

INNOVATIONS: RETAIN THE BEST; TOSS OUT THE REST

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Abstract

“The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas and throw the bad ones away.”

Linus Pauling, American Chemist (1901-1994)

In marketing we are consistently looking for the newest and latest pedagogical ideas for our classes to best prepare our students for an ever-demanding workplace. Ferrell et al. (2015) note that in marketing is often faddish, with the latest changes in business practices then emphasized by professors in the classroom. Teaching is an increasingly complex job in an increasingly complex, changing society. For that reason alone, innovation is central to teaching (Goatley & Johnson, 2013). A brief review of the academic literature demonstrates the importance of incorporating innovative teaching methods, and not simply new marketing concepts, into the curriculum. Innovation, like evolution, does not normally begin with a “big vision” but rather with a succession of small realizations—a continuous process of transformation and knowledge building over time (Goatley & Johnston, 2013). Instruction delivered in the classroom, the most identifiable and tangible product of the university, the mainstay where ideas are exchanged, is threatened by a rapidly changing environment, pluralistic competition, and inertia (Celse & Wilfingbarger, 2002). Most innovations, good or not so good, have provided some sort of evidence of their value to get traction, but evidence is needed to know whether an innovation is truly useful (Goatley & Johnson, 2013).

At a College of Business in a large west coast four-year university we have been experimenting with a variety of innovations to determine which are best and those that do not perform as advertised. The outcomes vary from unexciting results to success stories in courses ranging from principles of marketing through the curriculum to the strategic marketing capstone.

Unimpressive results were reported following a test pilot of Marketing Plan Pro software and some standalone pricing simulations in the principles of marketing course, where the feedback was lukewarm. The pricing simulations we evaluated seemed simplistic and cost of the software was a major issue. As such, these particular innovations were shelved and others showing strong promise will be tested empirically to assess their ongoing value. The first is a set of 75 custom-created 3-5 minute online video modules. Students were expected to view the videos in advance of class when the material taught. The presumption was that they would arrive at class fully prepared to cover the material having had exposure to the key concepts (“prelearning”, “flipped” classroom) via the videos. A quasi-experimental design was used to compare students with access to the video modules with a control group from an otherwise identical class. The overall Chi-Square tests revealed significant improvement of one to two subgrades, in addition to an improvement in failure rate in finding the proportion of ‘Fs’ in the two groups, F’s were significantly down by about 62 percent. We also wanted to determine if administering quizzes via an online student response system offered advantages to students in motivating them to view the videos. And, on a related note, does the use of an online response system increase class attendance; and if so, what are the implications for the course?

Second, a Stukent Digital Marketing Simulation was piloted with five students and received mostly positive responses. We plan to do a full-scale assessment survey at the end of this semester to evaluate the broader appeal of this innovative assignment to learn how to make the execution smoother (Exhibit 1).

The Marketing Portfolio, implemented several years ago in our capstone course, encourages students to reflect on their entire learning experience and capture succinctly those achievements that showcase their talents. Students include summaries of these achievements and a compelling resume in their portfolio. The express intent of the portfolio is to capture the attention of potential employers with the end result of

assisting students in launching their professional careers. This assignment is a requirement for passing the capstone course and is comprised of student reflections of coursework, resume, relevant work experience, and a Lynda.com certificate. Students have shared anecdotal evidence that the portfolios are useful in gaining job interviews and securing career positions. However, in order to obtain empirical evidence of the portfolios' usefulness we will be conducting a study of students who have graduated over the last two years (Exhibit 2).

Other course innovations, in addition to those piloted and adopted at the principles and capstone levels, have been recently tested. A significant motivation for more widespread innovation is the inclusion of High Impact Practices (HIP) at the university level (Exhibit 3). HIP practices have been refined and incorporated into several of the teaching techniques, specifically in our marketing tools and analytics and consumer marketing courses, with the purpose of meeting outcomes including encouraging students to create new knowledge, understand, and practical application. Successful students are able to think critically, manage diversity, speak publically, work in teams, analyse and solve real-life problems, see the bridge between theory and practice, and communicate such effectively.

