

MARKETING EDUCATOR HOME PAGE AND WEB SITE ADOPTION: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gauge how marketing educators approach the establishment and maintenance of their home page. An on-line survey was used to identify how and where home pages fit into the educators' faculty responsibilities and, most importantly, uncover some of the resource issues relevant to faculty development and success in adopting Internet technologies in their faculty role.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of this study was to identify the current status of the use of home pages by marketing educators. More specifically, it sought to empirically measure the following home page aspects: (1) length of existence, (2) its contents or elements, (3) faculty vs. other individual(s) involvement in its design, establishment, and updating, and (4) performance or quality self-perceptions. Additional information was sought to measure the degree of institution support for web site development/maintenance (not limited to home pages) and general attitudes relating the their institution's and academic unit's atmosphere and expectations regarding faculty use of the Internet.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

The population of interest in this survey was current and/or former members of the Western Marketing Educators' Association (WMEA), which has recently and legally changed its name to the Marketing Educators' Association (MEA).

The method chosen for gathering data was an on-line survey. An e-mail invitation to participate in the study addressed from the author of this paper was sent to those holding WMEA/MEA membership within the 1998-2000 time frame. E-mail addresses were obtained from membership directories and by searching at member institutions for e-mail addresses not contained in the directories. Thus, the population studied was limited to those with e-mail systems (to receive the invitation) and Internet access (to complete and submit the survey).

FINDINGS

Sample Size and Characteristics

Of 353 invitations sent, a total of 79 (or 22.4 %) e-mail invitations were undeliverable. A total of 102 usable responses were realized for a 36.4% response rate. Most respondents were at the highest possible professorial rank (i.e. "full"), located at a USA based public institution, and were teaching at the undergraduate level.

Home Page Adoption

A majority (81 or 79.4%) reported the existence of a home page. Most said this has existed for more than two years (63.4 %).

Table 1 identifies content or elements existing at these home pages. Out of 14 elements listed in the survey, the mean average number of elements reported was approximately 6.9. Most frequently listed was work contact information. (98.8%) followed closely by an e-mail contact hot link (92.5%). Most also listed information about courses they taught (82.5%) with a much smaller percent (52.5%) having direct links to information specific to those courses. However, it is not known if those courses have web sites for which linking is possible. Marketing educators are least likely to list personal information on their home pages.

Perceived Home Page Strengths and Weak-nesses

As shown in Table 2, many didn't really have an opinion about three of four home page elements, navigation, and style performance characteristics. Highest ratings were for the spelling accuracy of home page content—52.5% "excellent" and 36.3% "good." More insight into what was liked or disliked about home pages was discerned from responses to two open-ended questions asking what were seen as the main strength(s) and weakness(es). Approximately one-half of all eligible respondents gave comments to this question (41 comments on strengths and 40 on weaknesses). Content analysis of the strength responses found five themes or common threads while four appeared for weaknesses. Table 3 displays the overall findings for this analysis. Many educators

thought highly of their page's simplicity while an overwhelming number were dissatisfied with non-currency of the page.

Personal Involvement in Home Page Construction and Maintenance

Respondents were asked about the role they vs. others played in making decisions about content, style, and navigation issues. The findings in the first three rows of Table 4 suggest that marketing educators were very involved with the up front content issues (62.6% "completely" and "mostly me" combined) while less involved with style and navigation issues. There also appeared to be relatively more involvement in the actual work of updating vs. creating the web site. Educators reported combined "completely" and "mostly me" frequency scores of 45.1% for creation but a 56.3% for updating. This is an important factor to recognize given the frequency of web site updating reported by study participants. One-third of those with home pages said that their web sites had been updated more than four times in the past academic term. However, 43.2% was the combined frequencies for once or not at all.

If other people were involved in any of these five areas, respondents were asked who, if any, of four different types of people were involved. When other people were involved with the up front design, style, and navigation issues, the most frequent person was a university or college web master (54.1%) followed by other university/college staff (36.8%). Least frequently mentioned was another professor (8.8%). When other people were involved with the actual work of establishing a site, the relative popularity of those involved with the up front decisions was identical. However, nearly twice as many relied on other professors (17.5%). When other people were involved with the actual work of updating the site, "other university/college staff" was the most frequently used (47.4%) with "university/college web masters" placing second (39.5%).

Available Institutional Resources

Six areas were rated as to the quality of institutional resources and reported Table 5. The highest rated resource (with a 72.7% "excellent" and "good" combined score) was obtained and updating necessary hardware and software while the lowest such combined score (34.7%) was for staff to maintain or update their web sites. Overall lower ratings were for staff support resources while middle level ratings were reported for professional development opportunities with approximately 30%

or 3 out of 10 respondents giving "Fair" ratings for this area.

