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A PERSONAL MARKETING STRATEGY APPROACH: FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

The concept of marketing is increasingly being applied in many different areas. The application of some of the fundamental marketing concepts to the individual is discussed in this paper. Students in three retailing classes studied how the marketing strategy concept could be applied to them. They investigated important uncontrollable variables, analyzed the market (a retailer), and then applied the marketing mix variables to themselves. In effect, they were the products! services to be marketed.

FRAMEWORK

The terms marketing, marketing strategy and personal marketing strategy will have as many definitions for people as there are people. Much confusion has been generated during the past few years as marketing has been applied in many different settings. Confusion about marketing exists even in the business field as professors and practitioners use the term to apply to single activities such as selling and advertising and to complex activities such as development of a marketing strategy and strategic planning. The connotation of marketing, marketing strategy and personal marketing strategy as set forth for this project will be explained before the application of the terms is given.

Perspective of Marketing

Marketing can be broadly defined as the 'creation of a standard of living' [5] or narrowly defined as selling. In order for the students to grasp what marketing really is, the following definition is normally given to them by this writer. 'Marketing includes all the operations of a business that determine and influence existing and potential demand in the market place and that activate the supply of goods and services to meet this demand.' [2, p. 6]

This definition enables the students to grasp the fundamental concepts of marketing while being able to envision some of the types of jobs and activities that are included in the field. In order to expand the scope of marketing beyond a business horizon, the definition is modified to the following. Marketing represents those functions of an organization which determine demand, influence demand and activate the supply of a product or service. This definition expands the horizon of marketing to nonbusiness activities but still limits it. No where in the definition is the customer or profit mentioned. Marketing is not always performed with the customer foremost in mind. Similarly, not all marketing operations are profitable. In order to bring in these perspectives, the marketing strategy concept becomes important.

From this viewpoint, marketing is concerned with the performance of functions concerned with product development and related activities, pricing, distribution, and/or promotion. A marketing strategy stresses that each of the above, either singularly performed or in concert, should focus on the intended customer.

Marketing Strategy Planning

The distinction between marketing and a marketing strategy approach is very fundamental and important. McCarthy defines the marketing strategy approach in the following manner. It is involved with two important components, a Target Market and a Marketing Mix [4]. Consequently, the major difference between marketing and a marketing strategy is the recognition of the importance of Customer needs. Even though all companies which are employing a marketing strategy approach will not succeed, the probability of their success is enhanced.

Basically, the marketing strategy is concerned with the following elements.

These elements have normally been applied to business or organizational settings. The expansion of the scope of these activities to the individual who is soon to be in the job market will now be discussed.

Uncontrollable Variables	Marketing Concept	Controllable Variables
Societal	Customers	Product Strategy
Technological	Research	Price Strategy
Economic	Integrated	Promotion Strat.
Governmental	Operations	Place Strategy
Competitive	Profit	

Personal Marketing Strategy

Marketing today is being expanded to all types of activities. [1] In effect, it really is becoming the delivery of a standard of living. As marketing becomes involved with all facets of life, it is logical that marketing be applied to the individual. Being consistent with the above discussion, more than marketing must be applied. A marketing strategy approach must be utilized. Therefore all marketers are not seen as the happy go lucky, hand shaking, back slapping, loud individuals. Not every marketing student wants to go into sales.

The personal marketing strategy approach dictates that the person analyze his/her own characteristics. He/she becomes the product (service) to be marketed to the customer, the business firm or organization doing the recruiting. In order to best meet the needs of the customer, research of the various aspects of the company must be performed. A complete self analysis concerning personal objectives, characteristics (product strategy), salary and fringe benefits (price strategy), geographic location (place strategy), and contacts with the company through cover letters, resumes and interviews (promotional strategy) is a second essential part of the personal marketing strategy. An analysis of the various uncontrollable elements completes the personal marketing strategy approach. The remainder of this paper will be concerned with its application in a retailing course.

