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BRINGING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO A PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING COURSE THROUGH USE OF AN INTERACTIVE, MULTIMEDIA APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

A design for an experiential learning exploration of principles of marketing is presented for a multimedia CDROM to supplement classroom teaching. The design reorganizes principles content into four bodies of knowledge: macromarketing, micromarketing, buyer behavior, and strategy. The CDROM's strength lies in evoking a learner's own experiences with marketing through interaction with engaging modules which simulate real world marketing phenomena, and which allow the learner to examine these phenomena in detail and in an organized context. Students report higher levels of course satisfaction, better retention of essential concepts, and increased appreciation for the importance of marketing in their lives.

Key Words: multimedia, marketing, interactive

INTRODUCTION

With academics and business practitioners now envisioning institutions of higher education as "virtual information organizations" (Creth, 1995), the growth rate for mediated education is predicted to be higher than that expected for entertainment for the foreseeable future (Gilder 1995). Along with calls for increased productivity and efficiency in higher education, how can we reconcile these demands with the benefits that experiential learning bring to our students?

This article details one author's approach to the revision and adaptation of the content of a principles of marketing course for presentation as a series of interactive, experiential learning exercises presented through a multimedia CDROM "book" and supplemented by a series of self-reflective writing exercises posted for discussion on the World Wide Web.

BACKGROUND

A course in principles of marketing is included in the undergraduate business curriculum of over 98% of

AACSB-accredited programs (Turnquist, Bialaszewski, and Franklin 1991). The same researchers found that almost one-third of these principles courses utilized microcomputers in the course of instruction during the data collection year of 1988, and projected dramatic growth in the use of microcomputers and computer-based simulations in principles courses. In a survey of AMA member faculty at four-year institutions, McDaniel, Lamb, and Jarboe (1989) found a decided preference for conceptual topics over experiential areas, although respondents believed that there should be increased emphasis on experiential learning. These two categories roughly correspond to the cognitive and behavioral sides of the Kolb Learning Model as presented by Ronchetto et al. (1992). In their adaptation of the Kolb model, Ronchetto et al. place abstract conceptualization as the cognitive polar opposite of concrete experience (the behavioral anchor), and reflective observation as the cognitive polar opposite of active experimentation (the behavioral anchor). With accommodation for differences in learning style, Ronchetto et al. argue that different topical areas in marketing call for different approaches to teaching, and that multimedia is well-suited to a variety of different learning styles and pedagogical techniques.

November (1993) criticizes business education as excessively "left-brain," i.e. dominated by "explicit, linear, sequential, and analytical thought processes that are often expressed in words and based on logic" (page 4). He finds deficiencies across business curricula in "right-brain" processes "characterized by implicit, simultaneous, relational, and holistic thought ... that are best expressed as a picture or diagram based on intuition" (page 4), and argues for a more holistic, conceptual, and process-oriented approach to marketing education. Principles of marketing students enter the class with different needs. McDaniel, Lamb, and Jarboe (1989) implicitly recognize different segments among principles of marketing students by stating different student-customer needs and different instructional goals to satisfy those needs.

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As a faculty member who teaches some 500 students principles of marketing each semester, this author has become increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional lecture/discussion pedagogy. Frustrations stemmed largely from spending a great deal of time conveying and reinforcing definitions and marketing terminology, and not enough time spent on the integration of marketing concepts. Conventional textbooks support this traditional pedagogy with their encyclopedic breadth of coverage, and provide little integrative material beyond mini-cases or illustrative sidebars.