On a more global level, 17.6% strongly agreed with the statement "In general, the faculty I work most closely with at this institution get all the support they need in order to establish and maintain their web sites." while 14.7% strongly disagreed.

Institutional Expectations and Personal Intentions

As shown in Table 6, a majority of respondents worked in academic units, which did not expect faculty to have a web site or use a web site for their teaching related activities. However, 31.7 % (strongly and somewhat agreed combined) felt they were expected to have a web site. By far, the majority (69.4% - strongly and somewhat agreed combined) saw increased use of web sites to fulfill their teaching responsibilities.

Obstacles Preventing Further Internet Adoption

Another open-ended question was used to solicit perspectives on obstacles preventing more effective use of the Internet to fulfill their faculty responsibilities. A total of 67 out of the 102 study participants offered comments—many containing multiple ideas. Content analysis found the following common themes and their frequency of occurrence: (1.) The lack of time to learn and execute (n=35), (2.) lack of training (n=11), (3.) inadequate technical support (n=7), and (4.) other resources (n=5).

Segmentation Analysis

A number of statistical tests (ANOVA, Chi-square, and t-tests) were conducted in order to identify any possible differences in some of the respondents' demographics and other study variables. No statistically significant differences were found when looking a size and type of institution across home page presence and resource ratings questions. Despite the probable hypothesis that administrators might perceive higher amounts of resources available for faculty, no significant differences were found in these views. Another analysis step was to look for variables that significantly related to the existence of a home page. A significant (.025) Chi-square score was found for level of agreement with faculty (in their academic unit) being expected to have a web site and the presence of a home page. Thus, it appears that educators are meeting expectations.

Finally, the statement "In general, the faculty I work most closely with at this institution get all the support they need in order to establish and maintain their web sites" was treated as a dependent variable and

regressed (linear, stepwise) against the six resource issues (shown in Table 5). The resultant three variable model produced an R of .775 ($R^2=.600$) and was significant at .000. The three independent variables, in rank order, explaining this variance were: "Support services to assist when there are problems," "Staff to construct and publish a web site which you have conceptually defined for them," and "Obtain and update necessary hardware and software." Further analysis also indicated that obtaining and updating necessary hardware and software is the strongest predictor of respondents stating that they saw themselves using their web site much more in their (future) teaching responsibilities.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Nearly eight out of ten (79.4%) marketing educators in the study reported the presence of their own home page/web site. This represents a 268% increase over the 29.6% reported to exist in the fall of 1996 (Lincoln, McCain, and Vega 1997). Thus, it appears that strong progress is being made in this area. Home page content has also increased with 82.5% of this study's home pages containing course (taught) information whereas the comparable percent in 1996 was 28. Having contact information on the site is up slightly—from 92% to 98.8%. The study also found improvement over some of the activity measures reported by Vaidyanathan et al (1998).

Most educators are using their home page to offer communications access and provide students with access to the courses they teach. A much less popular use is to lead others (via links) to other sources of information available through other organizations. There appears to be opportunities to add value to web site visitors by directing them to other (linked) sources of information. Only about one-third of the home pages owned by study participants offered this content. However, the identification, linking, and avoiding "dead links" can require significant time. Again, this is clearly one of the major obstacles reported in the study.

Many respondents were not able to assess three functional qualities (browser compatibility, dead links, download time) and might be well advised to use one or more of the free services available for assessments. Faculty with home pages appear pleased with the fact that they have one and that they are simple and easy to use. However, they very often feel that their home pages are not up to date. They recognize that expertise and time is needed to keep the site current.

The amount of personal involvement in web site construction and maintenance is considerable. It appears that continual training and refresher workshops may be needed. Most important is the need for staff support and assistance to help them with technical issues that many care not to learn or know. Lastly, it would seem that more sharing of expertise with colleagues might be called for. Perhaps administrators could more explicitly recognize the efforts of faculty who help other faculty advance their web site publishing skills.

While advances in institutional resources will aid marketing educator Internet technology adoption, other avenues should be recognized and brought to bear. These might include publishers, professional educational organizations (e.g., AMA, MEA), as well as hardware/software vendors (e.g. WebCT).

