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## **INTERNET EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING CLASSROOM: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the importance of the internet and experiential learning in the Principles of Marketing setting. From this foundation, the authors propose several internet-related experiential exercises that synchronize with Principles of Marketing topics. Specifically, activities are offered for market segmentation, new product development, marketing channels, wholesaling, international marketing, business to business marketing, retailing, advertising and ethics.

### **INTERNET EDUCATION**

The internet is a world-wide computer network that links millions of people and computers (Pillutla, 1996; Leonard and Page, 1996). The internet contains a wealth of information and resources that may be useful to the principles of marketing instructor. The internet allows individuals to search, display and download plain text, graphics and audio/video (Kopp and Suter, 1996). As over 80 percent of colleges and universities have internet access (Siegel, 1996), it may be time to incorporate the internet into the marketing learning experience (Leonard and Leonard, 1996).

Internet activities, in the classroom, can provide a complement to the traditional lecture method of teaching. One advantage of employing the internet into one's lesson plan is the international business exposure that students can acquire (Leonard and Leonard, 1996). For example, students can search companies world-wide to learn how the marketing

mix differs across cultures. This quick and comprehensive access to information may not be readily available by other information source. Another advantage of incorporating the internet into classroom learning involves the enthusiasm it may generate (Siegel, 1996). Students are oftentimes excited by experiential learning activities, especially those embracing new technology. Ergo, the purpose of this paper is to offer several experiential internet activities that can be implemented into the Principles of Marketing classroom.

The following section presents several areas of the Principles of Marketing course in which internet experiential activities appear befitting. The activities and internet sites espoused here are by no means exhaustive. Instead, they may provide a starting point by which instructors can build a personal lesson plan involving the internet.

### **MARKET SEGMENTATION AND NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

Two web sites that illustrate the concepts of segmentation and target marketing are **future.sn.com** and **www.hambeach.com**. **The first is the home page for SRI's VALS 2** typology. The eight groups, defined largely by psychographic variables, can be illustrated to students by progressing through the site. Each group can be accessed for a detailed verbal description and magazine readership profile. By completing an interactive questionnaire, students can determine their personal VALS 2 profile. Afterwards, students can compare their results to average Americans, or internet users specifically.

### Experiential Exercise

For a short homework assignment, students can be instructed to access the VALS 2 home page, complete the questionnaire, and print out the results (a description of their VALS 2 classification). A short written report should also be submitted by the student as to what aspects of the VALS 2 group is consistent (and/or inconsistent) with his/her current life situation. This exercise can prove beneficial in comprehending the concept of market segmentation. Likewise, the assignment often helps elucidate the criteria by which a firm may choose to segment their market.

The second site is the home page for the Hamilton Beach Corporation. Visitors to this site are asked a series of psychographic questions. One question prompts visitors to input the type of vehicle they drive (e.g. minivan, convertible, sedan, bicycle). Another question directs individuals to indicate their neighborhood type (e.g. gated development, subdivision with kids, apartment complex). Based on the answers given, the site suggests several products, which match the psychographics of the visitor. Lifestyle questions are a genuine method of eliciting valuable information about potential customers. Similarly, these questions appear to pragmatically illustrate the various customer segments of Hamilton Beach.

The Hamilton Beach site attempts to extract valuable information from visitors regarding their needs. That is, Hamilton Beach strives to assess the needs of their market by asking them to design the perfect home appliance (i.e. blender, toaster, etc.). Specifically, students can design an ideal small appliance by choosing from a menu of product features. It seems plausible that Hamilton Beach utilizes this portion of the internet site to assist with their new product development processes.

### Experiential Exercise

For a homework assignment, Principles of Marketing instructors can have their students visit the Hamilton Beach home page. In doing so, have the students answer the following questions.

1. In your opinion, what is (are) the target market(s) of Hamilton Beach appliances?
2. What, if any, valuable information can Hamilton Beach obtain from their home page?
3. Is the internet an effective means of reaching Hamilton Beach potential customers?
4. Does the Hamilton Beach home page experience inspire you to consider their company upon your next appliance purchase?

The aforementioned questions can stimulate thoughts about market segmentation, new product development, and the Internet's effectiveness in reaching customers. In particular, the home page can help facilitate the understanding of market segmentation and new product development.

