require people to use the information in different ways mean that sales employees go over the same material multiple times, practice sales pitches, and have an exciting experience that makes all the material far more memorable.

There's a whole range of different types of gamification that you can use to elevate your sales certification courses, including scoring points, completing successive levels, and solving puzzles.

In this ebook, we're going to walk you through, step-by-step, how to run competitions that you can roll out to certify your entire sales team using either simulated or one-on-one role plays.



Stage 1:

Planning a gamified sales certification program

1. SET YOUR GOALS

Setting goals for your sales certification competition is always the first step. Your goals will be informed by your company's sales strategy, but keep them focused. It's best to choose something very specific, like a single message that you're trying to promote, a new product, version, or feature, or some special offer.

Your learning objective has to be measurable, otherwise there'll be no way to score participants' progress or relative abilities. Consider how long you want your salespeople to spend on the experience, how long managers should spend, and what is your ideal outcome.



"Set specific and measurable goals for your certification competition."



2. DEFINE WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

Next, you'll need to decide who's taking part in the competition. Ideally, you should use a topic that's relevant to all your sales teams, from SDRs to sales engineers to account executives, even if they're all at slightly different levels.

You need at least 50-100 participants to keep the challenge interesting and enable you to divide everyone into teams. There's no real maximum; even a sales force that's several thousand strong can enjoy a successful certification competition, you just need to split them up into enough small teams.

Typically, we recommend enabling people who work together as a team to also compete as a team, since besides being fun, it can also be a fantastic bonding experience.



3. SET YOUR TIMING

Timing is everything, even for sales gamification. It's great to tie your sales certification challenge to a special event, like a product launch, your SKO, or a big industry event. Make sure you have clear start and end times, so that people know how to plan their participation, and publicize them hard so no one can claim that they didn't know about it.



Your sellers need enough time to learn the material, participate in the challenge, and come back to improve their scores. In our experience, 1.5-2 weeks is ideal for AI-driven simulations since that's plenty of time to fit in at least one 30-minute session. If you are doing live role plays, you may need to allot more time for the competition, depending on how many people you have available to play the customer side of the role play and then score the participant according to your scoring guidelines.

1.5 - 2 weeks is an ideal contest length for AI-driven simulations.



4. PREPARE YOUR LEARNING MATERIALS

Accessible learning materials are key for every challenge, otherwise your sellers won't know how to master the material in the first place. Organize all your brochures, videos, and other training content in a single place, like your LMS, so that it's easy to find.

When it comes to training videos, you should use videos showing your top sellers engaged in real dialogue or realistic role plays, not just reciting monologues learned by rote. Your salespeople need to know what "good" looks like before they're able to emulate it.

5. PICK AN INCENTIVE

Of course, learning is its own reward, but you'll transform the whole competition when you offer an enticing prize for the winners. Think of something that will get everyone buzzing and really motivate even the laggards to join in, whether it's a box of Omaha steaks, the latest gadget, or a trip for two to the Seychelles.





6. CHOOSE YOUR COMPETITION MEDIUM

Now you need to build the nuts and bolts of the competition itself. There are a number of different approaches you could take to the format of your sales competition, but whatever you choose, make sure that it's both scalable and realistic.

You want something that you can reasonably roll out to a sales force of hundreds or thousands of people; can you really require your sales managers to review that many recorded pitches before the competition ends?