A second major concern are the differing needs of the three major constituencies in a principles of marketing course. For the first segment, undergraduate marketing majors, this is the first exposure to marketing as a discipline. Integration of concepts is important at this stage of study, as students will subsequently explore highly specialized areas of the discipline and only later reintegrate the knowledge in a capstone course. Providing this integration through experiential learning exercises positions key concepts in the learner's own experience giving the marketing major an early conceptual framework on which to hang subsequent marketing coursework. For the second segment, non-marketing business majors, a broad overview of marketing to gain some insight into developing business strategy is essential. Grounding this student with an integrative experience in marketing leaves the learner with a process-oriented perspective, rather than a collection of terms to be forgotten before the student takes a capstone business strategy course. And for the third segment, non-business students, marketing is a worldly elective in their studies. It may be a brief exposure to the world of work, and thus an excellent place to give an experiential perspective to ground essential marketing concepts in the learner's own experience.

Integrated multimedia holds the potential to develop supporting materials for experiential exploration and process-oriented teaching approach in principles of marketing. Integrated multimedia brings together text, color imagery, full motion video, stereo sound, simulation models, spreadsheet analysis, and student annotation, with a full concordance, all flexibly linked together. Creative use of these modes of presentation along with an associative exploration style bring together a number of possibilities suggested in the Kolb Model (Ronchetto et al. 1992) facilitates more holistic thought as November (1993) suggests. The

learner is thus encouraged to experience marketing as a series of processes which can be dissected and related to his or her own life experiences.

METHOD

Finding an Organizational Paradigm

Traditional books, constructed in a linear fashion from a series of building blocks, provide one means for organizing multimedia content. One American history multimedia book by Boyer et al. (1993) uses a traditional textbook organizing scheme, with terms like "chapter" and "page" to inform the user of location and structure. In the case of the instructional design under consideration, using the traditional book organizing mechanisms would have meant re-inventing the principles of marketing wheel and for no apparent gain, given pedagogical motivation. A central organizing concept was needed; some core process or mechanism around which to organize content and which supported non-linear and experiential learning. It was also desirable that the organizing mechanism be flexible so as not to exclude the users of more traditional approaches to principles.

Would that there was a "unified field theory" of marketing! The American Marketing Association's definition of marketing implies four diverse perspectives: "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives" (Bennett 1988).

These diverse perspectives formalize themselves in marketing academic research into four bodies of theory: macromarketing, micromarketing, buyer behavior, and marketing strategy. Each represents a different world view and none has a fully-elaborated over-arching theoretical structure; however, they are intellectually robust enough to provide a world view on marketing and an organizational structure for a principles book. In teaching principles of marketing, we can identify topics and issues in the course that come from all four of the world views. Part of the integrating task in teaching principles is reconciling not just process, but diverse perspectives on marketing as

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well. The knowledge base is thus envisioned as a classic pyramid structure, with each of the four faces representing a world view of marketing: macromarketing, strategy, micromarketing, and buyer behavior.

Organizing the Content

An initial list of marketing topics was collected from existing teaching notes, overhead transparencies, and a student "reader" compiled to assist students in classroom note taking. This consolidated document was a very personal world view, and not necessarily comprehensive or even representative of what all (or most) marketing instructors viewed as essential. Next, twelve current principles of marketing textbooks were examined for similarities and differences. These books were largely organized by marketing function in the typical fashion of a principles book. A number of additional core concepts were included in the consolidated outline as a result of this examination in an attempt to make the working outline inclusive of the breadth of current teaching in principles. In the end, the comprehensive list ran for some 90 pages, and encompassed 332 discrete topics.

Next, the list was examined for related concepts which could be presented in combination through an interactive experiential learning exercise. Some thirty-two such high-level concepts were identified, and each assigned to one of the four pyramid faces depending on the dominant paradigm for the concept. By organizational face, the thirty-two concepts are:

Macromarketing: What is Marketing?, A Brief History of Marketing, Marketing Philosophies, Marketing's Contemporary Environment: the U.S., Marketing's Contemporary Environment: Global Markets, and Marketing Ethics.

Micromarketing: The Fundamental Managerial Process of Marketing, Marketing Research, Developing Positioning: Product, Developing Positioning: Price, Positioning: Distribution, What is Business Logistics?, Wholesaling and Retailing, Developing Positioning: Marketing Communications, Advertising, Sales Promotion, and Personal Selling.