### MARKETING CHANNELS / WHOLESALING

To illustrate the internet as a marketing channel, Principles of Marketing instructors may consider directing students to *Great Food Online* at [www.greatfood.com/gfhome3.htm](http://www.greatfood.com/gfhome3.htm). This noteworthy site is a worldwide wholesaler of gourmet food items. Great Food On-line affords visitors the opportunity to shop for award winning food items selected from at least twelve manufacturers. Further, visitors can consult food and entertaining experts, as well as collect recipes. Shoppers can easily order items on-line and have them shipped di-

rectly to their chosen destination. This Internet site exemplifies a user-friendly channel of distribution. As such, it likely provides a useful means of teaching students the fundamentals of a distribution channel.

### Experiential Exercise

This exercise is recommended to occur in-class, however, it can be adapted for an outside of class assignment. First, the class may visit Great Food On-line and browse the site. Afterwards, the class can discuss the following questions.

1. In what type of distribution channel(s) do the Great Food On-line manufacturers engage?
2. What role does the internet play in this distribution channel?
3. Is this an appropriate channel strategy for Great Foods On-line? If not, please suggest alternative channel structures.

The *Great Food On-line* exercise may prove beneficial in relating an actual channel structure to Principles of Marketing students. The heretofore site represents the potential of the Internet to act as an intermediary in a channel of distribution. Additionally, it portrays the Internet as a complement or substitute for print catalogs.

### INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

The website of Coca-Cola ([www.cocacola.com](http://www.cocacola.com)) contains an interactive game. In this game, visitors are given a description of an exotic soft drink flavor. Next, students attempt to guess the name of the soft drink and the country in which it is primarily marketed. This game serves to illustrate Coke's distribution network and wide product mix that targets consumer tastes in a myriad of countries. Countries included in the game are in

Europe, Asia, the South Pacific, and Latin America.

### Experiential Exercise

A fun in-class exercise can assist the instructor in communicating Coke's global strategies. This activity requires access to a multimedia classroom or an internet-equipped computer lab. First, instruct the students to develop small groups. Subsequently, begin the global Coca-Cola game by asking group one to verbally guess the flavor and home country of the first soft drink. Providing group one volunteers an inaccurate guess, the remaining groups may posit an answer. The game progresses by affording each team an initial opportunity to correctly name the soft drink. The instructor can keep score by awarding one point to any team that submits a correct answer. The Coca-Cola Internet game can seemingly help students grasp the multitude of marketing plans employed by international firms to captivate global markets.

### BUSINESS TO BUSINESS MARKETING

Reynolds Metals Company ([www.rmc.com](http://www.rmc.com)) is a worthy site for illustrating the differences between consumer and industrial products. Consumer products highlighted in the home page are the plastic wrap products while canning machinery represents industrial products. The nature of products in the business market (i.e., they tend to be highly technical, have high dollar costs (high unit value), and may require a long decision process involving many people) can be demonstrated by browsing through this site.

### Experiential Exercise

As an out-of-class assignment, instructors may choose to have students visit the Reynolds home page. During the visit, students can ponder and answer the following questions,

which can provide the basis for an forthcoming class discussion.

1. What markets does Reynolds attempt to target?
2. What differences, if any, are apparent between consumer and business to business distribution channels?
3. Compare and contrast consumer product firms and business to business firms, in relation to their respective marketing philosophies.
4. Is the Internet an effective medium to reach business to business customers?

This brief assignment, coupled with an in-class discussion, may yield an enhanced knowledge level concerning business to business marketing practices. Particularly, the internet exercise provides a practical, easy to understand method of learning the differences between consumer product firms and business to business firms.

### **RETAILING**

The Internet has become an increasingly popular retailing mode in recent years. Consequently, the inclusion of internet retailers into the Principles of Marketing curriculum seems like a worthy endeavor. If internet retailing is undertaken, Tropi-Ties ([www.silcom.com/-tropitie](http://www.silcom.com/-tropitie)) is posited as an exemplary case. Tropi-Ties is a direct manufacturer that offers casual clothing and accessories for the tropical-minded shopper. Visitors to this site can effortlessly scan their products, place items into their on-line shopping cart and consummate the purchase.