APPLICATION, SUMMER, 1978

Students in a junior level retailing class were exposed to the extension of the marketing strategy to themselves during the summer of 1978. All of these

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students have taken the basic marketing course in which marketing and marketing strategy have been defined, explained and applied in business perspectives. In order for them to experience a very real experiential situation, they became marketing managers responsible for introducing a new product (themselves) into a maturing market.

In the initial attempt to adapt the marketing strategy to the student's perspective, a somewhat limited approach had to be used due to the shortness of the summer term-four weeks. Therefore, the focus of the summer project was on the controllable variables. In effect, each student conducted a detailed self analysis and then determined how to best market him! herself. The following instructions were the only written ones given to the students.

"You will be applying the retailing strategy to yourself. You will discuss each of the six major components of the marketing strategy (uncontrollable to controllable) and how each applies to you. You become the product to be marketed. The customers are the retailers. What are the important factors to examine in determining who to work for? What are your unique characteristics? How do the other elements of the retailing strategy apply to you? This paper may be upwards of 10 pages. Typed, subdivided. A resume is required but is only a portion of the paper."

This particular assignment was given to them after they had performed a short report and discussion of an annual report of a retailer. Consequently, they were familiar with the basics of the marketing strategy since this report was also based on the triad of uncontrollable variables, marketing concept and controllable variables. A handout summarizing the array of marketing variables listed in McCarthy's Checklist of Marketing Considerations was also provided for the students. [3, pp. 60-61] This checklist was developed to be applied to product/service marketing in the traditional sense. The students were instructed to use variables given in the checklist and adapt them to this personal marketing project.

The project was evaluated on how well the students developed their marketing strategy, on the use of outside resources and on how much creativity was used in the project. The reaction from the students was so positive that the project was kept for the fall term retailing classes. Some of the students remarked that they would have liked to send out their reports to the retailers.

Using the above information a three stage project was developed for the fall term. The students would first examine one particular retailer in depth. Next, they would analyze their own marketing mix components. Finally, they would send out cover letters and resumes to the retailers studied in stage one.

APPLICATION, FALL, 1978

Since the fall, 1978, project would be more comprehensive than the summer project and since a basis for the fall project was laid during the summer, preliminary work was done by the author. This work was done in order to make the fall term's project as realistic and beneficial as possible.

Preliminary Work

The papers turned in by the students from the summer, 1978, became the foundation for the fall project. So that the students in the fall class (two sections) could benefit from the summer class's work, the various concepts that were identified under the following six headings by the students were summarized.

Uncontrollable Variables
Target Market
Product Strategy
Price Strategy
Promotion Strategy
Place Strategy

This summary became one of six chapters of a working paper written by David Bloomberg and this author. [6] The other five chapters were oriented towards the

1. explanation of marketing;
2. presentation of the checklist of marketing considerations;
3. bibliography of sources concerning careers, 1939-1978 sources;
4. utilization of the library for marketing students; and,
5. brief presentation of various career opportunities.

This working paper was provided to each of the students for use in the course. With the aid of the working paper, the students should have had little problems with the first and second stages of the project.

General Nature of the Project

The nature of the project as explained on the syllabus was still general to provide opportunity for creativity by the students. The syllabus indicated the following:

A marketing strategy is composed of uncontrollable variables, a customer orientation and controllable variables. You will apply this approach to both a retail firm and to yourself. The emphasis is on the application to yourself. But, in order to accomplish the project, you must also know about a company, the customer. You, in effect, become a product to be marketed. The retailer becomes the customer. You must market yourself to the retailer. But, first, you must learn about the retailer.

Consequently, the project was divided into three stages. During the first stage, each student would select a retailer and find out as much about that company as possible. Next, each student would apply the marketing strategy concept to him/herself. Finally, each student would bring the first two stages together by marketing him/herself to that firm. Each of these stages is now discussed.

