

Developing Marketing Skills in the Beginning Marketing Student

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This article reports the use of a two-phase approach to developing marketing skills in the beginning marketing student. Phase one consists of a student team analysis of an existing company's marketing strategy, while phase two requires the individual student to develop an original marketing strategy. These two phases, which dovetail nicely, provide the student with the opportunity to use marketing concepts. As a result, the student may gain a greater understanding of marketing theory while developing some practical application skills.

Marketing educators who teach an introductory marketing course are challenged to provide students with the opportunity to use marketing theory. As they introduce course material, instructors may frequently field questions like these from the business student: "What good is it?" or "How may it be used?" By having the marketing student use the course material in practical, real-world situations, the student may answer his or her own questions, and the educator may end up with a more informed and satisfied student. This "learn-by-doing" approach may also result in a student who has developed the ability to apply marketing theory to solve problems.

OVERVIEW

This article describes a two-phase approach which has proven beneficial in teaching introductory marketing. In the first phase of the approach, an existing company's marketing strategy is analyzed by students working in teams. Each team chooses a company and then explains the company's strategy in terms of the marketing theory presented in class. In the second phase, each student develops an original marketing strategy on an individual basis.

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Phase II requires the student to creatively apply marketing theory to a new situation, rather than to use the theory to restate or modify an existing marketing strategy. In this way, the student must dig deeply into theory and consider the elements of marketing at a fundamental level.

This approach enhances students' learning of marketing theory by the repeated reinforcement of the subject matter. First, students apply the concepts within teams. Second, as observers, students witness the application of the theory to a variety of companies through the other student team presentations. Third, students apply the material as they develop original marketing strategies individually. Through this repeated reinforcement, students may be expected to achieve a satisfactory understanding of marketing theory and its use.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE TWO PHASES

As shown in Exhibit 1, Phase I of the assignment consists of the analysis of an existing company's marketing strategy, while Phase II involves the development of an original marketing strategy (not necessarily for the company studied in Phase I). Phase II builds on and relates to Phase I in at least two ways.

First, Phase II exploits the student's prior experience in analysis of a company's marketing strategy to bridge the gap between theory and creative application. Thus, the student does not move from theory directly to creative use of

EXHIBIT 1

OVERVIEW OF APPROACH

Phase I: Company Marketing Strategy Analysis (Team Project)

Description: Students analyze an existing company's (or business unit's) marketing strategy.

Purpose:

1. To promote students' application of marketing theory (in group setting).
2. To increase students' understanding of marketing theory (through informal group discussion).
3. To relate marketing theory to an actual marketing situation.
4. To develop interpersonal relations skills.
5. To develop written and oral communication skills.

Phase II: Company Marketing Strategy Development (Individual Assignment)

Description: Students develop a marketing strategy for a new customer need idea (alternative one) or students develop a marketing strategy to use to market themselves upon graduation from college (alternative two).

Purpose:

1. To promote creative individual application of marketing theory.
 2. To focus student attention on unsatisfied market needs.
 3. To increase student understanding of marketing theory through original application experiences.
 4. To develop written communication skills.
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theory, but moves through the recognition and use of marketing theory in a real world situation first.

Second, after working as part of a team, the student moves from group discussion and application of marketing theory in Phase I to individual application in Phase II. Group analysis of an existing company's marketing strategy in Phase I allows the student a deeper understanding of marketing theory than is possible through individual analysis of the situation. Thus, the student brings greater understanding to bear in creatively developing a marketing strategy in Phase II.

The team presentations are scheduled throughout the semester, while the individual strategy papers are due during the last week of the course. The first team presentation does not

occur, however, until students have acquired enough knowledge to meet the basic requirements of the assignments. Of course, the team analyses show more depth as the semester progresses, since the students are acquiring more knowledge as the course goes on.

Phase I: Company Marketing Strategy Analysis

This phase of the assignment has many purposes. First, the student has the opportunity to apply marketing theory to an actual marketing situation. He or she may then recognize and understand marketing in action. Another benefit of this phase is that, by participating in the group analysis, the student should develop better interpersonal relations skills because group analysis and problem-solving under a project deadline require the students to work together. An additional benefit is that in developing a project paper and presenting the paper, the student may develop better written and oral communication skills.

The class is broken down into teams of three or four members each. In this phase, each student team researches and prepares a project paper and presents the paper to the entire class. The team is free to choose the level of analysis (e.g., company, business unit, product), but the project paper must include the following elements in its analysis of the company's marketing strategy:

1. A statement of the company's mission, objectives, strengths, weaknesses, and marketing management philosophy.
2. A description of the company's market, marketing strategy (i.e., target market and marketing mix), and target marketing strategy (e.g., concentrated).
3. An analysis of the significant environmental elements which may affect the firm's success in carrying out its strategy (i.e., environmental opportunities and threats).
4. The position of the company in its industry (e.g., profits, sales, market share).
5. An evaluation of its marketing strategy using the BCG matrix or GE grid.

