



interactive achievement

Q & A with Interactive Achievement CEO, Jonathan Hagmaier

The Renaissance Network Case Study Series

PRESENTED BY:



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~ Jonathan Hagmaier, CEO of Interactive Achievement

The Business—Interactive Achievement

Interactive Achievement was founded by educators in 2006 for the purpose of delivering improved assessment and reporting tools that help enable students and teachers achieve success in the classroom. As a result, IA’s team of educators created the Assessment Management Solution (AMS) and Longitudinal Data Solution (LDS), allowing educators to deliver personalized curriculum and assessments in order to make data-driven decisions to raise student achievement. Interactive Achievement has the most technologically advanced assessment creation and delivery capabilities, offering proven internal and third-party content, allowing educators to deliver assessments that can be personalized or aligned with state longitudinal test standards. IA’s Assessment and Analytics solutions are used in classrooms across 13 U.S. states, including nearly all Virginia public schools.

The Situation

What were the goals of Interactive Achievement and the obstacles in the way prior to engaging with The Renaissance Network (TRN)?

Our goal was to expand our sales significantly outside of Virginia, but we really had no clear direction of how to get there or someone to lead the charge. Recognizing this gap was the easy part. Of course we always think we can do it on our own at first—we had worked with tech headhunters in the past but TRN was the first search firm we engaged with outside of just technology. We never went outside of technology and used a search firm. We started looking and talking to people, we looked internally and throughout our own network. Then you ultimately have to go through a maturing phase and come to the conclusion that if this is so important, why would we not invest the money and time into doing it properly and bring in experts to do it. Once we got over that challenge, it was easy to do. The next challenge was the cost, and you question yourself and wonder why I have to pay that much? Once it makes sense, you get through that mental obstacle. And then the real big shocker is what we had to pay a VP of Technology or a VP of Sales and we really had to get over this because, realistically, that's where the market is at. Lisa (Lisa Sacchetti, CEO of The Renaissance Network) did a wonderful job getting us to understand the market and how much we have to pay in order to find and retain good talent. In other words, you cannot not pay for good talent, if that's what you want.

It's really an interesting dynamic you have to figure out when growing a business. You want a new result but you're not willing to fight the old trend. And then you say to yourself, 'but I want to be in this world over here.' I had a great board of directors, great group of investors, and good people around me. My investors had worked with some good Ed Tech companies who knew of TRN. And we chose Lisa at the end.

What were the goals you were trying to achieve during that time?

The goals we were trying to achieve were pretty basic and simple—from a talent standpoint. Find someone who would culturally fit with us and had grown sales before. We were at about five or six million dollars. We wanted to find someone who would build a team and could grow a company size. It was very important that we found someone who could build a great sales team. You know, there's different types of VP profiles out there. There are the people who can maintain people and others who can build a team. And then there's people that can build a team and maintain growth simultaneously and Lisa really understood that.

What were the stakes at play for Interactive Achievement during that time?

The value for our company was to be able to get out of Virginia, we owned 98% of the market at the time in Virginia with hundred percent recurring Revenue year-over-year. We really had nowhere to go or expand in Virginia. We invested in Lisa and The Renaissance Network and we said to each other very clearly that if we didn't succeed, we would have to lay off half the company and just be a lifestyle company in Virginia. Our gap during that time was that we had no one to lead the sales growth of our company. We didn't have this person in place, we were lacking this for sure. With Lisa and The Renaissance Network, their ability to really work closely with us was a very big factor in our success and is a testament to their boutique operation and environment. We felt she and the team really understood us—she was the underdog like we were, she fought through all the obstacles that came up. Ultimately, the ROI was huge for us in comparison to what was at stake. What was at stake for us was a.) do we become a lifestyle company which was okay, nothing wrong with that or b.) do we grow and expand 30% above capacity, and the one piece we were missing was a VP of sales.

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~ Jonathan Hagmaier, CEO of Interactive Achievement

What was your criteria when looking for a search partner?

So, truthfully, how you [TRN] have your payment structure kind of raises some red flags. The higher the salary the more you get paid. So with those factors, it really came down to being able to work with somebody that we could trust. And Lisa is very trustworthy. She just came across trustworthy and really followed through with what she was saying both good and bad. When you're interviewing outside vendors, you really try to get that sense of the individuals you work with. We were looking for someone we can sit down with, work well with, and trust - that was the number one goal for me.

What was it like working directly with TRN?

The first meeting I went up to Boston. Lisa had offered to come to Virginia but I said no, we were a very visible company at the time, so I didn't want people in the company getting red flags or being alarmed. We decided that it would be best to meet in person in Boston. We spent the day together with the TRN team and we had a very strong intake meeting. I explained the culture, we dove into the position in great depth, why it existed, what we're looking to achieve and the growth goals that needed to be obtained as a result of the hire. After several interviews with candidates we realized very quickly that the compensation structure was not in line with the skillsets that we needed to grow, and Lisa really helped us understand what it would take to get to the next level and how to find, interview, and nurture better candidates.

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What was the work like both strategically and tactically with TRN?

So, The Renaissance Network really understood what stage we were at and what type of person we needed to hire in that position for us to have the greatest chance of success. We needed a real leader in there, it might cost some money but the benefit of it would be great. That alone was like gold for people like me, I mean you have to understand - I was a teacher. Lisa really understood that mentality and how to help us. It's that "all-in" mentality, she needed to remind me that 'Jon, you're successful because you went all-in.' At the time I suddenly noticed I wasn't giving it all my effort and resources. I was just so afraid of going all-in. Where Lisa was great is that she really grabbed my hand and said, 'Listen you've gone all-in to get here, you're going to have to go all-in on this one and I'm going to help you get there.' She really counseled me through that process.

Tactically she really understood the type of profile to get to the next level. I remember the candidate assessment being very useful in this process. For me, I'm really a gut-feeling kind of guy. My VP of Marketing at the time and my CFO at the time we're not gut-feeling types of people, so it was helpful to have quantitative data to support the profile we were looking for. It was great to help all of us get on the same page.

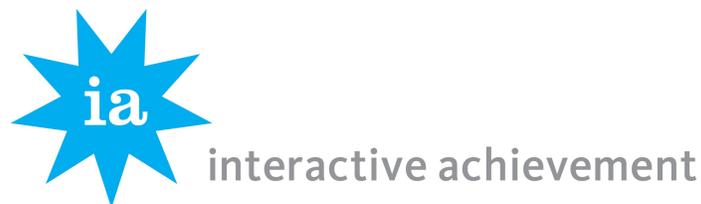
The Renaissance Network did a great job making sure we did not make a bad decision through this process. Lisa really helped us and talk this through the process, eased any fears we may have had. She could sense in my voice when I was really hot on a candidate or not and would really help us analyze why we liked a certain candidate.

The Results

Before Hiring Our VP of Sales, we had done a total of \$300,000 in revenue outside of Virginia. By September of that year after bringing on our VP of Sales, we had reached \$1.6 million in new business outside of Virginia. We were probably in about 10 states before our VP of Sales came on board, but we really honed in on our growth strategy the moment he came onboard - and we grew.

Overview of The Renaissance Network?

The reason why you go with The Renaissance Network is simple, they become part of your life. They help you make the best decision possible for your internal team, your clients, your partners and investors, and anyone who is integrated with your organization. They are not there to work with you only when they have time, they are there with you through the entire life cycle of the project and then some. Whether you know exactly what you want, or you know what you don't know, you go with Lisa Sacchetti and The Renaissance Network because they have been there before. They are professionals, they knew what we didn't know.



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