Stage I: Retailer's Marketing Strategy

The syllabus provided some guidance for this project. It said,

"Stage I: Customer Evaluation (Due Friday of 7th week)

Use the format: Uncontrollable Variables-
social,
economic,
technological,
legal,
competitive,
Controllable Variables-
product,
price,
promotion,
place,
people

Study the annual report (and turn it in).

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Investigate the company in the library. Write to the company. Talk with local branches or similar types of stores."

In effect, the students were doing a traditional paper on the marketing structure of a particular retailer. The finished papers ranged in length from 8 pages to 30 pages. The grades on this project were the lowest that the author had ever given on similar projects. The low grades were primarily due to three factors.

1. Many students wrote the papers without seemingly ever looking at the working paper.
2. Some students did very little library work. One student who researched J.C. Penney indicated that little secondary information was available -
3. Several students, both business and nonbusiness majors, had either not written very many term papers or had not taken business communication.

A handout summarizing most of the common problems with the papers was developed and given to the students as an aid for the other two stages.

Stage 2: Personal Marketing Strategy

The syllabus provided the following guidelines for this project.

Stage 2: Personal Marketing (due Friday of 11th week)

Apply the above uncontrollable and controllable variables to yourself as you apply the marketing strategy to yourself. A resume is only a part of this."

The students also had access to the chapter in the working paper describing the concepts developed by the students in the summer retailing class. One additional resource was provided to the students. While the students were completing the first stage of the project on the company, they also reviewed the sources from the bibliography in the working paper. Each student was assigned two different sources. Each source was to be scrutinized for factors that would apply to career development, vocational guidance, resumes, interviews, and jobs. The information was fit into the marketing strategy framework.

David Bloomberg and the author then summarized all the information from the 110 sources. A handout entitled a Checklist of Personal Marketing Factors was developed for the students. This handout identified 16 uncontrollable factors, 47 factors concerning customers, 44 factors about the product, 45 factors to examine concerning price, 19 factors concerning place and 91 factors relating to promotional techniques.

Using the above sources and the papers from the summer class, the students completed the experiential exercise of marketing themselves. Due to various circumstances, this paper was not turned in until the 13th week. The grades on this stage were much better than on the first stage. The students had taken heed to subdivide the papers, provide an introduction and conclusion, write clearly and be creative. Some of the students also turned in resumes and cover letters as part of their promotional mix. A critique of these was made and handed out to all students to be observed as the third stage was developed.

Stage 3: Synopsis and Contact

The following was given on the syllabus as a guideline for this stage.

"After receiving back the first two stages, you will synthesize them and write to the company and apply for a job. We will discuss the responses during the 16th week.

Turn this in to me for mailing. Have a carbon of the return sent to me."

Since this stage of the project would be Bent out to the retailers, an additional handout was developed to guide the students' efforts. They were told that any cover letter and resume that was not "perfect" would be returned to them for redoing. This correspondence would be representing Western Illinois University as well as the student.

This stage was graded on the following basis. If the letter and resume were "perfect" in English and typing and the student flattered the company with tidbits of information and provided highlights about him/herself, an A was given. If the above was followed except that the company was not flattered or information about the student was not given, then a B was assigned. If the student provided no information about the company or none about him/herself, a C was given. If no information was given and the paper was poorly written, then an F was given. Over one half of the students received As on this stage. Several students had to retype their cover letters. Due to

TABLE 1
RATINGS FOR THE STAGES

Bipolar Terms	Percentage of Response					Dif-ference		(n)
Interesting-Dull								
	1	2	3	4	5			
Stage 1:	33%	36%	19%	10%	2%	2.1	.3	42
Stage 2:	28	43	20	8	0	2.0		40
Stage 3:	45	40	8	5	3	1.8		40
Hard-Easy								
	1	2	3	4	5			
Stage 1:	21%	45%	24%	10%	0%	2.2	.6	42
Stage 2:	18	44	21	19	0	2.4		39
Stage 3:	3	38	44	13	3	2.8		39
Practical-Theoretical								
	1	2	3	4	5			
Stage 1:	18%	61%	21%	0%	0%	2.0	.8	38
Stage 2:	23	49	21	5	3	2.2		39
Stage 3:	26	32	2	2	0	1.4		

the guidelines given, the resumes were in very good form.

