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Marketing Me: A case study on the evolution of an MBA marketing competence exercise

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Abstract

The importance of marketing competence among recent graduates is well documented in pedagogical conversations concerning business education and training (Le Diest & Winterton 2005; Winterton et al 2005; Wellman 2010). The current discussion offers a case study on the evolution of a reflective marketing competency exercise entitled, "Marketing Me." Used as part of a core marketing course within a U.S. MBA program over a 10-year period, we describe how the one-page, one-hour assignment has not only led to successful learning and professional outcomes for students, but also improved faculty effectiveness when technological aspects were incorporated.

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1. Introduction

When considering the skill set currently required of successful classroom educators, Roessingh and Chambers (2011) referencing Barrett (2005) state "There is a distinct shift from a lecture-based approach to an open-ended process-oriented model associated with critical theory that values inquiry, reflection, negotiation of meaning, case and problem-based learning (PBL), discussion and collaboration, and self-directed learning." (Roessingh &

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Chambers, 2011, p. 60). Accordingly, educators perpetually seek innovative instructional techniques that will further enhance the learning experience of students. This pursuit is complicated by the need to better equip freshly-minted MBA students—and marketing students in particular—with highly-employable skills. (Li, Greenberg, & Nicholls, 2007; Taylor, Hunter, Gary, Melton, & Goodwin, 2011).

As employers continue to demand graduates who are independent, adaptable, and capable, graduate schools have encountered an influx of students with fewer and fewer years of business practice. (Smith, 2004; Maital, et al., 2008). In response educators have incorporated a variety of pedagogical approaches that facilitate practical learning in less-experienced classrooms. Curricular modifications range from simulations (Li, et al.) to live cases (Heriot, et al., 2008) to service learning projects (Milewicz and Partridge, 2014) —each achieving consistent, though moderate, success in numerous, varied contexts. (Young, et al., 2008). The current case study highlights a graduate marketing course component called “Marketing Me” (modeled after a marketing plan) that compliments experiential learning via the application of critical thinking at the intersection of theory and practice.

In this overview we describe the Marketing Me activity, showcase the ways in which it cultivates marketing competence via creative and independent thought, discuss the role of technology in enhancing the learning process, and offer anecdotal evidence of successful learning and professional outcomes.

2. Building Marketing Competence via Coursework

The marketing plan has served as a reliable cornerstone for both development and assessment in a variety of marketing courses especially Marketing Principles (Smith, K., 2004; Wellman 2010; Taylor, et al., 2011). Because a marketing plan readily meets the requirement by “consensus” that marketing education be practitioner oriented with a focus on “relevant marketing knowledge and skills,” (Wellman, p. 120) its examination is a course staple. Wellman (2011) posits Werienga’s (2002) framework of the relationship between academic marketing knowledge (i.e., marketing laws/principles and empirical generalizations) and marketing knowledge used by practitioners (i.e., experience, creativity, and intuition) as a foundational aspect of marketing competence. Winterton et al.’s (2005) unified typology further frames the import of theory and practice by classifying competence into cognitive, functional, meta-competence, and social arenas. Accordingly, the successful development of a marketing plan as a co-created pedagogical output serves as a reasonable proxy and suitable amalgamation of both academic (e.g., consumer behavior) and practitioner knowledge (e.g., market sizing) in judging marketing competence.

2.1. The assignment

The Marketing Me assignment was derived from an original exercise we created for students’ first day of the core marketing course. At the end of the first class session they split into teams and received a sheet of paper with a blank one-page template/outline of a marketing plan. Key components included a situation analysis, environmental scan, competitive analysis, target market, positioning and the four Ps, implementation, and controls. Students were instructed to, “Generate a skeleton marketing plan for [Their current school] based on what you feel the school is currently doing.” Further instructions were, “Have fun with this. Be as creative as you’d like to be and do the best you can. I will review them, but this will not be graded.” (See Figure 1 for one-page marketing plan template). From there students wrestled with some unfamiliar terms and concepts such as positioning and contingency planning, but constructed a bulleted SWOT analysis more easily. The groups’ sheets were collected before the end of that class period. The students appreciated the chance to “try their hand” at market planning and the exercise served as a preamble to the main course deliverable of a marketing plan for a live case with a (typically) local company. Additionally, the introductory exercise served as a coarse benchmark of students’ current marketing knowledge. This was helpful for comparative purposes in assessing the progress made by the time Marketing Me was assigned later in the course.

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