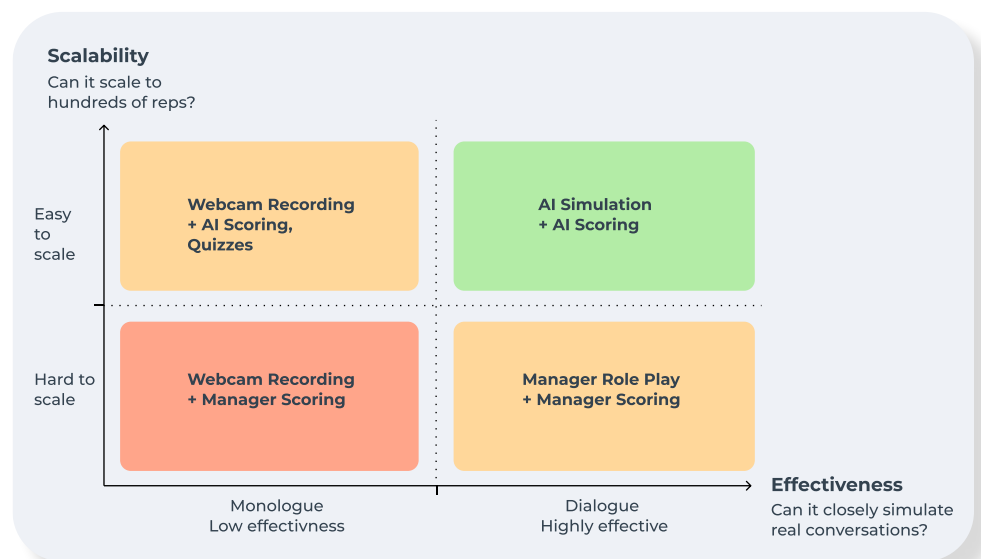
Successful selling is the art of conversation, not of completing quizzes or checking boxes. Asking and responding to questions, listening for pain points, and overcoming objections are the real skills you need sales employees to acquire, and that only comes through hard practice.

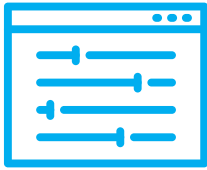
Here are some of the options:

- **Webcam practice.** This forces sales employees to practice speaking, but there's no one throwing them tough questions or even listening to their pitch, plus it's boring and time consuming.
- **Quizzes.** These are the easiest ways to check if sales reps have mastered the material, but they don't reveal if the participant can hold a conversation. They also lack the emotional punch of a live conversation, meaning even if reps ace the quiz, they still might miss key points in their next live client call.
- **Live, one-on-one role play.** This way, participants have to hold a conversation and experience simulated interactions, but it's difficult for sales reps to grade each other objectively or consistently, and hard to monitor from the outside.
- **AI simulated role play.** AI simulations are the closest you can get to a real life sales conversation, plus the AI engine is totally objective, so scoring is consistent and trustworthy. The platform can deliver instant feedback that helps participants improve.

Scalability - effectiveness matrix

This scalability effectiveness matrix helps you understand the pros and cons of different options and choose the one that's best suited to your certification program needs.





7. CHOOSE WHICH TOOLS TO USE

You'll probably enlist your LMS and other training tools that are already part of your toolbox, but you might want to add some new ones too. An AI sales training tool like Second Nature is just what you need for realistic AI sale-scall simulations.

If you are considering purchasing a new tool, check that it can score participants consistently in real time to keep people engaged, that it's easy to use, and that it has built-in gamification tools like leaderboards to generate a sense of excitement.

This table shows how leading certification methods stack up against each other.

	 QUIZ Watch a video & take a quiz	 WEBCAM Webcam recordings to be reviewed & scored by sales managers	 ROLE PLAY 1-on-1 real-time role play sessions with sales manager	 AI SIMULATION AI-driven simulation
Real Life Simulation	✗	✗	✓	✓
Consistent Scoring	✓	✗	✗	✓
Operational Simplicity	✓	✗	✗	✓

Source: Second Nature



8. BUILD YOUR SCORING METHODOLOGY

Consistent scoring is key to successful gamification. If your sales employees don't feel that your scoring system is objective, they'll lose trust in the outcome and all interest in the process. That rules out any human-led scoring system, because people are, by nature, subjective.

