TEACHING MARKETING WITHOUT TEXTBOOKS

John Schibrowsky, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
James Cross, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Alexander Nill, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Elena Pomirleanu, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Steven Hartley, University of Denver

Abstract

Textbooks continue to play an important role as marketing educators prepare and develop their courses (Besser et al, 1999, Carpenter et al, 2006). They are regarded as fundamental for the preparation of topics to be covered in lectures (Vafeas, 2013) and are considered to be the single most important decision an instructor makes regarding the design of a course. So what is purpose of the textbook in terms of its value to the course? There are a number of elements associated with the value of a textbook. First, the textbook provides a structure for the course. Second, the textbook is supposed to provide the students with the basic knowledge that will be covered in the course. It is essential that the material be state of the art concerning the course topic. Third, faculties often rely on the textbook to provide meaningful, up to date examples. A fourth goal in the selection of a textbook is for it to engage the students by making the topics easy to understand and interesting. Finally, the textbook makes it easier to teach the course by providing the teacher with a test bank, PowerPoint slides, videos, and teaching notes.

However much of the research on textbooks suggest that students are not using the textbooks in the way that faculty members have envisioned. While textbooks remain an essential part of the teaching and learning process, evidence suggests that student completion of reading assignments is lower than teacher expectations (Vafeas 2013).

Research shows that many students don't bother to buy the textbook and even more don't regularly read them. A recent study indicates that 25% of freshmen and 33% of seniors did not purchase academic materials due to excessive costs (Schick and Marklein, 2013). Starcher and Profitt (2011) found that 40% of the students surveyed had completed less than half of the assigned readings. In a related study, Juban and Lopez (2013) found that 40% of the students in their businesses classes only read the textbook immediately prior to the exam.

Criticisms of Textbooks Continue

Are you old enough to remember the good old days when almost every course had a reading packet that was printed and distributed by your local Kinko's? It was the professor's way of putting their personal mark on the course, truly customizing them. Today, virtually every course has a textbook, computerized test bank and PowerPoint slides. Some also have customized videos and suggested experiential exercises. Basically, the textbook and its ancillary materials is the course. The instructor simply becomes the actor that alters the course with his or her interpretation of the material. Nonetheless, a number of criticisms of pertaining to textbooks continue to be discussed.

First and foremost, textbooks are very expensive. The prices have truly gotten out of hand. A recent GAO report and the Huffington Press found that the cost of textbooks has grown faster than inflation, homes, or medical services. The average student spends over $600 per semester on textbooks. Second, many textbooks are out of date. They have current examples; neat videos etc. but lack the current state of marketing. Most of the topics and pedagogy have remained from earlier editions of the textbook for decades. Third, textbooks tend to be overkill. The current version of <u>Marketing </u>by Kerin, Hartley, and Rudelius includes 22 chapters, 4

appendices, and 800 pages. With an 800 page textbook, that would be 50 textbook pages of reading per class. Finally, many textbooks do not provide the right coverage of topics. Many of the chapters are fillers. But when you don't cover them, students think something is wrong.

The Solution - Teaching without Textbooks

So what are the options for faculty members interested in (economically) providing their students with the material necessary to learn the topics covered by the course? Our recommendation is to consider teaching the course without a textbook and instead provide the students with the needed knowledge and examples from other sources. With the abundance of information on the web and from other sources, there are sufficient resources available to effectively provide students with the information needed for almost any marketing topic one can imagine. Since students are already naturally consulting the Internet for more information, clarification, even quick definitions, we can leverage that inclination and guide them to quality sources. With technology like smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc. students are very comfortable accessing online resources for their information (Juban and Lopez, 2013). This trend makes the time right to consider teaching without textbooks by substituting them with online resources.