Buyer Behavior: Defining Consumer Behavior, Consumer Decision Making, Buying Roles and Decisions, Adoption and Innovation, and Organizational Buying.

Strategy: The Organizational Context of Marketing, Corporate Planning, Marketing Strategy Development, The Nature of Competition, Military Strategy as Inspiration for Marketing Strategy, Sociobiology as Inspiration for Marketing Strategy, Social Exchange Theory and Mutualism, Managing for Quality as Strategy, The Impact of Global Markets on Marketing, and Writing the Marketing Plan.

Writing the CDROM

For each of the thirty-two high-level concepts, a scripting treatment was developed by the author and revised in consultation with instructional design experts at a multimedia production company, and with the electronic media editors at a major publisher. Revisions to the author's ideas were based on the degree to which the concept could be appropriately implemented for an interactive CDROM, and the degree to which the proposed treatment conveyed the appropriate instructional objectives. From these scripting treatments, the author wrote a pre-production script which detailed the functions of the interactive exercise, text and media to appear on-screen, all voiced text, as well as guidelines for the look and feel of the exercise.

As each pre-production script was completed, a producer at the multimedia production company specified the design and programming requirements and shepherded the module through completion. The thirty-modules were combined with a hierarchical programming structure for later addition of World Wide Web support by the publisher, and delivered to the publisher as master disks in both Windows and Macintosh formats.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The CDROM has been used in two very different learning environments at the author's university. The first use of the disk was in a group of twenty-five student volunteers in a large section lecture format course. The test group members were each given a beta-test version of the CDROM, and asked to use the CDROM instead of a textbook to support

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their studies in the course. The experimental group students also agreed to participate in three focus groups during the semester of use. Initially these students reported some anxiety about the breadth of the topical coverage and the degree to which they would be able to compete effectively with students who studied with a conventional textbook. By the midpoint of the semester, the second focus group reported a change in that attitude, as the participants felt they had a stronger grasp of essential concepts than their textbook-studying colleagues. They also reported spending more time studying than they presumably would have with a textbook, and felt that their studying was more fun. Many of the participants believed that their overall studying for all courses had improved, as the study for the marketing course seemed so effortless that they were more encouraged to spend time with conventional studies. By the third focus group, the participants were reporting increased satisfaction with the course overall, and were able to offer substantive constructive criticism on the CDROM to enable the production company to improve the final version. The twenty-five volunteers also had a higher average grade in the course (about one-half grade higher) than their textbook colleagues. This finding must be taken with considerable caution. While all students took identical exams, the author's style of teaching was more appropriately reflected in the CDROM than in the textbook. Thus the textbook was likely to have been an inferior ancillary to the lectures.

The second use of the CDROM was in a small section (thirty students) taught on Saturday mornings. Each student enrolled in the class was required to have a CDROM-equipped personal computer and an email account. This section of the course focused on the experiential learning aspects of the CDROM. Each week an assignment was given to explore one or two interactive modules on the CDROM, and then the learner was to write a short journal-style essay which tied the concepts on the disk to his or her own experiences with marketing (either as a consumer or as an employee of a firm). The writing assignments were returned to the instructor by email and were graded and returned with feedback to their writers. The best of the journal-style essays were compiled and published on World Wide Web pages each week. Prior to attending Saturday class, the students were expected to read the relevant Web pages as a preparation for class discussion. The class

discussion focused on the similarities and differences in the students' experience vis-a-vis the CDROM topics. There was no conventional lecture or other presentation of course content.

A typical essay question is the following from the module on sales promotion: "What types of consumer promotions do you participate in? Give an example of one kind of promotion that you find valuable. Why? Give an example of one that is targeted to you, but in which you don't participate. Why not?" Two student responses follow. Note their differences in preferences for promotion participation, the ways in which they evaluate their satisfaction with the promotion, and the implicit critique of marketing and the ethics of marketers. These differences provided a basis for a very lively classroom discussion.

