

# Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

## THE USE OF GAMES AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN A SINGLE MARKETING COURSE TO INCREASE GAME PARTICIPATION

Bernard V. Katz, Oakton Community College

### ABSTRACT

Some element of confusion can usually be expected among students when beginning a computer simulation game. Often the anxiety developed may prevent the student from fully participating in the game and as a result reduce what can be learned. In this paper the author reports on the observations of students who were started on a limited decision making game before moving on to one more complicated. The result appears to be increased participation and learning.

### INTRODUCTION

Coupled with the increasing use of computer simulations in business and marketing curriculum in four year and graduate schools, has been the accelerated use of simulations in community colleges. We can speculate on the many reasons for this--acquisition of computers, more teachers with exposure and experience to gaming, new games being published and, of course, the literature of the field which is reaching out to more and more people.

This phenomenon is not without its own unique set of problems. Clayton Walker [1] alludes to the dismay and hopelessness of university students during the first several decision periods of a game. He suggests, however, that learning is so rapid that students begin to lose interest by the sixth or seventh period. Experience with community students suggests that the opposite may be closer to the truth. It is only after the helplessness and dismay are minimized, along with the excitement of "playing the game!!" that learning begins to take place.

### THE CURRICULUM AT OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Oakton Community College opened its doors in the fall semester, 1970, and offered an Introduction to Business course. Principles of Marketing was introduced in spring, 1971, and within the next two years the only marketing course added was Basic Retailing. With the fall semester, 1974, a two year Marketing Management Program was established with six advanced courses which should be taken in a third or fourth semester of study. The prerequisites for these courses was Principles of Marketing, which in turn required the prerequisite of Introduction to Business. One of the advanced courses is Marketing Management. This was designed as a capstone case study course for the Marketing Management Program, and students were advised to wait until the fourth semester of study to take the course. For the fall semester, 1975, it was decided to add a computer simulation game to the course syllabus. The game selected was Marketing in Action, 3rd edition by Thomas E. Ness and Ralph L. Day [2]. In the spring semester, 1979, the 4th edition was substituted.

In the fall semester, 1977, it was decided to experiment with a computer simulation game as a means of pulling together concepts of marketing strategy in a Principles of Marketing course. After some searching the game "Marketing a New Product" by Zif, Ayal and Orbach [3] was chosen (this game was originally published in 1971). At the time of the selection, Professor Jehiel Zif, one of the original authors was on a sabbatical from Tel Aviv University and teaching at Northeastern University in Boston. During the period of the test, Professor Zif made several improvements in the fortran program and advised in the use of the game.

### PROBLEM AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Community colleges, particularly those in urban metropolitan areas, serve a unique market. There is the young person within two years out of high school; there is the adult returning to school. Many in the latter group are not returning to achieve a degree. They are, instead, studying for job improvement, job enhancement, special training or just to learn. It is not unusual to find in a class of 20 students enrolled in Marketing Management, no more than one-third who are sophomores by traditional standards, and the remainder from age 25 to 50 with a large group clustered in the early 30's. Over half of the students may be women, and 80% of all the students may be working full-time. Several problems can arise with such a diversity of students, some readily apparent. Almost all tend to manifest into two related to computer simulation.

1. The feeling of hopelessness and confusion during the first several periods is intense.
2. Students tend to play at the game and think in terms of planning from period to period rather than planning ahead.

It appeared that minimizing the two problems, which were termed "The Game Anxiety Syndrome," could be brought about by extending the game time. Start-up was moved from the eighth week of the semester to the fourth week. Marketing in Action (MIA) can be run for twenty four monthly periods but has more opportunity for student involvement by gaming for thirty six. The earlier start slowed the game so six weeks were used for the first twelve monthly periods.

WEEK	PERIOD
1	1
2	2
3	3-4
4	5-6
5	7-9
6	10-12

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aircraft. The CAB has already mandated no smoking sections aboard aircraft and is rumored to be considering banning smoking in the air. You are generally in support of this action as you do not feel comfortable smoking in the close quarters of an aircraft. In fact, you have been sitting in the nonsmoking section of the aircraft since the sections were created. While you enjoy smoking, you do not enjoy someone else's smoke second-hand. You plan to make Sun aware of your position and also to contact the CAB concerning the possibility of extending the ban to all air carriers.

### Consumer Group C

You have never smoked and believe smoking to be a dangerous, dirty habit which provides no benefit to humanity. You organized as a group to get the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) to mandate no smoking sections aboard aircraft. You are presently working for the elimination of smoking in aircraft altogether. The CAB has considered this action but appears to be far from making a decision on the matter.

You have recently learned that Sun Airlines is considering the elimination of smoking aboard their aircraft. You strongly support this position and are preparing to argue in favor of such action before Sun in a few minutes. You are also preparing to contact the CAB to again push for a ban on smoking although you do not have much hope for early action.

### Notes for Sun Airlines

#### I. Learning Objectives

1. Become aware of the diversity of consumer demands faced by the firm.
2. To discover that by satisfying one group of consumers, the firm may create dissatisfaction among another group of consumers.

#### II. Administration

Suggested members for the five different groups

are as follows:

Sun Airlines	3 or 5
Consumer Group A (adamant smokers)	3-5
Consumer Group B (casual smokers)	5-7
Consumer Group C (vocal nonsmokers)	8-12
CAB	3 or 5

Select members for the groups using the following test. Ask them to score their answers and assign on the basis of total points.

1. What is your general attitude toward smoking?
  - a. bad habit (-1)
  - b. indifferent (0)
  - c. enjoy (1)
2. Do you believe smoking should be banned from public transportation?
  - a. yes (-2)
  - b. indifferent (0)
  - c. no (2)
3. If you smoke, how important is smoking to you?
  - a. very important (3)
  - b. moderately important (2)
  - c. not very important (1)

Assign people to group A with high positive scores. (heavy smokers)

Assign people to group C with negative scores. (nonsmokers)

Assign people to the CAB so that there is some balance to the score.

Assign people to Sun Airlines with near zero scores. Assign remaining people to group B.

The time schedule for the exercise follows:

Introduction and assignment	10 minutes
Reading and planning	15 minutes
Action set	20 minutes
Debriefing	10 minutes

When introducing the exercise it may be useful to take a moment to describe the role of the CAB in air transportation. Also, the groups should be encouraged to develop assumptions for information which they desire but do not possess. Occasionally such assumptions may have to be mediated by the administrator when the groups have developed conflicting assumptions.

### EXPERIENCE

The exercise has been used successfully at the MBA level in the first marketing course. The attitude test has functioned well in placing participants in groups which closely match their true attitudes and beliefs. This technique should be appropriate for any exercise using roles which require a specific position be taken on an issue. The close alignment of the role with the individual should generate more realistic and intense interaction than is possible through arbitrary assignment of roles.

A thorough debriefing of the exercise is also a necessity. Points to be covered include the final decision reached by Sun and the CAB, the reasons for these decisions, how each of the consumer groups felt about the decisions and a short discussion about the fact that while some of the groups are satisfied with the decision, other groups are alienated by it.