Present participants with a scoring methodology in advance, so they'll know how many points they'll earn with each activity or what they need to do to advance to the next level. If sales managers are involved in scoring, you'll need to share a set format and criteria so that it's clear that they aren't awarding points based on their own opinion. It's definitely best to avoid having managers score the teams they manage.

Ultimately, you want a scoring system that encourages representatives to advance their skills and smash their quotas.

Pitch Practice
01 June 2020
Duration: 05:04

Final Score: **85**

- ✓ Your clarity is 90% which is higher than the average!
- ⚠ You used 4 filler words
- ✗ You covered 4/6 topics! Try again!

Recording | Transcript

Start evaluation

Knowledge 95

Proficiency
How well you know your stuff

Style 63

Clarity
How comprehensible your speech is

Pace
How optimal your speaking tempo is

Filler words
Did you say um-s, you know-s, like-s

Sentence length
How straightforward your sentences are

Energy
How confident you sound

Feedback ★★★★★ (3)

Give feedback

Knowledge summary: Topics covered 4/7 Topic covered

✓ Security for multi clouds	00:12
✓ Accounts and assets consolidated visibility	01:32
✓ Company overview	02:50
⚠ Cloud threat prevention	05:10
✗ Automation	—
⚠ Secured development process	—
⚠ Prevent misconfiguration automatically	—

Feedback

Jarrett Cawsey
jarrett.c@aol.com
★★★★★ 5 min ago

This is a good pitch overall. You should work on the part you presented the company overview, because users need that level of comfort and assurance.

Keep up the good work!

Dana Kopřivová
danakopp@aol.co
★★★★★ 1 day ago

I really liked how you presented Security for multi clouds. Will definitely try that myself. Thanks.



9. CREATE INTERNAL ENTHUSIASM

Gamified sales certification still isn't widely known, so you'll probably have to champion the idea to your colleagues and superiors to get them all on board. They might think of it as a waste of time that could be better spent on a quick training course and actual sales calls, or disparage the whole setup as "just a game."

You'll see far better results when the whole organization is interested in the challenge, so get all the stakeholders and managers on board early. Present your plans clearly and concisely, share your reasoning for running this kind of sales certification process, and lay out what you'll need from them at each stage of the challenge.

Hold a pitch meeting where you present the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How, along with the goals you have for this unique certification process.





Stage 2:

Running the gamified competition

1. NOTIFY EVERYBODY ABOUT THE NEW CHALLENGE



Raise excitement about the event by promoting it to all your sales teams, just as you would for any other event. Share all the details of your upcoming challenge - the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of it all - on all your internal communication channels.

If participants have to download new tools or learn how to master new platforms, send the instructions well in advance so that they can troubleshoot any issues before the challenge kicks off.

Here's an example of an internal newsletter announcing a gamified sales certification challenge.



COMPANY NAME
TAGLINE GOES HERE

Dear Team,

We are thrilled to launch an internal competition with Jenny, an AI-driven virtual customer who coaches you and helps you practice your pitch.

Who:
All our sales teams will be competing against each other as teams.

What:
Internal competition to pitch about [product or topic name]_____

When:
[start date/time] - [end date/time]

Where:
You can compete from anywhere in the world!

Why:
Have fun, beat the other teams, and get a chance to win!!

