A PYRAMID APPROACH TO REVAMP MARKETING EDUCATION ON A FIRST YEAR LEVEL

Mélani Fletcher, University of Pretoria, Department of Marketing and Communication Management, Pretoria, South Africa, 0002, (2712) 4203415

Tania Coetzee, University of Pretoria, Department of Marketing and Communication Management, Pretoria, South Africa, 0002, (2712) 4203414

ABSTRACT

Using the marketing concept as a foundation, a pyramid approach has been developed which will assist universities in taking the students through each of the phases during their three-year education in Marketing Management.

This approach also takes into account the movement towards integrated marketing education. The principle idea behind this is to provide the student with a holistic view on what they have studied over a three-year period. It shows them that each sub-segment can only be effective if it is integrated into the complete delineation.

The focus of this first paper, in a trilogy, falls on the first level of the pyramid. During the first year project only one element of the marketing concept, namely consumer orientation, is applied with the help of a project based on an advertising campaign.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Marketing is not a theoretical subject. From its roots it is a subject leaning towards practical expression. Although it is possible to write a theoretical curriculum on marketing it will never be possible to convey the complete thought to the student.

A further problem identifies itself. The marketing fraternity is sceptical about appointing students from a complete theoretical background into a practical occupation. In this modern era where the evolution of marketing thought has brought us to be more consumer and market oriented, the education of marketing should keep up with these market trends. If the market needs a work force with an understanding of theory as well as its application, is that not exactly what should be provided? Universities owe it to the market, for they provide the first levels of education and training for tomorrow's work force, as well as to those university students who strive to give themselves a competitive advantage and not to obtain obsolete knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The projects that inspired this paper were launched due to a gap identified in the education of marketing at the University of Pretoria. This paper examines the importance of practical projects for marketing students in tertiary education. Based on the model in figure 1 the practical projects deal with the principles of the marketing concept and provide a win-win situation to the student (the product) and the client (the industry).

THE PYRAMID APPROACH FOR MARKETING EDUCATION

Using the marketing concept (depicted in figure 1) as a foundation, a pyramid approach has been developed which will assist universities in taking the students through each of the phases during their three year education.

This approach also takes into account the movement towards integrated marketing education. The principle idea behind this is to provide the student with a holistic view on what
FIGURE 1: THE MARKETING CONCEPT AND PRACTICAL PROJECTS

they have studied over a three-year period. It shows them that each sub-segment can only be effective if it is integrated into the complete delineation from first year to third year level.

Figure 2 presents a visual explanation of the pyramid-approach. The focus of this first paper, in a trilogy, falls on the first level of the pyramid. During the first year project only one element of the marketing concept is applied namely, consumer orientation.

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The FMI-project was launched in 1990 by marketing lecturers who realised that there are deficiencies in marketing education. The name of the project meaning first year marketing initiative, was to be the project designed to uplift the standard of marketing education at the University of Pretoria.

The following assignment is used: The students are divided into “advertising agencies” consisting of six self selected members each. Each “agency” competes against its peers for the acquisition of the advertising account. This way both the creatively and strategically inclined students have the opportunity to excel. The competition is therefore also divided into two categories namely: campaign and creative elements. Each “agency” is compelled to hand in a strategic advertising plan as well as a creative plan consisting of a compulsory television, radio and magazine advertisement.

The magnitude of the project expands annually and therefore the format of the project has been adapted each year in order to make it more valuable to the participating students. During the first year of this project a fictitious product was used namely Neon Jeans. The co-ordinators then realised the potential for getting sponsors, and therewith real products for this assignment. From then on the students did an “advertising campaign” for a specific well-established company in South Africa.

THE STAGES OF THE PROJECT

The following stages were carefully executed according to specific predetermined dates. Our academic year consists of two semester, each 15 weeks long. The first phase takes place during the first semester and the rest of the project during the second semester.

Stage 1: First semester

During the first semester sponsors for the project are approached and contracts signed in order to attain the necessary funds required for such a project. All the responsibilities of the sponsors are specified and important dates booked.

Other arrangements finalised during the first semester are as follows:
- Book the university’s video team, VideoTuks, for the production of the five best television commercials.
* Book studio time at RadioTuks, the on-campus radio station, to record the five best radio commercials.

* Arrange with the Department of Visual Arts for the production of the 20 best print commercials. The visual arts department’s third year design students are assigned to do a reproduction of the idea as part of their curriculum.

At the end of the first semester the theoretical base or foundation for this assignment is dealt with in class sessions. The first year students are introduced to marketing communication to enable them to approach the assignment with some basic knowledge of the topic at hand.

Before the official launch of the project the students are divided into groups consisting of six members each who then act as advertising agencies that have to pitch for the contract on completion of the project.

**Stage 2: The launch**

* Client brief
The official launch of the project consists of a client brief. The marketing manager of the sponsoring company for that year’s project, briefs the students on the campaign to be executed.

In this brief the sponsor identifies the product or service to be advertised, provides some background information, states the company philosophy and objectives as well as important guidelines which the students have to adhere to. The sponsor also sets a budget that financially limits the students and forces them to make trade-offs in their ideas.

* Additional information
(a) As magazines are one of the main media vehicles to be used, National Magazines (responsible for the management of the major South African magazines) was
approached to act as co-sponsor of the project. After the client brief, National Magazines presents a lecture explaining in detail how to go about advertising in magazines. Cost and placement issues as well as target marketing receives a lot of attention during this lecture.

(b) In order to avoid a large group of students phoning companies for information, most of the information is made available through the library. This information includes tariffs needed for a media schedule from National Magazines as well as from Radio Active (responsible for the management of the major South African radio stations). All extra information which students may find necessary has to be obtained individually.

