

WHITE PAPER

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Marketing Doesn't Have to be This Bad Brent Barootes

This was an article from MARKETING Daily AM this week that we felt needed to be shared. It is by David Finch, John Nadeau and Norm O'Reilly. This article also originally appeared in the September 10, 2012 publication of MARKETING.

http://www.marketingmag.ca/news/marketer-news/marketing-education-doesnt-have-to-be-this-bad-61840?p=61840?utm_source=EmailMarketing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=marketing_daily_AM

Unless there are fundamental changes in how undergrads are taught, tomorrow's talent will enter the workforce disillusioned, ill-prepared and saddled with student debt for years. If you are a marketer in 2012, you know the pace of change today is unprecedented. Technology, social media and globalization are redefining entire industries and the discipline of marketing is no different.

Consider, for example, the marketing domain of product development. TV took 55 years to go from concept to commercialization. Contrast that to today's world of crowdsourced product development and 500,000 apps. Marketing in 2012 often feels like driving in a whiteout: you know where you have to go, but you can't see the road. As marketing educators today, we face the challenging task of preparing students with the knowledge and skills to compete and excel in this new reality. Companies must face change head on or they will die. Just ask Blockbuster, Kodak or Nokia. We believe it is imperative that marketing instructors confront these changes to our discipline head on. *Mad Men* is great TV, but our goal is to develop the marketer of the future, not the past.

In our recent review of the top post-secondary marketing programs in North America, we observed that many marketing educators have chosen to maintain a classic approach to the discipline. If undergraduate marketing education was television, it might resemble *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Brady Bunch* or *Gilligan's Island* reruns. Like these shows, today's programs and courses emphasize lots of well-tested principles, but they are hardly testing ground-breaking material. If we draw again on the analogy of product development, most marketing educators continue to define their "product" via a linear four-year product development cycle.

Our raw material enters the factory as a 17- or 18-year-old and leaves the plant four years later with a degree in "marketing." This four-year product development cycle has served our discipline well since the 1950s. But relatively speaking, that era was one of evolution-not revolution-for the discipline. Things have changed.

So, how do we reinvent marketing education in an era of revolution? To answer this we decided there is no better place to start than by asking our customers. Since our product is new marketing graduates, our customers are the people that hire them. Our process began by developing a panel of 17 senior marketers. The members were selected to provide background from a breadth of industries and functional roles. This included creative directors, product managers and CMOs. It included agency and client-side representatives, from both B2B and B2C,

spanning large multinationals and small start-ups.

This panel was challenged with answering one simple question: how do you identify the characteristics and skills of the future marketing rock star? In response, the panel identified 49 factors that were grouped into seven themed clusters:

- * Marketing communications
- * Branding & strategy
- * Sales & distribution
- * Financial skills
- * Knowledge of marketing context
- * Design skills
- * Soft skills

The 49 factors were then reviewed and translated into specific questions that formed a survey to test which factors are most important today for marketing professionals. Basically, we were testing what senior marketers are seeking compared to what is provided in today's graduates. From the perspective of a Canadian marketing professional, we asked what are the most important factors considered when evaluating an entry-level employee and, based on your past hiring, how are new graduates performing today?

The Results

The results provide specific guidance to educators confronted with the opportunities and challenges faced with reinventing marketing education. As the chart of results below demonstrates, soft skills outranked all the traditional conceptual marketing knowledge areas by a considerable margin. Soft skills were composed of 12 individual factors, ranging from self-management and problem solving to adaptability and teamwork. In fact, the top nine of the 49 individual factors measured were soft skills.

Today, however, soft skill development is a periphery outcome of the curriculums in most marketing degrees, where the core emphasis remains on teaching the fluency and literacy of conceptual marketing knowledge. As a result, the gap between the importance of soft skills and the perceived performance of new graduates on these non-technical skills is dramatic.

In fact, two of the most highly ranked soft skills from our research (selling ideas and business writing) sit near the bottom ranking of performance. These findings suggest that marketing educators must fundamentally reconsider the role of soft skills in both program curriculum and course design. "Teaching marketing theory is meaningless if the fundamental skills don't exist. Students need to know how to prioritize, allocate resources and work with others to achieve a task. Everything else is secondary," said Kevin Morihira, national senior marketing manager, energy for KPMG. Consequently, marketing professors need to recognize that

these skills can no longer be considered general workplace skills that can be developed after graduation. The market is telling us they are essential requirements for successful young marketers to navigate the pace of change in the marketing workforce.