LIMITATIONS

As with most empirical studies, this one has some acknowledged limitations, which influence the generalizability of its findings. First, the study focused only upon current and/or former members of the Western Marketing Educators Association. Second, respondents, by definition, had to be current users of Internet technology in order to receive a study invitation as well as participate in the study. Thus, those less "connected"—physically or mentally—to the "Net" have not been surveyed. Third, many respondent characteristics seem to indicate that one should consider the respondents "senior" faculty. They were at the highest rank and had been teaching for several years. Lastly, although many questions in this survey were home page specific others were more general about other web sites (e.g., for courses) that respondent's used. It is possible that some respondents may not have completely differentiated between the two.

REFERENCES

- Lincoln, Douglas J., Gary McCain, and Manrique Vega 1997. "Marketing Educator Website Adoption: Where Are We?" in *Proceedings of the 1997 Western Marketing Educators' Association Conference* George E. Belch and Linda J. Morris, Eds. 6-9.
- Vaidyanathan, Rajiv, Linda Rochford, Paul Johansen, and Rajshree Agarwal 1998. "Faculty Use and Perceptions of the Internet in Marketing Education," in *Proceedings of the 1998 Western Marketing Educators'*

TABLE 1
Information Available at Home Page

Information or Items	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Cases
Work address and contact information	79	14.3	98.8
Direct e-mail connection or link	74	13.4	92.5
Information on courses taught	66	12.0	82.5
Brief biographic sketch	61	11.1	76.3
Links to courses taught	42	7.6	52.5
List of recently completed research	37	6.7	46.3
Complete vita or resume	31	5.6	38.8
Links to other university hosted web sites	31	5.6	38.8
Links to business hosted web sites	28	5.1	35.0
Links to government hosted web sites	26	4.7	32.5
Links to non-profit hosted web sites	26	4.7	32.5
Information of personal interests/hobbies	20	3.6	25.0
Home address and contact information	18	3.3	22.5
Listing of research in progress	12	2.2	15.0
Total responses	551	100.0	688.8

TABLE 2
Rating of Web Site Characteristics

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Ability to work with a range of browsers	32.5%	26.3%	20.0%	3.8%	17.5%
Length of time for browser loading	26.3%	40.0%	11.3%	3.8%	18.8%
Spelling accuracy in web site	52.5%	36.3%	2.5%	1.3%	7.5%
Absence of dead hot links	23.8%	37.5%	16.3%	3.8%	18.8%

TABLE 3
Open-Ended Response Themes for Home Page Strengths and Weaknesses

Strength	Number of Mentions	Weakness	Number of Mentions
Simple/easy to use	9	Needs updating/not current	17
Course material related	6	Not complete/finished	8
Informative/complete	6	Not creative, interesting or unique enough	9
Photos/graphics	4	Not interactive enough	3
Other web site links	3		

TABLE 4
Personal Involvement in Site Design, Establishment, and Maintenance

	Completely me	Mostly me	Fairly equal with another	Mostly another person	Completely another person
Influence in deciding upon web site content issues	43.8%	18.8%	7.5%	22.5%	7.5%
Influence in deciding upon web site style issues	38.0%	10.1%	7.6%	21.5%	22.8%
Influence in deciding upon web site navigation issues	35.0%	12.5%	13.8%	15.0%	23.8%
Amount of actual work performed by professor in creating and publishing web site in beginning	28.8%	16.3%	6.3%	30.0%	18.8%
Amount of actual work performed by professor in updating and publishing web site in changes	37.5%	18.8%	4.7%	25.0%	14.1%

TABLE 5
Rating of Institution Support for Web Site Establishment and Support

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Obtain and update necessary hardware and software	24.2%	48.5%	17.2%	9.1%	1.0%
Support services to assist when there are problems	24.2%	33.3%	25.3%	15.2%	2.0%
Programs, workshops, etc., to help you learn about using a web site to fulfill your job	15.2%	41.4%	29.3%	10.1%	4.0%
Programs, workshops, etc., to help you learn how to construct and publish a web site	16.2%	32.3%	30.3%	15.2%	6.1%
Staff to construct and publish a web site which you have conceptually defined for them	16.2%	24.2%	25.3%	27.3%	7.1%
Staff to maintain or update your web site at your request	15.3%	19.4%	22.4%	32.7%	10.2%

TABLE 6
Academic Unit Expectations and Personal Intentions

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Having a web site is expected of all faculty in my immediate academic unit	11.9%	19.8%	16.8%	21.8%	29.7%
Regular use of a web site for teaching-related matters is expected of all faculty in my academic unit regardless of course taught	4.0%	14.0%	23.0%	24.0%	35.0%
In the future, see myself using web site much more for teaching	30.6%	38.8%	18.4%	5.1%	7.1%