#### **Experiential Exercise**

To explore Internet retailing, students can engage in an on-line shopping spree. That is,

students can browse the Tropi-Ties site, place wanted items in their cart for purchase, and view the order fulfillment section (students can view the ordering procedures without placing an actual order). Thereafter, students can print a copy of their shopping list and discuss the following questions.

1. What are the conveniences and shortcomings, if any, of on-line retailing?
2. Is the internet an effective means to market clothes and accessories?

A visit to Tropi-Ties can help the Principles of Marketing instructor to teach the notion of online retailing to students in a straightforward, realistic fashion.

### **ADVERTISING**

Advertising has exploded onto the internet in recent years. Accordingly, it remains unlikely to visit any internet site today without being exposed to several advertisements. This popularity may be due, in part, to its presumably inexpensive cost per number of persons reached. Further, the ads can be directed to specific market segments by linking the advertisement to those web sites proposed to enthrall precise consumer groups. From this perspective, the internet is apparently becoming a sensible and reliable advertising medium. Thus, the inclusion of internet advertising in the Principles of Marketing discussions may become useful in providing students with a more encompassing knowledge base.

#### **Experiential Exercise**

A succinct homework task, discussed here, can assist Principles of Marketing instructors to pragmatically impart internet advertising to their students. To accomplish this objective, have student's type in the keywords *advertising* and *Internet* into a preferred Internet search engine, such as [www.webcrawler.com](http://www.webcrawler.com). In

due course, students will be presented with a plethora of web sites referring to internet advertising. For instance, several sites point to firms that market internet advertising services. The instructor can advise the students to search relevant sites for answers to the ensuing questions.

1. If one desired to advertise via the Internet, what could they expect to pay for a typical ad?
2. Compared with other advertising media, what are the advantages and disadvantages of internet advertising?
3. If any, to what types of businesses are Internet ads befitting?
4. In your opinion, do internet ads stimulate purchase intentions?

These questions will likely invigorate a energetic class discussion on the topic of Internet advertising. This experiential exercise provides a practical approach to learning about this advertising medium. That is, students learn the concept “first hand” rather than learning “second hand” through the instructor.

### **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY / ETHICS**

Social responsibility and ethical issues have historically aroused interesting debates between Principles of Marketing students. In the author’s experience, the key to these lively discussions have been the use of current issues. The internet can greatly assist the instructor in this regard, as the web furnishes a wealth of current issues concerning marketing ethics. One very attractive ethical issues site is called McSpotlight ([www.envirolink.org/mcspotlight/](http://www.envirolink.org/mcspotlight/)). This web site contains a overabundance of current ethical debates surrounding influential corporations. A visitor to this site may engage in live debates with others, and read up-to-date ethical articles.

McSpotlight is remarkably current, user friendly and very informative. For these reasons, this site may be a welcomed addition to Principles of Marketing ethical deliberations.

### **Experiential Exercise**

An entertaining homework task involves visiting the McSpotlight site. In doing so, students can be instructed to investigate the site for an ethical debate, which can be related to the marketing function. This task becomes extremely intelligible given the multitude of marketing dilemmas located on this site. Next, the students can be asked to write a one page summary comprised of 1) the primary points, 2) a position statement explaining his/her viewpoint, and 3) the implications for marketing. The McSpotlight exercise can help students to better understand many current social /ethical problems in marketing from an applications standpoint.

### **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This paper attempted to set forth an argument for incorporating internet-related experiential exercises into the Principles of Marketing classroom. The authors presented several activities, which may prove useful in creating exciting classroom discussions and enthusiastic students. This environment could potentially have a positive influence on student comprehension and learning.

It should be noted that this paper discusses just a few ideas for integrating the internet into the Principles of Marketing classroom. From this perspective, the authors hope this paper will furnish a springboard to increased experiential learning via the internet. Having the students discuss home page sites of companies often generates a high level of participation during class time. Likewise, short homework assignments may effectively improve a student’s effi-

cacy with both the marketing topics, and the internet itself

In future studies, the authors suggest that other marketing topics be explored on the internet. For example, pricing and distribution activities are ostensibly warranted. Marketing companies are developing internet home pages at a swift rate. Many of these sites possibly contain valuable learning tools for the Principles of Marketing course. Therefore, academicians are urged to pursue this important information and pass it on to their colleagues and students.

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