Measurability Matters

The second conclusion highlights the priority of evidence-based marketing skills as central to the development of a 21st century marketer. Creativity and innovative thinking are clearly valued by today's professional marketers-but creativity and innovative thinking that are founded on measureable evidence is the Holy Grail.

"Our business is about customer analytics and evidence-based decision making," says Maury Kask, senior vice-president, chief customer experience officer at Westminster Savings in Vancouver. "You can't manage what you can't measure. This should be on the first line of the first page of every marketing textbook."

This conclusion was reflected throughout the conceptual marketing knowledge themes in our research. This included the prioritization of the ability for new graduates to understand how to measure ROI and use CRM systems, and understand how to make strategic marketing decisions based on evidence from customer-driven research and market analysis. So in other words, marketers today are not looking for new graduates to be either right-brain or left-brain-they are expecting them to be right-brain and left-brain.

The third key conclusion of our research is the importance associated with pre-graduate work experience (e.g. client projects, co-op education or internships). The results suggest that such real-world experience is not only important; in fact, it amplifies the perception of performance amongst employers. In other words, employers perceive those new graduates with work experience to be superior performers (or have the potential to become superior performers) as compared to those without.

Whether true or not, perception is reality in this case. Thus, pre-graduate work experience is a considerable competitive advantage for new graduates. Although this finding is both logical and intuitive, it provides important guidance to educators and to our students that embedded pre-graduate work experience must become the foundation of reinvented marketing education. The marketing knowledge and theory taught in class is critical-and it is enhanced dramatically if it includes a component of the real world. Today, many programs offer optional work experience opportunities-such as co-op-but our research suggests that it must go much further to meet the emerging challenges of the discipline and the expectations of the market.

The Schools Doing It Right

So which marketing programs in Canada have adapted and are responding to the new reality? As noted, many programs have started to embed experiential dimensions into their programs. This includes most top Canadian business

schools which have implemented global internships, live case studies and extensive co-op experiences. For example, the marketing program at the Rogers School at Ryerson University includes an upper-level undergraduate course that is a marketing strategy developed for an industry partner, and the Ivey School at Western which bases its curriculum on the case method. The Sauder School at UBC has identified internships as a key element of its MBA program by building the UBC MBA Internship program, managed by its Business Career Centre, which consists of an eight- to 16-week internship during which students are paid and work with an industry partner. However, most of these initiatives remain reactive and are often driven by the initiative of individual faculty. One example of a marketing program that assumed a radical transformation is Mount Royal University in Calgary.

Its Marketing BBA no longer has the traditional courses we all took as students, such as B2B Marketing, Advertising & Promotions, or Introduction to Market Research. Instead its students in *The Science of Persuasion* must apply the theories by going door to door and selling real products to raise money for a targeted charitable cause. The students in *Evidence-Based Marketing* must complete a real-world consulting project that involves a face-to-face presentation to senior management.

Finally, the two marketing capstone courses are in fact not "courses," but instead students must form competing agencies like in *The Apprentice* and apply four years of knowledge by responding to real client briefs. To make it more real, these agencies don't meet in classrooms-they meet in assigned boardrooms and the students in the winning agencies become eligible for an internship with their new client. Those clients have ranged from Rogers Communications to Alberta C.O.P.S. to Lululemon. "What was most interesting was it was not designed as simulation or a case study, but was designed to be very real," says Darrell Graham, vice-president of consumer sales, Western Canada for Rogers Communications. "These students truly didn't care about their grade. They cared about winning and delivering client value. This is the future of marketing education from my perspective."

In Summary

This research, combined with our collective experiences as both marketing practitioners and professors, leads us to challenge the current foundation of marketing education in Canada. The Xs and Os we teach are not delivering value to our market. Just like many other businesses, marketing education, whether it is university or college, must be reinvented or risk becoming irrelevant. This reinvention must start with the fact that great marketers are not born from a textbook or case study. Rather, great marketers are born from real experience. They are born from taking real risk and experiencing real success and failure. The market has spoken. The only question is, will we listen?

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