Benefits Associated with Teaching without Textbooks

The number one benefit associated with developing your own materials for the course is customization. The instructor decides which concepts and topics to cover, the order in which to cover them and identify the best descriptions and discussions of those concepts. A second related benefit is the ability to personalize the material presented to both the instructors view on the topic and in terms of examples that the students can relate to. Third, using online resources can provide a way to provide current information in both the practitioner and industry perspectives along with extremely current examples. Fourth, this approach not only engages students it also engages the faculty member. The faculty member has to be an active seeker of information needed to engage students. Fifth, most of the websites that provide multiple resources to be used in a course come from industry or trade association websites along with the websites of the primary consultants in the field. In this way, the faculty member and the students get the opportunity to learn from industry thought leaders and consulting experts in the field. Finally, one of the biggest benefits is the faculty member learns new things.

Problems and Issues Associated with Teaching without Textbooks

While there are a number of benefits associated with teaching without textbooks, there also some drawbacks and problems that need to be discussed. First, since the web is fluid and constantly being updated, links are going to become broken. Second, besides the time needed to accumulate and update of online resources, the faculty member has to develop his/her own lecture notes, exams (no test bank available), projects, homework assignments and PowerPoint slides. Third, one of the problems with using readings from different sources is that the student has to work to assimilate the information. While this might not seem like a major issue, it is problematic for students that learning the information for the first.

Barriers to Employing the "Teaching without Textbooks" Approach

First is the time commitment. It takes significantly more time to prepare course from scratch than a canned course. Second, it is more difficult to teach a course without a textbook if you have little or no knowledge of the topic before you begin. Third, you might get pushback from your department chair and other senior faculty members that believe that you can't possibly do a good job of teaching a subject without having a textbook as the basic foundation. Finally, you

might also find ambitious bookstore managers sending emails to the department chair and the Dean's office asking why textbooks are not assigned for non-textbook classes.

How to Teach a Course without a Textbook

The starting point for designing any specific course is the course description since it provides the basic scope of the course. Next one needs to consider the specific learning objectives for the specific course. We are referring to the specific goals for the course rather than the global program goals. These two items frame out the scope of the course, learning expectations, and the skills to be developed. From this information, we recommend that a list of proposed topics be developed. Now comes the fun part actually determining what information will be provided to the students. In this capacity, the teacher needs to view their job of curator of resources for students rather than the person that simply selects a textbook. At first, with all the resources available, the process of identifying resources for the different topics to be discussed in a course can seem daunting. As you begin to develop your course, you will identify a core of go-to resources that will inevitably prove to be the valuable and relevant for a course.

We recommend that the instructor, break the information down into basic knowledge, pedagogy, examples, current practices etc. Then sources for each type of information for each topic sources need to be identified. This includes, but is not limited to: consulting and trade websites, online white pares and opinion pieces, reports, library databases, YouTube, Slideshare, trade books, the popular business press, magazine articles, and even journal articles. Some topic areas have a multitude of resources available and others have almost none. Think about what is the minimum information students need to be exposed to rather than the maximum. You can always add items, but overwhelming students with too many items results in students skimming rather than reading the materials.

Once the readings/and viewing resources are completed, go through and prepare the lecture outlines to see it and see if they fit the resources that have been assigned and flow together in a logical manner. A quick review usually results in areas that need fewer items and some areas that obviously need to be modified. After a few iterations and modifications, a high quality customized course will have been developed. The second time the course is taught it is much easier. The instructor will have a feel for has worked and what areas need to be tweaked or require major modifications.

Summary

The textbook for a class is often used as the basic learning tool, providing students with the needed learning format to understand the concepts that will taught and discussed in the class. Unfortunately, textbooks often fall short in terms of being concise, current, engaging, sources of the requisite information for a course. When resources were limited to print sources and teacher knowledge, textbooks for a class made sense, but with the abundance of materials available on the web, teaching marketing without a textbook has never been easier. Teaching without a textbook can be incredibly rewarding, in that it allows teachers to create a sense of ownership of the course they teach. They get to expose students to multiple perspectives and multiple sources, with maximum flexibility.

References Available upon Request