First prize team will win _____

Second prize team _____

Third prize team _____

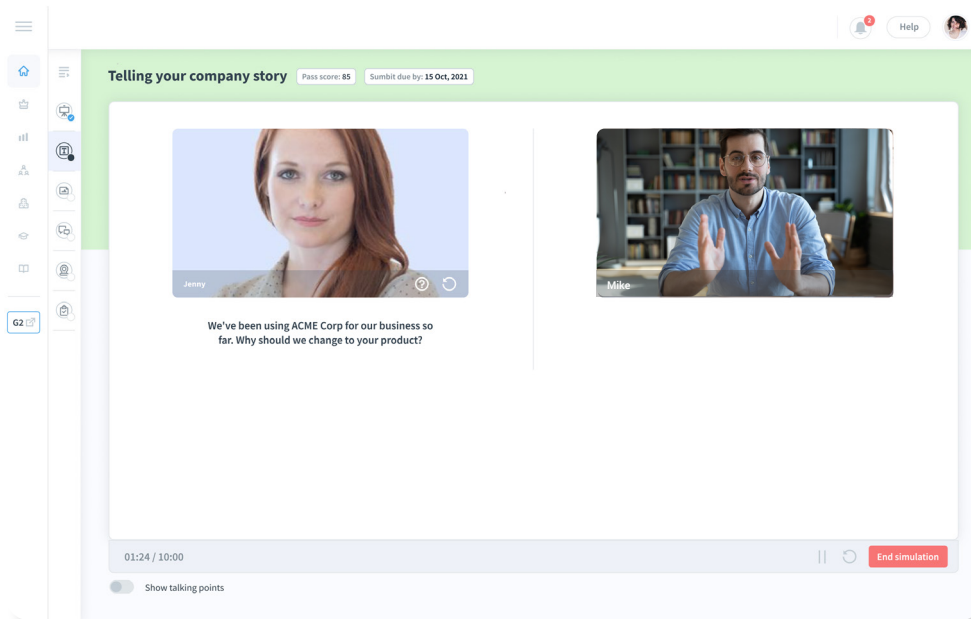
[View full rules of the competition \[link to full rules\]](#)
[Click here to meet Jenny!](#)





2. GIVE PARTICIPANTS TIME TO LEARN A NEW INTERFACE

If your participants will have to use tools and platforms (like Second Nature) that they aren't familiar with, make sure they know what to expect. Share screenshots or short videos that walk them through the new interface, and give them a chance to take the technology for a trial run.



3. COMMUNICATE THE RULES

Everyone needs to know the rules of the competition well before they actually get started. Share the full rules on a webpage and link to it from your internal newsletter announcement about the competition.

The precise rules are up to you, but on the competition list to the right are some of the rules we recommend you include.

COMPETITION RULES

- 1 All sales employees are automatically enrolled in the challenge, including the sales manager.
- 2 Every member of the team has to complete the simulation at least once and receive an overall score of 80.
- 3 Anyone who doesn't participate receives a score of 0, which is counted as part of the team's final score (that means that anyone who refuses to join in is letting the team down!).
- 4 You can practice as many times as you like; we'll only count your highest score.
- 5 The team with the highest average score in each segment is the winning team for their segment.
- 6 The Head of Sales will decide which segment winners are the regional champions, and regional champions will go to the finals.



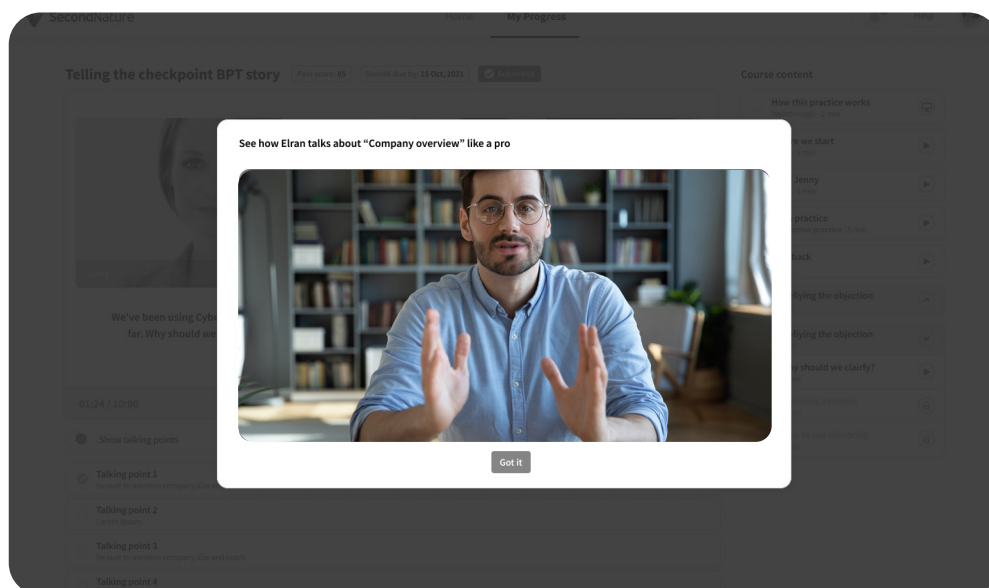
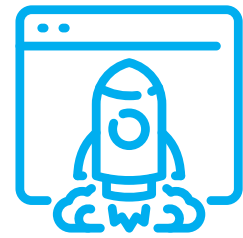
4. LAUNCH THE ACTUAL COMPETITION