"Every Sunday, my sister, mother and I sit together, go through, and collect coupons that come with the Sunday paper. My mom is a firm believer in saving every way we can, and indeed, coupons provide ample savings for a family of eight. Sometimes, however, coupons make us spend more rather than save."

"Our family has this misplaced belief that things that are free or reduced in price provides savings and therefore are worth having. We are victims of coupons, samples, prices-off and premiums. They are valuable to us, of course, when we really save money on them. However, we have a tendency of trying out "new" things that we discover through coupons and samples even if they are totally useless to us. And of course, our youngest brother must always have every new free toy that McDonalds have with their kiddie meal. Hey, it's free so it's saving us money, right?!"

"So, sometimes, these sales promotions are more of a liability to us than savings. But for the manufacturers, they really served their purpose..."

From the second student:

"I have participated in many of the customer promotions mentioned in the cd. I often get free samples through the mail or when I walk in certain shopping malls. I like this kind of promotion because I get to sample the product for free before making a financial commitment to the product. Contest promotions don't appeal to me because all

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the winners are usually people that live in the middle of nowhere. In other words, I feel certain product contests are 'fixed'. I use coupons when I remember that I have them. I think many customers (like myself) cut out many coupons but forget them at home. I feel sometimes coupons are a burden because you have to remember to bring them. I have not bought anything from a demonstration promotion. But demonstration promotions are an excellent way when someone wants to purchase electronics (printer, scanner, etc)."

"I recently purchased a zip drive and the driving force behind purchasing the zip drive was the rebate promotion. Iomega, the zip drive company, was offering money back and promotional products as a part of the rebate. First the money part was the real eye catcher because I had really saved a lot of money with the rebate. Second, the promotional product was a nice accessory to the rebate. I believe by offering such a generous rebate, Iomega hoped to build a list of loyal customers. It worked with me."

"Usually on many college campus are numerous credit card "vendors". These are the people who try to offer any student a credit card with low apr and as a added bonus a free t shirt, dictionary, marker, mug, or whatever was cheap and plentiful. These promotions are targeted directly to college students, which I am. But I do not participate in them. I feel the credit card companies are being slightly deceptive by offering many students a line of credit without any regards to understanding the student's financial background. They give the credit cards away like it means nothing. But it is the students that will suffer any consequences and not the credit card company (bad credit rating, collectors hounding you..). I don't like the idea of bargaining for more than I ask for."

The students in this section appeared to the instructor to be highly motivated and deeply involved in this learning experience. In their evaluations of the course, the students reported a very high degree of satisfaction tied to their ability to relate their own experiences with marketing to a new conceptual framework. Several accounting majors in this section reported that this was the first time they had felt comfortable with a conceptual course such as marketing (accounting students often report dissatisfaction with principles of marketing courses due to the abstract nature of the

concepts presented). Many students reported that writing about their own experiences with marketing helped to cement the language of marketing and the processes of marketing into a form that would be useful to them in future studies, on their jobs, and in their lives as consumers.

Future Development

The author is continuing to work with the CDROM's publisher to develop a series of interactive pages on the World Wide Web which will be linked to the thirty-two modules on the CDROM. Use of the Web to deliver additional information will allow for highly flexible and customizable content, delivered just in time to learners. This content will initially focus on expansion of the topics presented along with up-to-date examples and links to relevant web sites. Later development will offer students and faculty using the CDROM the opportunity to communicate with each other in a learning community so that all may learn by sharing their experiences in marketing.

CONCLUSIONS

This reorganization of content for multimedia presentation forced a rethinking of both the essential content areas as well as the ways in which each area could be related to some aspect of the learner's experience with marketing. The freedom of experiential exploration granted to the learner with this type of book is unprecedented, and hopefully will cause some rethinking of the ways in we teach principles of marketing. Faculty using this pedagogy are potentially freed from their traditional roles as experts and sole integrators. The instructor can then serve as a sounding board for students to test their experiences and assumptions against expert opinion and the body of academic marketing knowledge.

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