To select a company, students are referred to *Business Week*, *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and company annual reports. While they may be inclined, at first, to choose a large company and one of its products, students are encouraged not to overlook the many local companies (and their products) which might be analyzed.

The deliverables which each team provides for Phase I include:

1. A collective paper, not to exceed three typewritten pages. The paper should be in outline form to keep it concise.
2. An oral presentation to the class, not to exceed fifteen minutes. Students are encouraged to use visual aids and to do the presentation in a professional manner. All team members must participate in the presentation.
3. Three good multiple-choice questions which could be answered by a class member who had listened to the presentation. These questions may show up on a later quiz, so class members are provided with an incentive to listen to the presentation.

In addition, each team member submits a confidential evaluation of the amount of work contributed by the other members of the team to the paper and oral presentation. This evaluation is used in assigning a grade to each team member. In this way, each member is encouraged to carry his or her own fair share of the work load.

In terms of timing, one team's paper, multiple-choice questions, and individual member evaluations are collected at the start of the class period in which that team will make its oral presentation.

Some suggestions are provided to the students to improve their presentations:

1. Cover all of the points required.
2. "Net out" the main points and do not dwell on detail.
3. Start the presentation with an outline. Also, introduce the team members and indicate which team member is presenting each topic.

4. Do not read the presentation to the class.
5. Use visual aids to provide examples and to clarify points.
6. Practice the presentation, smooth out the rough edges, and make sure the presentation is within the time limits.
7. Allow enough time after the presentation for class discussion.

Through repeated trials, Phase I has proven to be an effective method of achieving the aforementioned purposes. When the presentation is well executed by the student team, it also stimulates class member interest in marketing, while providing the class with practical information on specific companies and their marketing efforts.

Phase II: Marketing Strategy Development

For this phase, the student may select either one of two alternatives. Alternative one requires the student to develop a marketing strategy for a currently unsatisfied customer need. The student is encouraged to be creative in identifying the unsatisfied need. Alternative two allows the student to develop a marketing strategy to use in the marketing of himself or herself upon graduation from college. This alternative is often chosen since each student will soon be graduating and is concerned about developing a strategy to get a job (or to start a career). For either option, the student prepares a paper. (Phase II does not require the student to use the marketing strategy or organization which was used in Phase I.)

The purpose of Phase II is to encourage the student to creatively apply marketing concepts to a new situation. The student may not directly copy the marketing strategy of an existing product. (This can be a temptation, especially in the case of a new customer need idea.) Instead, the student must review the course material and tailor marketing concepts to the alternative selected. In this way, the student is required to think about the subject matter and integrate its elements in order to come up with a logical marketing strategy. Other benefits to the student include reinforcement of marketing theory and additional experience in written communication.

The marketing strategy paper for Phase II consists of these elements:

1. **Situation:** A statement of the company's (or student's) mission and objectives, as well as strengths and weaknesses, and marketing management philosophy.
2. **General Market Description:** A general description of the market to which the student intends to make a marketing mix offering (or in which he or she intends to apply for employment).
3. **Marketing Strategy (Target Market and Marketing Mix):** A detailed description of the market segment(s) in terms of needs, wants, and characteristics (e.g., adoptor curve category, adoption process stage, goods classification category, and price elasticity of demand) of those potential customers to whom the student plans to make a marketing mix offering (or to whom the student wishes to market himself or herself); a detailed description of the marketing mix (i.e., product, place, price, and promotion) or the student (e.g., background) which meets the needs, wants, and characteristics of the selected target market; and identification of the target market strategy (e.g., concentrated) chosen by the student and justification for that choice.
4. **Environment:** An identification of three uncontrollable variables which may affect the success of the marketing strategy, an

indication of how each of these variables would affect the marketing strategy, and the student's proposal on what to do about each variable to ensure marketing success.

5. **Performance:** Here the student is asked how he or she would determine (prior to commercialization of the product) whether his or her marketing strategy would achieve its objectives. Students are expected to focus on the new product development process.

The Phase II student marketing strategy paper is limited to three typed pages. The paper is in outline form to encourage conciseness. Nevertheless, the paper is graded on its completeness and quality. Normally, this paper is collected at the end of the semester. Thus, it also serves as a good tool for the student's integration of course material and review prior to the final examination.

SUMMARY

This article has described a two-phase approach to developing marketing skills in the beginning marketing student. It allows the student to gain experience in using marketing theory. It also may generate student interest in and enthusiasm for the field of marketing. By combining a student team analysis of an existing company's marketing strategy (Phase I) with the individual student's development of an original marketing strategy (Phase II), this approach has proven to be very effective.