Once you've launched the competition, you'll want to keep up communication all the way through. It keeps people excited and encourages them to stay involved. If you notice that anyone hasn't yet logged in, or they've logged in but didn't yet complete a simulated conversation, send them a notification to remind them that they're dragging down their team's score. Nobody wants to ruin it for everyone else.

Set up Slack or whatever internal communication tool you use to enable plenty of cross-team chatter, and capture as much of it as you can so that you can use it to report on the results of the competition.

Remember, the point is to encourage sales employees to practice sales conversations, so, if you are using AI-driven simulations, let people complete the simulation as many times as they like. Offer them real feedback from authentic dialogues, don't just enable a monologue.

Share the best sessions with managers, either through a webcam recording or via your AI-powered solution, and save the outstanding examples to use as encouragement during the competition, at the end to highlight the impact of the experience, and to use for future trainings.

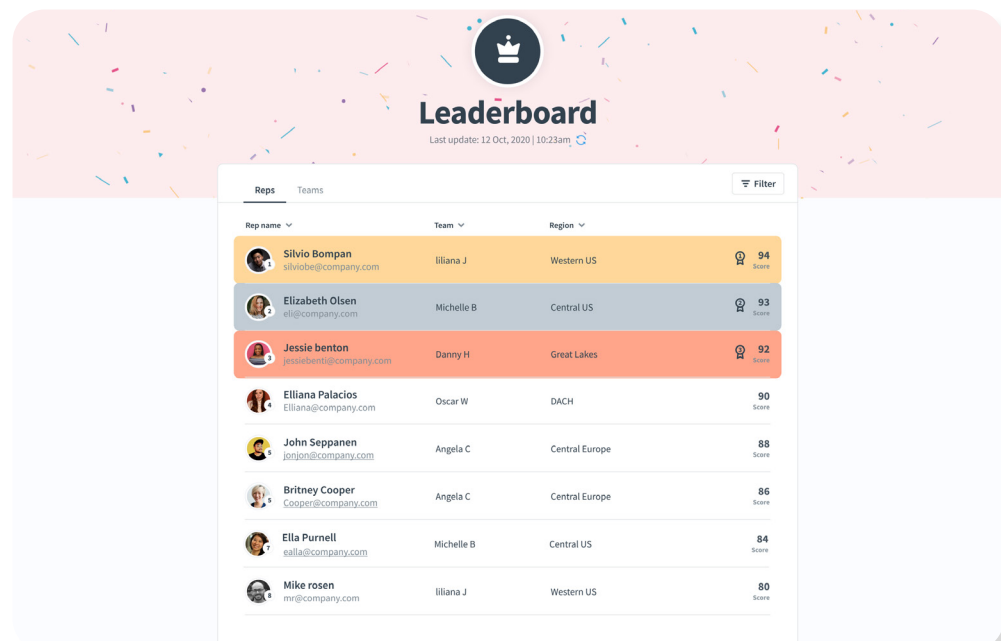




5. KEEP UP THE PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure can be a good thing, especially when it comes to sales certification competitions! Remember, this is a team sport, so you want your teams to be motivated to outperform each other.