(c) In addition to this information, the “advertising agencies” are given a prescribed format to work according to. This format includes:
- Introduction
- Background and product/service information
- Target market
- Objectives
- Media plan
- Budget
- Creative strategy
- Conclusion

On completion of these information sessions the students start working on the project. They have approximately four weeks up to the presentation date in which to do this project.

Stage 3: Presentations

During the presentation phase each “advertising agency” pitches for the contract. The presentations are twenty minutes each and are administered as follow:
Each “agency” introduces itself and motivates why they will be successful at executing the assignment for the client. The “agency” is then questioned in detail on decisions taken. For instance:
- Why did you choose to advertise in this magazine?
- Who is your target market and how will they assist you in realising your objectives? Etc.

The reason behind the questioning is to help the students understand how important each and every decision is. The student gains the realisation of how integrated a campaign is, as well as how much time and effort goes into such a campaign. They comprehend for the first time how expensive media and production costs are and how to make trade-offs in order to increase effectivity and to utilise their available funds optimally.

This project proves to be a tremendous success for both strategically strong, as well as creatively excellent students. With the division of the competition into two categories, both of these groups of students get recognition as the two categories are evaluated separately.

After the presentation, the “agencies” that excelled are identified in order to go through to the next round. In the campaign category five of the best campaigns go through to the next round which will be discussed in stage 5. In the creative category the following are selected:
- 5 x television commercials
- 5 x radio commercials
- 20 x magazine commercials

It should be made clear that the campaign and the creative section are evaluated separately. Meaning that an “agency” who’s campaign is selected will not necessarily be the advertisements that will be produced. The advertisements produced are selected from creatively excellent “agencies” in various groups.

Stage 4: Production

During this phase the best advertisements are produced. Each category will be discussed separately starting with television.

- Television
The five best television commercials are produced by VideoTuks, our on-campus video team. Each group is responsible for casting actors, finding the specified music and sound effects as well as selecting the venue. Each one of the “agencies” book the video team for a day during which the commercial is recorded. The students get the opportunity to see their brainchild come to life. This is an experience that no textbook can describe or teach a student.
After recording the commercial the video team is responsible for the editing.

- Radio
  RadioTuks has accepted the responsibility of recording the five best radio commercials. Again the students are responsible for all the arrangements and requirements for the commercial. This arrangement has proven to be a unique experience for both the students and the young DJ's who get the opportunity to produce a commercial.

- Magazine
  Lastly, there is an arrangement with the University's Visual Arts Department for the production of the magazine commercials. Their third year students use the "raw" ideas of 20 of our "agencies" and transform it into professional artworks as part of their curriculum. The arrangement stipulates that the art students are only allowed to improve the artistic expression of these commercials and are not permitted to tamper with the creative idea. The main reason for this is that many of the marketing students are immensely creative but not artistic enough to complement their ideas.

**Stage 5: Final judging**

The final round of evaluation is partitioned into two days. To ensure objectivity and to give the students some exposure, a panel of independent judges is invited from outside the university. Mostly the panel consists of people from marketing and advertising fraternities as well as some academics. The representatives of the sponsor also form part of this panel of judges.

The first day of judging focuses on the campaign section of the competition. Here the five "agencies" have to present their campaigns and prove that it has the depth and quality required by the sponsor.

On the second day the judges are entertained with all the commercials that went into production during stage 5. As the judges are briefed on what the sponsor required from the students, they know exactly what to look for. One of the judges has to be from the main sponsor's advertising agency. This way the university ensures that the people judging the commercials are informed as to what was expected from these students.

At the end of the semester a gala function is arranged for the students, their families and friends. It is on this glitzy evening that the winners in each of the categories are announced.

**STUMBLING BLOCKS**

The most obvious stumbling blocks of this project are:

- The number of students who get to go through to the production phase is not representative of the total number of students. This is due to limitations in funding and time.
- The students have limited knowledge to assist them in compiling an effective advertising campaign.
- The market seems to be very resistant in helping student groups who would like to gain more information for their assignment. This tendency is caused by time pressure and the volume of students. Therefore we attempt to provide the class with most of the information.

Operational stumbling blocks:

- The large number of students on first year level. The administration behind the 100 to 120 "advertising agencies" is enormous.
- It is not always possible to produce the best commercial due to production and cost limitations of the on-campus video team.
- The existence of the project depends on the availability of sponsors as there is not sufficient funds within a department to finance a project of this magnitude.
- The arrangements for this project take up an enormous amount of time.
- As with most educational institutions there seems to be insufficient personnel to help carry the workload of such a project, especially since the project is added to an already full semester.

**RESULTS**

All the projects within the department end off with the gala evening. During this evening the students whom excelled get a lot of exposure in front of their families, friends and possible employers. During this evening our sponsors also gain substantial mileage as they are the VIP guests of the evening.
One of the most significant advantages of this project is that it increases the students' marketability. To the successful students this project means an achievement to be noted on their curriculum vitae.

It also increases the students' self-confidence and teaches them to perform in front of a panel of judges. It gives them a sense of achievement even if they are not the ultimate winners. The project also eliminates the unfamiliarity of compiling campaigns and pitching for a project. This aspect will be valuable when the students enter the work force.

CONCLUSION

Most of all, this project creates an image of excitement and poses a challenge to the students. It positions marketing on a unique level as this is the only university in South Africa differentiating itself to this degree and finding a balance between the theory and the practice. If a subject is in essence practical, how can you teach it any differently?

The project is not only exciting for the students, but it also uplifts the standard of their education. It is from this point that the lecturers at the University of Pretoria decided to take the projects further and launched a second year project.