Evaluation of the Project

The comments from the students in the summer retailing class were so positive that the project was expanded for the fall term. Did this expansion dampen the enthusiasm for the project? Most of the comments on the evaluation forms indicated that the three stage approach was just as valid as the mini version of the summer.

In order to obtain a more quantitative measure of the students' feelings, they were asked to evaluate each of the three stages on a five point rating scale for seven sets of bipolar terms. The following table presents the percentages of response for the 21 sets of bipolar terms. The mean and number of cases for each set is also given. Finally, the difference between the means for the stages of like bipolar terms is included.

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The numbers 1 to 5 on the scale were on a very, somewhat, in

TABLE 1, cont.
RATINGS FOR THE STAGES

Bipolar Terms	Percentage of Response					Dif- Mean ference (n)		
	1	2	3	4	5			
Time Consuming-Little Effort								
Stage 1:	62%	24%	10%	2%	2%	1.6	.9	42
Stage 2:	30	38	30	3	0	2.1		40
Stage 3:	12	41	37	7	2	2.5		41
Easy to Find Information-Hard to Find Information								
Stage 1:	8%	13%	26%	26%	26%	3.5	1.2	38
Stage 2:	28	33	28	5	8	2.3		40
Stage 3:	23	33	33	8	5	2.4		40
Clear Guidelines-Unclear Guidelines								
Stage 1:	8%	32%	24%	27%	8%	2.9	.9	37
Stage 2:	16	37	29	13	5	2.6		38
Stage 3:	32	37	27	5	0	2.0		41
Application Was Hard-Application Was Easy								
Stage 1:	13%	40%	30%	15%	3%	2.6	.5	40
Stage 2:	23	37	28	15	0	2.4		39
Stage 3:	11	28	25	28	8	2.9		36

between, somewhat and very continuum. As indicated by the percentages, most of the students felt that the three stages were interesting, hard at first then easier to do, very practical, time consuming at first, hard to find information at first, more clearly defined as the stages advanced and the application became easier.

The means indicate the three stage approach has some validity due to a form of the learning curve. The students were able to benefit from the prior knowledge of the reports. Also, more specific guidelines and hints were provided throughout the course. The greatest difference in the means occurred in the finding of information factor. Since the students were using information from prior projects for the third one, the lower average (when compared to stage 1) is reasonable.

CONCLUSION

A three stage project applying the marketing strategy concept to students was attempted in a junior level retailing course. The

students became marketing managers as they developed the marketing mix (themselves) for the intended market (the retail firm) within the confines of the uncontrollable variables (e.g. the job market). Students taking the course during the summer of 1978 and the fall semester, 1978, were exposed to the project. The reaction from both groups was extremely positive. In fact, this project is being modified for a marketing research class taught the spring term of 1979. A modification to other marketing classes will be made in the future terms.

As competition becomes ever more keen for good jobs for the college graduate and as differentiation sometimes more difficult to achieve, a method of systematically evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the college graduate becomes even more important. This three stage project focusing on the marketing strategy development experience forces the student to study the intended target market systematically and then to study him/herself in the same systematic manner. This project has seemingly helped the students to become better marketers of their assets. Since the letters were sent out the last week of class, the reaction from the retailers cannot be determined at this point in time. They will be surveyed during the spring term to determine their reaction to the total approach. The cover letters mentioned nothing of a class requirement. If the retailers do respond favorably and if only 10% of the students receive jobs from the project, the project will still have been a success due to the thought that the students had to place into the project.

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