Few marketing programs have incorporated innovations in the teaching of Place, especially outside of concepts taught in Operations Management. We have recently addressed this area via several avenues. ESRI's ArcGIS, the leading geographic information system (GIS) software, has been made available in all classroom and public computers in the College of Business. We have incorporated this innovative tool in several marketing courses, and have developed a new course designed around its use and related concepts and applications. Case studies exploring the concept of Place in Marketing, and the value and application of GIS software have been incorporated in the new course, as well as the general graduate-level marketing management course. Another application of this software is Place-based projects whereby students examine the geographic distribution of psychographic segments, and ground-truth them with their own experiences in those places. Full presentation materials have been developed to enable instructors to explore a wide range of important Place concepts ranging from segmentation, promotion development, logistics, and location and market potential analytics, as well as the emerging domain of Place Branding.

Continuous improvement efforts mandated by accreditation bodies (AACSB), as well as the distinct needs of today's marketing students, demand teaching innovations (Mummalaneni, 2014). Our objective in sharing the results of a variety of innovations across the marketing curriculum at our institution—the disappointments and those having spectacular success—is to inspire discussion with other instructors about their own experiences. We believe this exchange will make for a highly interactive and engaging conference session.

Exhibit 1: Stukent Digital Marketing Simulation Survey

We believe that the Digital Marketing Simulation from Stukent provides valuable learning for all business majors in today's marketplace, which is relying increasingly on digital tools for promoting companies and their offerings. With an intent of improving its implementation in future semesters, we are seeking your input, since Fall 2016 was the first semester this was used across all Principles of Marketing classes. This should take about five minutes of your time.

1. Overall, how useful do you think the Stukent Simulation was in learning digital marketing tools included in it?
2. Overall, how well did the simulation work?
3. What is your level of satisfaction with the guidance provided by Stukent website and staff and/or your instructor on the mechanics of using the simulation (registration, login, etc.)?
4. What is your level of satisfaction with the guidance provided by Stukent website and staff and/or your instructor on how to perform well on the simulation and get maximum learning from the exercise?

5. What did you like about the simulation? Please try to list two things.
6. What suggestions do you have for improving this assignment? Please try to list two things.
7. Would you recommend its continued use?
8. Please feel free to add any other comments that you wish to share.
9. What's your gender (M/F)?
10. What is your cumulative GPA for *all* classes taken towards your graduation requirement?

Exhibit 2: Marketing Portfolio Survey

The Marketing Portfolio encourages and enables students to reflect on their entire learning experience and capture succinctly those achievements that showcase their talents. These achievements are described briefly in the portfolio and a compelling resume is included in the document. The express intent of the portfolio is capture the attention of potential employers with the end result to expedite the launch of student's marketing career This survey should take about five minutes of your time.

1. Overall, what's your opinion on the effectiveness of the Marketing Portfolio?
2. Did you interview for a job?
3. Did you use the portfolio?
4. Do you think it was useful during your job interviews?
5. Did you receive job offers as a result of sharing your portfolio?
6. Do you have any suggestions for improving the portfolios so they can be more helpful?
7. Would you recommend its continued use?
8. What's your gender (M/F)
9. What was your cumulative marketing concentration GPA?
10. What is your cumulative GPA for *all* classes taken towards your graduation requirement?

Exhibit 3: High Impact Practices as defined on focal university website (2016)

High Impact Practices are transformation learning opportunities inside and outside of the classroom that provide:

- Performance expectations at appropriate high levels
- Significant student engagement by investment of time and effort
- Meaningful and substantive learning interactions with faculty, staff, students, or external entities
- Experiences with diversity, complexity, and change
- Frequent and meaningful feedback
- Reflective and integrative learning
- Experiential Learning

References available upon request.