Place your leaderboard in a central place, like on the homepage of your internal communications platform, so that everyone can see the latest results and feel the push to raise their team standing.





3. END THE COMPETITION

All good things must come to an end. Everyone should already know the finish time for the competition, because of your pre-challenge communications, but send out reminders the day before it ends, a few hours before it ends, and at the final end point. Make sure that it's quite clear to anyone who logs in after the finish time that the competition is over.



Remind participants about the upcoming end of the competition:

The day before it ends

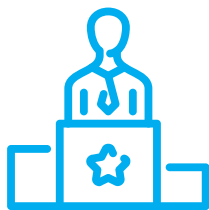
A few hours before it ends

At THE END ★

Competition is over!



You can still practice with Jenny, but scores won't count



4. ANNOUNCE THE WINNERS

Hopefully, everyone took the competition seriously, so don't let them down when you announce the winner. Make a big deal over the winning team and publicize it everywhere; in your email newsletter, on your Zoom chats, on Yammer, Slack, and any other internal communications channels you use.

You might want to have a cool prize-giving ceremony, either in person or online. The more fun and kitschy you make it, the more people will remember it and the more likely they'll be to take part when you do this again.



Stage 3:

After the competition

1. TRACK THE RESULTS

Your sales certification was a fun challenge, but it had a serious goal. You need to gather all your competition data and analyze it to see information like how many of your sales employees participated in the challenge, what the highest and lowest scores were, and how many times people joined the competition.

Compare your metrics with your original goals, and see how close you were to achieving them.



Metric	Goal	Actual
Participation	80%	96%
Minimum score	80	89
NPS	9	10
Deals on pipeline with X product	35% increase	53% increase (from 15 to 22 deals within one quarter)



2. GATHER FEEDBACK

You also want to know how everybody felt about the event, which aspects they loved, which parts could be improved, and what they felt was missing (if anything). This way you'll know whether you want to run another competition in the future and what if anything to change.

In our experience, salespeople love gamified sales certification challenges, but you need to know how your sales teams feel about them.

1★ Please rate your overall experience with this interactive pitch practice



If you use Second Nature, a feedback survey is already embedded in the software. Otherwise, you can easily create a survey using a third party survey tool, or even a simple Google form.



3. NOTE THE LESSONS LEARNED

Since you'll probably want to run a similar competition some time in the future, you should document everything you can about this challenge while it's still fresh in your mind. Take note of what went well, what could be improved, and how and why. Be as detailed as possible, because you'll probably forget some issues by the time you run your next competition.





Your Sales Certification Competition Checklist

STAGE 1 PLANNING





STAGE 2 RUNNING THE COMPETITION

Teach any new tools

Let the participants get familiar with any new tools before using them



Publicize publicize publicize

Generate excitement through emails, meetings, announcements, etc.



Communicate rules

Rules of the game should be clear to all participants so there are no disappointments along the way



Keep communication flowing

Open all your comms channels to keep the energy high



Positive peer pressure

Leaderboards keep everyone engaged



Bring the competition to a close

Give ample warning before you close the gates



Announce the winners

The kitschier and more fun the better

STAGE 3 AFTER THE COMPETITION



Track results

Measure your KPIs

Gather feedback

A simple NPS or other measurement tool can help



Record lessons for the future

Make your life easier for the next competition



ABOUT SECOND NATURE

Second Nature is innovative sales coaching software that lets you scale up your sales coaching, onboarding and certification programs. The SaaS solution provides a “virtual role play partner” that uses conversational AI to have actual discussions with sales reps, score them, and automatically provide personalized coaching. Sellers can use Second Nature to practice on their own and improve, so they can ace every sales call.

Learn more about Second Nature.

<https://secondnature.ai/> | sales@secondnature.ai